



Beyond the Act: Challenging practice and inspiring change

The Family First Prevention Services Act is a much-needed re-alignment of federal funding, providing greater supports to families so that they can stay together safely.



The Family First Act prioritizes:

- Intact families.
- Kinship supports.
- Home settings.



The Family First Act challenges:

- Casework practices.
- Community resource development.
- Data systems.



The Family First Act values:

- Equity.
- System collaboration.

The implementation of Family First is not happening in a vacuum. DCFS has been working to improve in these key areas in a variety of ways, and Family First aligns with these existing efforts to support and strengthen the progress already being made.

Throughout 2024, we will share the ways that DCFS is going beyond the Family First Act to challenge existing practices and inspire transformative change. Each issue

of the newsletter will focus on a current initiative in alignment with the substance and the spirit of Family First, and future issues will highlight new initiatives that are both inspired by the Act and in alignment with the broader Strategic Plan. We are proud to share a portion of each newsletter with some incredible change-makers who are passionate about keeping children in safe, stable, nurturing families and communities.



A fond farewell

Deputy Director Lori Welcher-Miles retired from Illinois DCFS in December after more than 30 years of service to the agency. The DCFS Family First team recognizes the integral role she has had in the implementation of the Family First Preservation Services Act.

A note from Lori:

“While I bid farewell to my role as deputy director of Intact Family Services within the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, my dedication to the well-being of children and families remains unwavering. I encourage each and every one of you to continue the vital work we do, to champion the rights of children and to be a voice for those who cannot speak for themselves.”

Thank you, Lori, and we wish you the best in your next adventure!



Family Advocacy Centers

Family Advocacy Centers (FACs) are community providers around the state that provide an array of core services as well as tailor their services to the individual needs of the communities they serve. FACs are generally not part of the child welfare system and can serve both general community clients as well as those who are, or have been, involved with DCFS. Anyone can be referred to FAC services, and anyone can walk in to a FAC to request services, including families reported to the hotline who need supportive and preventative services instead of an investigation.

FAC mission: promote permanency by maintaining, strengthening and safeguarding the functioning of families, in order to:

- **Prevent substitute care placement.**
- **Promote family reunification.**
- **Stabilize foster care placements.**
- **Facilitate youth development.**
- **Ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of children.**

Fast FAC facts:

- **FAC staff receive certification in the Quality Standards of Family Strengthening** endorsed by the National Family Support Network. Read more here: <https://www.nationalfamilysupportnetwork.org/standards-training>
- **FAC provide a hybrid of both virtual and in-person services.**

FAC core services

- **Advocacy**
- **Mentoring**
- **Parent support and training**
- **General counseling**
- **Employment readiness training**
- **Family and youth development support**
- **Financial literacy training for youth 18-21**
- **DCFS alumni services** (legal docs, transportation, financial support)
- **English/ESL classes**
- **Parenting classes**



DHS service linkages

- **WIC**
- **TANF**
- **Medicaid**
- **SNAP**
- **Healthcare**
- **Childcare**



DCFS service linkages

- **Extended Family Support Program**
- **Substance abuse treatment**
- **Mental health treatment**
- **Domestic violence services**



34

FACs in Illinois



99%

Families remain intact,
no new reports



87,360

Direct service hours
in FY23

Alignment: Family Advocacy Centers and Family First BOTH ...

- **Help families avoid the child welfare system.**
- **Help families successfully exit the child welfare system.**
- **Offer a wide variety of services and supports to families.**
- **Connect families to community-based supports.**



Family First updates:

- Since replacing the CFS 507 form on July 1, there was a **50% increase in referrals** submitted through the Provider Module from Q1 to Q2.
- **100%** of FY25 contracts in payable status.
- **1,630 referrals made** to date for all Family First interventions.
- Providers report **64.8% of parents are mostly or very engaged in services.**

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