

Caritas Family Solutions 2018 Annual Implementation Plan/House Bill 2227

The Foster Parent Law

Caritas Family Solutions philosophically supports the advancement of foster parents rights and responsibilities as defined and enumerated in the House Bill captioned above. In accordance with this bill, Caritas Family Solutions, in cooperation with our foster parents (and in consideration of their recommendations) has designed this implementation plan. Additionally, this plan shall be reviewed by a random sample of foster parents on an annual basis so that it might be adapted appropriately as needed.

This implementation plan will serve as policy in order to comply with the law. In addition, it will serve to formalize the agency philosophy and informal practice that already exists within the agency.

Foster Parents Rights

Foster parents' rights include, but are not limited to the following:

(1) The right to be treated with dignity, respect, and consideration as a professional member of the child welfare team.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes the value of our foster parents and makes every effort to treat them with the respect and dignity as professional members of the child welfare team. The agency understands the significance of including foster parents as part of the professional child welfare team. This understanding is embedded in the day to day operations of the agency.

Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parents' input in overall decisions for the agency. For example, the agency actively recruits individuals with foster care experience, to serve on the agency's board of directors. Caritas has made a concerted effort to always have at least one foster parent sitting on the agency's board. Board members make decisions for the agency regarding all of the agency's programs including foster care and adoption. Additionally, Caritas seeks individuals with experience as foster parents to work as employees. Currently, the agency employs several foster care staff who are also foster parents with other agencies. Many have adopted from foster care as well.

In compliance with this right, foster parents are provided with all known, pertinent information regarding each child's background and case history at the time of placement. Case managers are responsible for organizing and presenting this

information for the foster parent. Within the bounds of confidentiality, team members who have insight regarding the specific child's case history are made available to the foster parent for consultation. These could include, previous case managers, previous and/or current therapists, and could possibly include previous foster parents that have had experience with the child. Prior to time of placement, licensing workers are trained to be able to "match" potential foster parents with children in need of homes. Licensing workers assess skills and verbalized preferences at the time of the initial home study. Licensing workers also continue to keep themselves privy to foster parents' preferences and feelings about potential placements at the semi-annual monitoring visits and anytime by phone or e-mail conversation.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that in order to promote a general feeling of consideration for the foster parents, they should have the opportunity to be present in as many professional staffing's as possible. Foster parents are included in all Administrative Case Reviews (ACR). Foster parents are made aware of the scheduled time and date of the ACRs by the case manager. Foster parents are consulted by the case manager when critical decisions are made regarding the care of any youth in care in their home. These consultations can either take place during the in-home visits, a phone call, or a conference call. Case managers and supervisors make efforts to hear and consider the foster parent's input before fully forming a final decision. It is the responsibility of the case manager to keep the foster parents informed of all upcoming court dates and times. It is also the responsibility of the case manager to educate the foster parent on general court proceedings and confidentiality matters. Even if specific county court proceedings do not necessarily lend themselves to foster parent participation and/or inclusion, the case manager will still keep the foster parent informed in the case that they would still like to attend. The foster parent should understand that it is not, however, the responsibility of the case manager or any foster care staff to represent a foster parent's personal agenda at any court proceeding. Specialized foster parents are included in monthly staffing with the Specialized Foster Care Worker. Guidelines regarding confidentiality of the child's and family's case are enforced and respected in all communication between the foster parent(s) and other members of the child welfare team. Along with being included in ACRs, all foster parents are included in Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM), as long as the birth parent is in agreement. Foster care caseworkers and their supervisors schedule these meetings and strive to make a time and date that is feasible for all parties.

Foster care employees are trained to cultivate an open communication relationship with their foster parents insofar as the foster parents would feel the freedom to express input and feelings about all matters regarding a child's case. Foster parents are made aware of all of the employees in the agency that are available for them to consult and receive support from by the case manager or licensing worker. Foster parents receive the support of the child welfare team (caseworker, therapist, licensing specialist, and supervisor). Additionally, foster

parents receive support and guidance from the child's therapist (for those children who receive counseling) where practical and beneficial to the child in care. The case manager or licensing worker also invite the foster parents to contact employees in Administration if they feel their need warrants this kind of support.

Caritas Family Solutions also strives to develop an atmosphere of trust with the foster parents. All members of the agency are trained to conduct themselves in a professional manner and to establish rapport with the community and this includes team members like foster parents. Foster care employees make direct attempts to form individual relationships with foster parents by continuing communication and taking extra time to help foster parents deal with their own feelings in regards to foster care situations. Foster care employees are instructed to refrain from engaging in conversations that are destructive to agency morale to help the foster parents develop a deeper sense of trust with the agency. Foster parents are also invited and encouraged to attend monthly-held Foster Parent Support Groups where they can develop a greater sense of community not only with the agency but with other foster parents.

In the event that foster parents believe they have been subjected to unjust treatment or fostering conditions that interfere with their ability to provide optimal care for the children placed in their home, foster parents may file a grievance by contacting the agency's Director of Quality Improvement. The procedure for filing a grievance is provided in the Foster Parent Folder. Foster parents may also contact their licensing specialists for further direction on how to file a grievance.

All Caritas Family Solutions employees are trained to uphold an environment of respect and professionalism regarding communication with the foster parents. Employees in foster care as well as administrative and other areas are expected to return telephone calls and e-mails in a timely manner within 24-48 hours. Weekends, holiday weekends, and scheduled vacations are taken into consideration. Employees are also trained to ensure that foster parents have an alternate contact available to them in the instance where they are not able to be reached directly. This can include providing an alternate phone number for their supervisor or referring them to the on-call emergency phone number on their respective "Out-Of-Office" or "Away" messages. Inherent in this, it is the responsibility of the supervisor or the on-call worker to resolve a lack of communication matter with the specific worker. At least one member of the team is "on-call" 24 hours a day, seven days a week for emergency consultation. Foster parents are given an on-call number as well as specific directions for contacting the agency in the event of an emergency outside of regular business hours.

(2) The right to the given standardized pre-service training and appropriate ongoing training to meet mutually assessed needs and improve the foster parent's skills.

Prior to licensure and placement of children (with exception to the placement of relative youth in care), all foster parents complete Foster PRIDE. This training is conducted by a team of PRIDE certified trainers. Foster PRIDE utilizes a co-trainer model approach to ensure learned skills. One Department staff trainer is paired with an experienced foster parent trainer in order to give the foster parents a multifaceted experience during training. In this way, the new foster parent is able to utilize an experienced foster parent's expertise and a staff member's expertise to get the most out of this prerequisite.

Additionally, all foster parents (as a condition of licensure) are required to complete a minimum of sixteen hours of ongoing, Department-approved training per licensing period. Specialized Foster Parents must complete a minimum of sixteen hours of on-going training per year. In order to ensure that foster parents can easily meet the minimum required hours of training, Caritas Family Solutions provides ample training opportunities throughout the calendar year. Caritas Family Solutions in-service trainings are facilitated by licensed foster parents as well as licensed child welfare professionals and partnering service providers.

In an effort to build on foster parent strengths and areas for growth, Caritas Family Solutions considers the following in determining ongoing training needs of foster families:

- Feedback received from Foster PRIDE and in-service trainers
- Foster parent requests for specific training topics
- Feedback from agency training evaluations and suggestions
- Feedback from Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey
- Feedback from foster care staff regarding their perceptions of what trainings would be useful
- New developments in DCFS policy and procedures effecting children and foster parents

Caritas Family Solutions makes every effort to provide training consistent with the agency's assessment of foster parent training needs as well as the foster parents' own assessment of their training needs. Training is based on various child care issues (parenting skills, behavior management, attachment issues, sexual abuse, etc.), and rules and procedures regarding foster care. Foster parents are also encouraged to take advantage of training offered by other agencies (DCFS, school districts, hospitals etc.) and to make use of DCFS's at-home training, Digital PRIDE CD-ROM training modules. All training information is communicated to the foster parent by the licensing worker and in the quarterly Caritas Foster Parent Newsletter.

(3) The right to be informed as to how to contact the appropriate child placement agency in order to receive information and assistance to access supportive services for children in the foster parent's care.

All Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are provided with the on-call telephone numbers for after-hours emergencies. The On Call Number is directed to a live operator who will contact the on call case worker if the situation is deemed an emergency or document the concern to give the case manager during the next business day if it is a non-emergency. On Call workers consist of a Foster Care Caseworker or Supervisor who will answer/return the call immediately. If the On Call worker cannot assist the foster parent, then the On Call worker can contact a supervisor for further assistance. This allows foster parents immediate access to a foster care staff member on a 24-hour a day, 365 day a year basis. This ensures the foster parent can get assistance or help on an emergency basis. Foster parents are also provided with a contact list and instructions, from a case manager at the time of placement, which advises them of the appropriate chain for reporting concerns and obtaining services relevant to the case of the child/children in their care. The foster care caseworker assists foster parents in determining appropriate supportive services for individual children in their homes, identifying applicable resources and securing services as needed, in the time of crisis.

(4) The right to receive timely financial reimbursement commensurate with the care needs of the child as specified in the service plan.

When a child is first placed in care initial clothing and equipment (ages two and under) expenses are provided by the agency based on the child's age. This is a one-time expense provided to the child while in care. All other clothing expenses will then come from the board payment provided to the foster parent. (See chart below)

Board checks for children in care are mailed to licensed foster parents by the agency's accounting department, no later than the 25th day of each month. If the 25th falls on a weekend, checks are mailed on the Friday before. The amount of the check (per youth in care) is based upon the number of nights slept in care, for the previous month (e.g. a check issued in October is for September, etc.) In the event that a foster parent does not receive board payment by the twenty-eighth day of the month (i.e. three days past the date the payment is mailed), he/she is encouraged to contact the child's worker or the foster home's licensing specialist, regarding the status of the payment.

Reimbursement for additional expenses (referred to as Special Service Fees), that have been submitted by the foster parent (i.e. hosting an overnight sibling

visit, hosting a day time sibling visit, supervised activities for family reunification, etc.) must first be approved by the child's caseworker and be in accordance with the Authorized Child Care Payment Procedure issued by DCFS. These expenses are then submitted to DCFS by the agency's accounting department. DCFS then assesses these reimbursement requests, processes the expenses and reimburses the foster parent commensurate with the type of care provided.

Respite care for children is reimbursed on an as-needed basis with the intent of ensuring placement stabilization. Foster parents must notify the child's case worker two weeks in advance of needing the respite care.

Expenses incurred which may not fall under the Special Service Fee or Respite categories should be discussed with the child's caseworker, approved by a supervisor and will be reimbursed in a timely manner and on a case to case basis in accordance with DCFS and agency guidelines. (i.e. camp fees, respite for non-specialized child, graduation expenses, some athletic fees, etc.).

All payments are given a timely assessment with payment commensurate with the type of care provided.

DCFS RATES AND CODES FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018

PCD (traditional) Board Payment Rate

Child's Age	Board	Clothing	Allowance	Total
0 - 11 months	\$366.00	\$39.00	\$13.00	\$418.00
1-4 years	\$368.00	\$44.00	\$14.00	\$426.00
5-8 years	\$371.00	\$59.00	\$15.00	\$445.00
9-11 years	\$379.00	\$68.00	\$25.00	\$472.00
12 years & over	\$389.00	\$77.00	\$45.00	\$511.00

Specialized Foster Care Board Payment Rate

Child's Age	Daily Rate	Days per Month			
		28	29	30	31
0 - 11 months	\$37.80	\$1,058.40	\$1,096.20	\$1,134.00	\$1,171.80
1-4 years	\$37.80	Respite = 15 hours maximum (\$2.46/hour)			
5-8 years	\$37.80				
9-11 years	\$37.80				
12 years & over	\$37.80				

(5) The right to be provided a clear, written understanding of a placement agency's plan concerning the placement of a child in the foster parent's home. Inherent in this right is the foster parents' responsibility to support activities that will promote the child's right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage.

Prior to the placement of a youth in care in the home, foster parents read and sign (as verification that they understand their responsibilities and that of the agency) the Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Parent Placement Agreement (Appendix G). Included in the agreement is the expectation that foster parents will support the child's permanency goal as well as activities that will promote the child's right to relationships with his or her own family and cultural heritage. The licensing specialist thoroughly reviews the agreement with the foster parents to ensure that they understand the agreement. The licensing specialist provides clarification regarding any points of question for the foster parent, and staff explains to them the procedure for filing a service appeal when they believe the service plan is not in the best interest of the individual child. After explaining the purpose of the service plan, the licensing specialist also provides a thorough explanation of how the foster parent is an integral part of the service planning process. Additionally, the licensing specialist witnesses the foster parents' signature on the document and signs the document as a witness.

The child's foster care caseworker provides the foster parent(s) with a copy of the child's most recent Client Service Plan. Within the service plan, the permanency goal for the child is clearly stated. If the permanency goal is other than "return home," the goal is thoroughly discussed with the foster parents. For children who are coming into foster care for the first time, foster parents participate in the Integrated Assessment and development of the service plan. The child's caseworker explains (in detail) the foster parents' responsibilities regarding the Service Plan. Foster parents are encouraged by the caseworker to participate in the development of future Client Service Plans in the following ways:

- 1) offering their recommendations to the child's caseworker regarding revisions to the Plan;
- 2) their attendance at the Administrative Case Review (if the birth parent is in agreement);
- 3) participation in Child and Family Team Meetings (if the birth parent is in agreement);
- 4) involvement in the Integrated Assessment;
- 5) participation in IEP when applicable; and
- 6) participation in other meetings and staffings regarding the plan, treatment, and services provided for youth in care in their homes.

DCFS and the caseworker notify foster parents of the date, time and location for the next Administrative Case Review. If a foster parent cannot attend the review at the scheduled time, efforts are made to reschedule the review at a time that is convenient for all interested parties. If a foster parent cannot attend, efforts are made to include them in the review via speaker phone. Foster Parents' participation in Administrative Case Reviews is strongly encouraged by Caritas Family Solutions if the birth parent is in agreement.

In order to facilitate a relationship with the birth family that is acceptable to the foster parents and supports the child's permanency goal, foster parents are consulted and encouraged to participate in the development of visitation plans and communication with the youth in care's birth family. When possible and appropriate, foster parents are encouraged to take an active role in supporting reunification through participation in visits, and other planned contact with the birth family.

When expected (and unexpected) changes in case plans are necessary, foster parents are notified immediately by the caseworker in writing in the form of a Notice of Decision. Caritas Family Solutions provides foster parents with a Notice of Decision fourteen days prior to movement of a child (except in cases where a Child Abuse and/or Neglect investigation is pending and a child is believed to be at imminent risk of harm). Foster parents are advised, by the caseworker, of their right to appeal changes or movement of the child to another foster home when the foster parent does not believe that the change or move is in the best interest of the child. Instructions for filing an appeal are in writing on the Notice of Decision.

(6) The right to be provided a fair, timely and impartial investigation of licensing complaint issues and be provided the opportunity to have a person present during the investigation and due process; the right to be provided the opportunity to request and receive mediation and/or an administrative review of the decisions which affect licensing parameters; and the right to have decisions concerning a licensing corrective action plan specifically explained and tied to the licensing standards violated.

Caritas Family Solutions, in accordance with guidelines provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services concerning licensing complaint investigations of Foster Family Homes, conducts all such investigations in the manner prescribed by the Department per Rule 383, **Licensing Enforcement**. Licensing Specialists who conduct such investigations are trained in accordance with the Department's guidelines. Licensing Specialists are thoroughly acquainted with the rights of the foster parents in regards to licensing investigations as well as the rules and procedures for conducting investigations. Licensing specialists uphold and respect the Foster Parents' rights throughout the licensing investigation.

Once a complaint has been received, and all pertinent information (including the DCP report in cases of alleged abuse/neglect) has been obtained, the investigating worker initiates the investigation within two business days. Investigation of the complaint is initiated with an unannounced visit to the foster home. At this visit, the licensing specialist presents the foster parents with the Caritas Pamphlet, ***“What You Need to Know about Licensing Complaint Investigations,”*** and explains to the foster parents that they have the right to have a person of their choosing present during the investigation interviews. Foster parents are given the opportunity (up to four hours) to contact such an individual and have him/her present prior to the initiation of any questioning on the part of the licensing specialist. Foster parents may waive this right by denoting the appropriate box and signing the CFS 596-29.

Investigation of the complaint involves action taken by the licensing specialist that includes: formation gathering and interviewing to determine the validity of the report and making a determination regarding the validity of the complaint. Upon completion of the fact-finding portion of the investigation, the worker’s report is submitted to the Licensing Supervisor for his/her approval. After review and approval of the investigation by the Caritas Licensing Supervisor and the DCFS Agency and Institution Licensing Representative, the licensing specialist sends the foster parents a certified letter advising them of the outcome of the investigation, corrective plan if necessary, and an invitation to contact the Licensing Supervisor to request a Supervisory Review of the complaint if the investigation reveals substantiated violations of Rule 402 or the Child Care Act. This letter also advises the foster parent(s) of their right to request and receive mediation as well as an administrative review of the decisions affecting licensing parameters.

At the Supervisory Review, foster parent(s) are encouraged to participate in (and provide input toward) the development of a Corrective Plan to address substantiated violation(s) of Licensing Standards or the Child Care Act. After the Licensing Review, the licensing supervisor provides foster parents with a written explanation of any decisions made to overturn substantiated violations. Rationale for corrective plans prescribed by Caritas Family Solutions to address substantiated violations that were not overturned, are included in this correspondence as well. Corrective plans are developed to clearly demonstrate a tie to the violated licensing standard.

The entire complaint investigation (including the licensing review) is completed (in most cases) within thirty days of initiation of the investigation. When there are extenuating circumstances making it impossible for the licensing specialist to complete the investigation within the thirty day guideline, he/she may request one thirty-day extension. Such requests are directed to the licensing supervisor, and are granted only when absolutely necessary for the fair review of the complaint.

Caritas Family Solutions, in accordance with Rule 340, will offer training on the following items: the purpose and availability of stabilization services, allegations against foster parents and the investigation process, and the public relations aspect of foster parenting. The trainings will be offered at Caritas Family Solutions monthly support groups and/or be included in the Caritas Family Solutions newsletter/updates to foster parents.

(7) The right, at any time during which a child is placed with the foster parents to receive available, additional or necessary information that is relevant to the care of the child.

Upon placement (or prior to placement whenever possible), the child's caseworker provides the foster parent or prospective adoptive parent with a copy of the CFS 600-4, ***Sharing Information With the Caregiver*** (Appendix B). Caseworkers are trained to release information regarding children and families in compliance with laws regarding confidentiality as outlined in the CFS 600-4. Information released to foster parents via this document includes:

1. Case Information and History, including the SACWIS Service Plan; reason the child came into care; permanency goal; legal status; and other pertinent information.
2. Health and Medical History, including known medical problems; communicable diseases; hospitalizations; mental health/emotional disorders; current medications/prescriptions, including instructions on when and how to dispense; immunization status; medical or insurance; and other pertinent health/medical information.
3. Educational Information and History, including current placement or grade level; IEP; IFSP; 504 Special Needs Plan; Case study evaluation or multi-disciplinary conference evaluation from the IEP, IFSP or 504 Special Needs Plan; and other pertinent educational information.
4. Placement History, including dates of all previous placement; reasons for placement changes; and other pertinent placement history information.
5. Behavioral/Social Information, including criminal background; substance/alcohol abuse; destructive behavior; sexual behavior problems; physical aggression; fire setting; runaway; eating disorders; truancy history; and other information regarding the child's behavioral/social history.

If the placement is an emergency placement, all current known information is provided to the foster parent verbally. Written documentation via the CFS 600-4 must be provided to the foster parent by the caseworker within 10 business days.

Both the caregiver and foster parent sign the CFS 600-4 as verification that the information has been provided to the foster parent. The original document is placed in the child's file. A copy of the document remains with the foster parents for their records. Additional documentation of the sharing of information is written in a casenote for supervisory review. The foster parents' signatures on the child's service plan serves as additional verification of relevant information shared by the caseworker with the foster parents.

Requests for additional information by the foster parent that is not clearly relevant to the care of the child will be evaluated on an individual basis by the foster care supervisor. Supervisors review confidentiality practices in accordance with policy during one on one supervision and during regularly scheduled foster care staff meetings. Caritas Family Solutions releases such information to foster parents in compliance with laws regarding confidentiality. Foster parents are acquainted with the confidentiality laws during PRIDE, and as part of the pre-licensure screening process. During the licensing process, foster parents are provided with written documentation regarding confidentiality laws for future reference. Foster parents also sign The Caritas Family Solutions Confidentiality Agreement which becomes part of the foster parents' licensing record.

(8) The right to be given information concerning a child from the Department as required under Section 5 (u) of the Children and Family Services Act and from a child welfare agency as required under Section 7.4 (c-5) of the Child Care Act of 1969. [20 ILCS 520/1-15].

A) At the time the caseworker places a child with a foster parent or prospective adoptive parent, or prior to placement of the child, whenever possible, the worker shall provide available information in writing (except as provided in subsection (a) (8) (B) about the child necessary for the proper care of the child to the foster parent or prospective adoptive parent. The information to be provided shall include:

- 1) Medical: The medical history of the child, including known medical problems or communicable diseases; information concerning the immunization status of the child; and insurance and medical card information.
- 2) Educational: The educational history of the child, including any special educational needs and details of the child's Individualized Educational Plan (IEP); Individual Family Service Plans (IFSP) when the child is receiving special education services; or 504 Educational Special needs Plan, if applicable.
- 3) Client Service Plan: A copy of the child's portion of the client service plan including any visitation arrangements and all amendments or revisions; case history of the child, including

how the child came into care; the child's legal status; the permanency goal for the child; a history of the child's previous placement changes and reasons for placement changes, excluding information that identifies or reveals the location of any previous foster or relative home caregiver.

- 4) Other: relevant background information of the child, including any prior criminal history; information about any behavior problems including fire setting, perpetration of sexual abuse, destructive behavior and substance abuse habits; and likes and dislikes, etc.
- B) In the case of an emergency placement, when all of the above referenced information may not be available, the worker shall provide known information verbally as it becomes available and subsequently provide this information in writing.
 - C) In advance of placement, the caseworker may provide the foster parent or adoptive parent with a written summary of the information listed above.
 - D) Within ten working days after the placement, the worker shall obtain from the caregiver signed verification of receipt of the information described above.
 - E) Supervisory review and approval is required prior to providing any information to the foster parents or prospective adoptive parents.

Foster parents may request additional information regarding youth in care. However, requested information that is not clearly relevant to the care of the child will be evaluated by the foster care supervisor on an individual basis.

Caseworkers are trained in confidentiality during their Fundamental Training prior to licensure. During this training, they review information in disclosure, confidentiality, and the Child Care Act (CCA). Confidentiality and Child Care Act practices are reviewed during regular Foster Care Staff meetings to ensure case workers are reminded and aware of the proper information to disclose for the care of the child.

Upon initial placement, each child in foster or adoptive care is assigned a copy of a Life Book. The Life Book provides the foster or adoptive parent and child an opportunity to track important information about the child from birth through their stay in foster care and beyond (if the child chooses). The Life Book is the property of the child and goes with him/her when the child changes placement or returns home. The caseworker ensures that the child receives the book at initial placement and that it follows him/her to subsequent placements including the child's return home.

(9) The right to be notified of scheduled meetings and staffings concerning the foster child in order to actively participate in the case planning and decision making process regarding the child in care, including individual service planning meetings, administrative case reviews, interdisciplinary staffings and individual educational planning meetings; the right to be informed of decisions made by the courts or the agency concerning the child; the right to have input concerning the plan of services for the child and to have that input given full consideration in the same manner as information presented by any other member of the team; and the right to communicate with professionals who work with the foster child in the context of the team, including therapists, physicians and teachers.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that foster parents are an integral part of the child welfare team. Foster parents are encouraged to attend (and participate in) meetings and staffings concerning the youth in their care. At the time of licensure, foster parents receive a Foster Parent Folder which includes a form entitled, ***“What To Expect When You Get The First Call.”*** This form explains the placement process, the casework process, as well as what actions the foster parent will need to take in order to ensure a successful placement.

Foster parents are notified of meetings in many different ways by the foster care caseworker – personally at visits, via telephone conversations, and/or in writing by mail or e-mail when ever possible. The caseworker notifies the foster parent(s) at least fourteen days prior to any scheduled Administrative Case Reviews, staffings, individual service plan meetings, court hearings, individual education plan meetings, family visits, etc. In the event of emergency staffings, hearings, etc. foster parents are notified verbally by the worker immediately. A follow-up letter or e-mail is sent to the foster parent as further documentation of the communication whenever possible. Since emergency staffings occur only on an emergency basis, the worker will make every effort to schedule a mutually convenient time for all parties to meet. If it is not possible for the foster parent to be present in person for an emergency staffing, the caseworker will attempt to make access available for the foster parent via speaker phone or Skype. All input from foster parent(s) is considered in the same manner as information/recommendations presented by other members of the child’s treatment team. The child’s caseworker notifies the foster parents immediately of all decisions made by the courts, DCFS, or the agency concerning the child. The caseworker advises foster parents of their right to appeal such decisions when appropriate and in keeping with Rule 337, ***Service Appeals***.

Upon receiving notification of a staffing and/or Administrative Case Review (ACR), foster parent(s) may contact the case worker with any questions or request additional information regarding a scheduled staffing. Staffings and/or Administrative Case Reviews are vital to understanding the status of a child’s case. Foster parents have the right to participate in staffings and/or Administrative Case Review for the child’s portion only, due to confidentiality.

Foster Parents are strongly encouraged to attend all scheduled staffings and/or Administrative Case Reviews in person or via telephone. All telephone staffings will need to be set up in advance for ACRs, so foster parents are asked to call the case worker prior to the meeting date so that appropriate arrangements can be made for the foster parents' participation.

(10) The right to be given, in a timely and consistent manner, any information a case worker has regarding the child and the child's family which is pertinent to the care and needs of the child and to the making of a permanency plan for the child. Disclosure of information concerning the child's family shall be limited to the information that is essential for understanding the needs of and providing care to the child in order to protect the rights of the child's family. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parent and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information.

In compliance with laws regarding confidentiality, it is the policy of Caritas Family Solutions that the caseworker continually makes an effort to disseminate any and all relevant information prior to (and during) placement. When additional information is requested, the child's worker obtains the information for the foster parent within the parameters of the Department's confidentiality guidelines. Foster Parents are encouraged to review the child's referral packet prior to accepting a child for placement whenever possible. In addition, staff carefully review all available child-specific information with foster parents during the initial call for placement of the child. Disclosure of information to the foster parents concerning the child's family is limited to the information that is essential in providing for the physical, emotional, medical, spiritual and educational needs and rights of the child. The privacy (and rights) of the child's family is respected by both the foster parents and the agency. The child's parent also completes the "Let Me Tell You About My Child" questionnaire with their caseworker in order to help the foster parent and the caseworker know more about their child and to help ease the transition into foster care. When a positive relationship exists between the foster parent and the child's family, the child's family may consent to disclosure of additional information at their discretion.

(11) The right to be given reasonable written notice of: (i) Any change in a child's case plan; (ii) Plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parent; (iii) The reasons for the change or termination in placement. The notice shall be waived only in cases of a court order or when the child is determined to be at imminent risk of harm.

Because foster parents are crucial members of the child welfare team, they are consulted prior to any changes in a child's case plan; plans to terminate the placement of the child with the foster parent; and reasons for the change or termination in placement whenever possible except when a child is at imminent risk of harm or when court orders dictate an immediate move.

Caritas Family Solutions notifies foster parents in writing (via the CFS 151-A, "Notice of Change of Placement") at least fourteen days prior to all changes in placement excluding those situations noted above. Verbal notification regarding changes in the case plan or placement are followed with a Notice of Decision to the foster parents from the foster care caseworker and foster care supervisor. Foster parents are advised by the caseworker of their right to appeal the movement of a child(ren) in their home. Such appeals must be filed by the foster parents within ten days of their receipt of the Notice of Decision. Directions for filing an appeal are included on the CFS 151-A.

(12) The right to be notified in a timely and complete manner of all court hearings, including notice of the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearing, and the court docket number of the case; and the right to intervene in court proceedings or to seek mandamus under the Juvenile Court Act of 1987.

Foster parents are notified by the caseworker prior to all court hearings. Depending on the county where the case is heard, foster parents may also get written notification from the court itself. This notice includes the date and time of the court hearing, the name of the judge or hearing officer hearing the case, the location of the hearing and the court docket number of the case. Additionally, the child's caseworker will notify the foster parent verbally of any and all court dates, etc. during monthly in-home visits. The worker explains the purpose of the hearing, the expected procedures, and advises the foster parent of the name and contact information for the child's Guardian Ad Litem (GAL). Foster parents are advised that they have the right to contact the GAL with any questions or concerns they may have regarding the progress of the child(ren) placed in their home. The foster care caseworker shall also provide the foster parent(s) the contact information for the child's GAL.

As part of PRIDE pre-service training, foster parents receive training on appropriate court-related intervention strategies, their rights in court, any court related issues and legal representation. Additionally, foster parents receive a ***Foster Family Handbook*** (provided by Caritas) prior to the Foster PRIDE training that includes an overview of Family Court. Foster care caseworkers receive training regarding the foster parents rights regarding court-related issues through staff in-service training as well as through supervisory consultation and on-going training and updates in regular Foster Care Staff Meetings.

(13) The right to be considered as a placement option when a foster child who was formerly placed with the foster parent is to be re-entered into foster care, if that placement is consistent with the best interest of the child and other children in the foster parents' home.

When a child returns to foster care, the DCFS Placement Unit reviews the child's placement history and the previous placing agency is notified that the child has

returned to care. In such an instance, the Caritas Family Solutions Foster Care Supervisor is responsible for reviewing the record and accepting the case. The supervisor also ensures that the previous foster parent is considered as a placement option. Caritas Family Solutions always attempts to place the child with his/her previous foster parents whenever possible providing that the placement is in the best interest of the child. Such placement however, is dependent upon: (1) licensing regulations regarding capacity; (2) the foster parent's ability and desire to care for the child/children in question; and (3) a review of the child's previous progress and adjustment in the home as documented in the child's case file. If the child is not "re-placed" in the previous foster home, a Critical Decision is completed which documents the reasons why the child was not "re-placed" in the home. The Critical Decision becomes a part of the child's permanent case file.

(14) The right to have timely access to the child placement agency's existing appeals process and the right to be free from acts of harassment and retaliation by any other party when exercising the right to appeal.

Upon initial licensure, all Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are given a Foster Parent Folder. Included in this folder are two important documents: The CFS 1050-32, "The Service Appeal Process," and the "Caritas Foster Parent Grievance Procedure" (Appendix A). Foster parents may also access both of these documents via the agency's web-site, as they are posted along with the current Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan. Additionally, the appeal process is outlined in the ***Foster Parent Handbook*** which foster parents receive during PRIDE training as part of their pre-licensure training.

Licensing Specialists, and other Caritas staff, assist foster parents in understanding both appeals and grievances by providing agency-sponsored training, and one-on-one consultation with the foster parents as needed.

Caritas Family Solutions strives to reduce adversarial relationships between all members of the foster care team including foster parents and staff. Additionally, Caritas strives to make quick resolutions to the disputes at hand per the DCFS and Caritas grievance policy and procedures.

(15) The right to be informed of the Foster Parent Hotline established under the Children and Family Services Act and all other rights accorded to foster parents concerning misconduct by Department employees, service providers, or contractors, confidential handling of those reports, and investigation by the Inspector General appointed under the Children and Family Services Act.

Prior to the required pre-service foster parent training (PRIDE) foster parents receive a copy of the ***Foster Parent Handbook***, as supplied by Caritas Family Solutions, and available via the DCFS website. The telephone number for the

Foster Parent Hotline is provided in this book, along with written documentation explaining the purpose of the Hotline. Situations that should be reported to the Foster Parent Hotline are discussed during this training.

Foster parents are encouraged to utilize the Agency chain of command in reporting concerns to Caritas Family Solutions as well as the Hotline. In the event that a foster parent believes that he or she has been subjected to unjust treatment or fostering conditions that interfere with their ability to provide optimal care for the children placed in their home, the foster parent may file a grievance by contacting the agency's Director of Quality Improvement.

Additionally, Caritas Family Solutions provides each foster parent with a copy of the CFS -1050-66, **Office of the Inspector General Brochure** (Appendix J). In the event that the foster parent is not satisfied with the outcome of an internal investigation of misconduct by staff, These brochures provide foster parents with necessary information to assist them in requesting an investigation of the matter by the Office of the Inspector General.

Foster Parent Responsibilities

A foster parent's responsibilities include, but are not limited to, the following:

(1) The responsibility to openly communicate and share information about the child with other members of the child welfare team.

As a member of the foster care team, foster parents are trained and expected to be honest and open about any details related to their youth in care's life, adjustment issues, emotional well-being, physical well-being, education, behaviors, etc.

Caritas Family Solutions child welfare staff assist foster parents in meeting this responsibility by providing the following: (1) an atmosphere of open communication and personal rapport (2) frequent contact between foster parents and members of the foster care team by phone, e-mail, in-home visits, etc.; and (3) encouragement of the foster parents to share all pertinent information regarding a child's case (4) behavioral logs if the foster parent or case manager wishes to utilize them (5) contact information for all members of the child welfare team that are involved with the specific child.

In order for foster parents to meet this responsibility they should also provide: (1) an atmosphere of open communication and personal rapport (2) continued and maintained contact with child welfare team by phone, e-mail, in-home visits etc. (3) behavioral logs if the case manager or foster parent wishes to utilize them.

Prior to placement of children in the foster home, foster parents read and sign a copy of the Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Home Placement Agreement (Appendix C) which outlines in detail the responsibilities of the foster parents in regards to communication about child/children placed in their home.

Foster parents receive the support of the child welfare team (caseworker, therapist, licensing specialist, and supervisor) at all times. In addition to the child welfare team being available to the foster parent by phone or e-mail, at least one member of the team is "on-call" 24 hours a day, seven days a week for emergency consultation. Foster parents are given an on-call number as well as specific directions for contacting the agency in the event of an emergency outside of regular business hours (Appendix F). This ensures that foster parents have access to needed support services on a 24-hour a day, 365-days a year basis.

(2) The responsibility to respect the confidentiality of information concerning foster children and their families and act appropriately within applicable confidentiality laws and regulations.

During foster parent pre-service training, **Foster/Adopt PRIDE**, foster parents are thoroughly educated (by PRIDE certified trainers) regarding confidentiality laws and regulations concerning youth in care. Additionally, prior to placement of a youth in care in a Caritas Family Solutions foster home, the foster care licensing specialist reviews the **Caritas Family Solutions Licensed Foster Home Placement Agreement**, and the **Caritas Family Solutions Foster Home Confidentiality Agreement** (Appendix D) with the foster parents to ensure that they understand stated directives regarding confidentiality. Foster parents sign and date these documents as testimony that they have read and understand all information within the agreement. The licensing specialist signs the agreements as a witness of the foster parents' signatures. The original agreements are placed in the foster parents' licensing file. A copy is returned to the foster parents for their records. Caritas Family Solutions does not place children in the foster home unless this agreement is signed, witnessed, dated and present in the providers' licensing file.

(3) The responsibility to advocate for children in the foster parent's care.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that the foster parent is the primary caregiver of the youth in care. As such, the foster parent not only provides day-to-day care of the child in an atmosphere of love and acceptance, but also acts as a "voice" for the child to ensure that necessary services such as special education, therapy, etc. are requested and evaluated by the Child Welfare team and other necessary consulting professionals. Foster parents are responsible for ensuring that the child actively participates in services deemed necessary by the Child Welfare team in consultation with the foster parents. As advocates for the child, at least one foster parent in each foster home is required to attend the DCFS mandated "Educational Advocacy Training" prior to license renewal. This training provides foster parents with information needed to secure necessary educational services for individual youth in care, and is offered several times throughout the year in various locations throughout the service area, free of cost. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to utilize the resources of the agency's Education Liasion. The Education Liasion comes to foster parent support groups to assist foster parents with questions and concerns regarding their specific youth in care's educational needs, and to inform them of how to better advocate for their youth in care in the school system.

Members of the child welfare team assist foster parents in meeting their responsibility as advocates by providing the following: (1) an atmosphere of open communication which recognizes the foster parent as an integral member of the child welfare team; (2) frequent contact between foster parents and other members of the foster care team; (3) training to assist the foster parents in understanding their rights and responsibilities regarding court hearings as well as protocol for testifying in court. The Caritas caseworker also encourages foster parents to be involved either in person or by phone in all Administrative Case Reviews, and communicates updated contact information for the foster parent to DCFS in order to ensure that the foster parent is in receipt of their invitation to

the ACR. Caritas caseworkers and licensing staff make every effort through mailings and discussion, to inform foster parents of their ability to request a Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP) if they feel that a child might require more intensive case management and services. The “Kids, Courts & Schools” conference is offered annually in the area, and is offered free of charge to foster parents. Written information regarding the appeal system is presented to foster parents when they have the right to appeal, including but not limited to, the notice of decision, investigations, complaints or when a service plan is distributed. When foster parents are given the appeal brochure, agency staff explains how the appeal process is implemented and answers any questions regarding appeals. This ensures that foster parents are aware of opportunities to appeal decisions related to daycare, medical issues and psychological services, as they pertain to each child. The Education Liaison is also available to attend educational appeals with the case worker and foster parent.

(4) The responsibility to treat children in the foster parent’s care and the children’s families with dignity, respect and consideration.

Workers complete monthly visits to the home to ensure the foster parents are treating the children with dignity, respect and consideration. Licensing workers are in the foster homes twice yearly and review the responsibilities of the foster parents to treat the children in their care with dignity, respect, and consideration. Additionally, Caritas Family Solutions assists foster parents in understanding the importance of treating all members of the child’s family with dignity and respect through pre-licensure (**PRIDE**) and on-going training regarding issues of separation and loss as well as the complex nature of the child’s relationship and attachment to his/her birth family. These trainings also address the importance of treating the child and all members of his/her family with dignity, respect and consideration since the foster family’s response to the birth family has a significant impact on the overall emotional development of the child in care, and ultimately, successful reunification and/or permanency.

Foster parents are also encouraged to attend the DCFS classroom training entitled, Reunification. This training is encouraged in order for foster parents to understand the importance of the birth family’s role in a child’s life. Foster parents are informed regularly by the licensing specialist of upcoming classroom sessions of this training offered by DCFS. In addition, foster parents are encouraged to take part in the Digital “Foster PRIDE” Training Module entitled, **Supporting Relationships Between Children and Their Families**. This training assists foster parents in preparing children for visits with family and helping support children after visits. Information is also provided to teach foster parents how to share the parenting role with birth parents.

(5) The responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s own individual and familial strengths and limitations when deciding whether to accept a child into care; and the responsibility to recognize the foster parent’s own support needs and utilize appropriate supports in providing care for foster children.

In an effort to ensure placement stabilization, Caritas Family Solutions makes every effort to “match” children with foster parents and families who possess the necessary strengths to provide the best available care for each, individual child. Foster parents are also encouraged to consider their own strengths and limitations when accepting or rejecting a placement of a child. Foster parents are given all available and important information known to them about the potential placement by the worker requesting placement and are also encouraged to take time to “digest” and consider the information before making a decision. Licensing specialists continue an ongoing open line of communication with foster parents in order to best understand the foster parents’ preferences, strengths, and weaknesses in their role as a foster parent at semi-annual home visits and phone or e-mail exchanges.

As part of semi-annual monitoring visits, foster parents are evaluated by their caseworker and licensing specialist regarding their compliance in terms of this responsibility. In an effort to build on foster parent strengths and areas for growth, Caritas Family Solutions considers the following in determining on-going training needs of foster families:

- Feedback received from Foster PRIDE and in-service trainers
- Foster parent requests for specific training topics
- Feedback from agency training evaluations and suggestions
- Feedback from Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Satisfaction Survey
- Feedback from foster care staff regarding their perceptions of what trainings would be useful
- New developments in DCFS policy and procedures effecting children and foster parents

Caritas Family Solutions strives to provide training consistent with the agency’s assessment of foster parent training needs as well as the foster parents’ own assessment of their training needs. Foster parents are also encouraged to take advantage of services such as respite care, training offered by DCFS and other agencies, use of the DCFS Digital Training, therapy, support groups, and other community services and resources in order to optimally meet the needs of the youth in care in their home. The rejection of a placement based on the foster parents’ own assessment of their strengths and limitations is not held against the foster parent in regards to future placement requests by Caritas Family Solutions.

Caseworkers learn skills regarding placement stabilization through supervision with their supervisor, discussions with the foster parents and other services that

are offered for children and foster parents for stabilization purposes. Caseworkers are also offered trainings regarding understanding children and their families needs, such as trauma, attachment and development training. These trainings are offered by Caritas Family Solutions, DCFS and through community resources, such as counseling centers. Caseworkers strive to maintain an open communication with caregivers and providers regarding the child and their needs.

(6) The responsibility to be aware of the benefits of relying on and affiliating with other foster parents and foster parent associations in improving the quality of care and service to children and families.

Foster parents are encouraged by the child welfare team (caseworker, therapist, foster care supervisor, and licensing specialist) to form and attend foster parent support groups (outside of the agency as well as those provided by Caritas Family Solutions foster parents) whereby they may attain not only support in their role as foster parent, but also tips, advice and skills for providing the best possible care to youth in care. Recognizing the fact that foster parent support groups are formulated to support the foster parents, Caritas Family Solutions assists foster parents in forming and implementing support groups, but does not insist that the groups operate in a manner decided upon by Caritas Family Solutions.

7) The responsibility to assess the foster parent's ongoing individual training needs and take action to meet those needs.

Through the use of annual foster home surveys conducted by Caritas Family Solutions Department of Quality Improvement, foster parents are invited to request training to meet their ongoing-individual training needs. Additionally, recommendations are made to foster parents by evaluators (licensing specialists, caseworkers, therapists, etc.), regarding appropriate training to be completed by the foster parents. The agency offers in-house training opportunities based on a collaboration of requests from foster parents and observations by the Child Welfare team. Agency sponsored training is always evaluated by foster parents immediately after the event. Foster parents are encouraged to provide honest feedback to improve the quality of foster parent training, and to ensure that specific foster parent training needs are met. In the event that specific training is needed which is not offered by Caritas Family Solutions, the child welfare team makes every effort to ensure that foster parents attain the training from another appropriate resource. Foster parents are also encouraged to assess their own skills and to make requests for training that they believe will enhance their ability to provide care for youth in care. As part of semi-annual monitoring visits, foster parents are evaluated in regards to their compliance with this responsibility.

(8) The responsibility to develop and assist in implementing strategies to prevent placement disruptions, recognizing the traumatic impact of placement disruptions

on a foster child and all members of the foster family; and the responsibility to provide emotional support for the foster children and members of the foster family if preventive strategies fail and placement disruptions occur.

In an effort to maintain stable placements, all foster parents are encouraged to take advantage of the agency's respite foster care program as needed. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to take specific concerns regarding a child's behavior or overall care to the child's caseworker. (It is recommended that foster parents not only express their concerns verbally to the child's caseworker, but also follow-up by putting their concerns in writing to the caseworker.) The caseworker, foster parents and other members of the child welfare team work with the foster parents to establish strategies to make the concerns more manageable for the foster family and thereby reduce the risk of placement disruption. Services of a placement stabilization team are provided to foster parents as an additional effort to avoid placement disruption. Foster parents are informed that they have the right to request from the agency a meeting with appropriate staff and involved professionals in order to establish a common goal and strategies for the specific problems at hand. Services of the family's licensing specialist can further help the foster parent avoid placement disruption whenever possible. In the event a placement disrupts despite efforts at stabilization, counseling is available to youth in care and the foster family. Additionally, foster parents are invited and encouraged to attend monthly Foster Parent Support Group meetings/trainings. This is an opportunity to meet and develop relationships with other foster parents.

(9) The responsibility to know the impact foster parenting has on individuals and family relationships; the responsibility to endeavor to minimize, as much as possible, any stress that results from foster parenting.

During the foster home licensing study, the strengths and limitations of the foster family regarding characteristics of their family relationships is assessed thoroughly by the licensing specialist. Strengths and concerns resulting from the assessment are discussed with the applicants on a personal level prior to licensure. Additionally, education regarding family dynamics and the effects a placement will have on the foster family's own family is discussed as part of the pre-licensure **PRIDE** training required of all foster parents. Case managers (as well as foster parents) are offered and encouraged to participate in **Child Trauma** training to identify, educate and help alleviate unnecessary moves. Case managers work with foster parents to assess and identify behaviors, needs, or resources to reduce the risk of placement disruption.

Foster parents are encouraged to discuss their personal concerns regarding the effects of foster parenting on the foster family with their licensing specialist. Foster parents are encouraged to take part in the DCFS Digital "Foster PRIDE" Training Module 9 entitled, **Managing the Impact of Placement On Your Family**. This training illustrates how fostering can affect the family relationships of the foster family. It also offers suggestions for minimizing stressors, and

informs foster parents about available sources of support.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in foster parent support groups and to seek the assistance of other foster parents and licensing specialists as needed. Caritas strives to schedule speakers and trainers for these support group sessions that specialize in topics outlined by foster parents as needed areas of training, so that foster parents can get the best benefit from these support group sessions.

Foster parents are encouraged to request respite care for youth in care in order to minimize stress on the foster family. Caritas will provide respite care for foster parents as needed and on a case by case basis. The agency understands that certain children with more challenging behaviors and intensive needs (as well as family dynamics) may take an emotional toll on the foster home environment.

Caritas also encourages and offers counseling services to foster parents as needed and requested by foster parents themselves. The intent of this therapy is for the foster parent to learn coping skills to alleviate stress that can occur from fostering.

In the event that foster parents feel the need to take “a break” from foster care but do not wish to close their license, they may request that the agency put their license on “Voluntary Inactive Hold.” This means that the license will remain in place, however licensing activities will be discontinued (no monitoring visits) and children may not be placed in the home until the foster parents request that the license be returned to active status or the license expires. During the period of “inactive status,” foster parents must continue to meet all licensing requirements per Rule 402 (Appendix H). The process for requesting a license be placed on “Voluntary Inactive Hold” is thoroughly explained to foster parents at initial licensure, and upon request by the foster parent for additional information.

(10) The responsibility to know the rewards and benefits to children, parents, families, and society that come from foster parenting and to promote the foster parenting experience in a positive way.

During pre-licensure activities and Foster PRIDE training, foster parents receive education about the important services that foster parents provide to children, parents, families and society in general. When possible, foster care alumni speak at agency sponsored training about their experiences in the foster care system. Individual recognition of services provided by foster parents is noted publicly at agency Foster Parent Appreciation functions, as well as in the agency’s foster parent newsletter. Additionally, in an effort to ensure that foster parents understand the benefit (and represent their experience in a positive light to the public in general) they are encouraged to bring specific concerns/problems to the attention of the child’s foster care caseworker and/or foster home licensing worker. Such issues are addressed by the agency in a timely and appropriate manner.

Caritas Family Solutions recognizes that foster parents are the best source of recruitment of new foster parents. As such, foster parents are invited to participate in recruitment of new homes at agency recruitment functions, as well as by word of mouth to others who might be an asset to the children and families served by the agency.

(11) The responsibility to know the roles, rights, and responsibilities of foster parents, other professionals in the child welfare system, the foster child, and the foster child's own family.

Prior to licensure, Caritas Family Solutions provides foster parents with education concerning their roles, rights and responsibilities as foster parents. The pre-service training also provides education regarding the rights and responsibilities of the other members of the child welfare team including the youth in care, and birth family. This training occurs during the DCFS required Foster/Adopt PRIDE pre-service training. Experienced foster parents and child-welfare professionals participate as co-trainers of the PRIDE pre-service training. On-going training for both foster parents and staff is held monthly as part of the agency's Foster Parent Support groups. Staff and foster parents partner to provide this training as well.

Caritas Family Solutions encourages participation from foster parent in many different ways: ACR, Child and Family Team Meeting, school meetings (IEP), counseling, and any additional services that the child may require.

Foster parents are encouraged to participate in the Reunification Initiative by supporting the Return Home goal, cooperating with the scheduling of visitation, ensuring the child attends those visits, and being a part of the visit when the situation allows.

Caritas Family Solutions provides a monthly Support Group for foster parents. During this support group, babysitting is provided for the foster parents as well as a meal for foster parents and child(ren). The Caritas Family Solutions support group allows foster parents to build relationships with one another, gives them a recognized voice within the agency, and establishes rapport with all member of the Child Welfare Team. Foster parents are invited to request topics for training that will assist them in caring for the child(ren) in their care. Staff members are available to answer questions and provide additional information. The Foster Parent Implementation Plan is reviewed periodically during the support group meetings giving foster parents the opportunity to add valuable input.

While the Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent support group is designated for foster parents to obtain training, and to collaborate and support other foster parents, it is also an opportunity for foster parents to voice concerns and make recommendations to the agency for improving services to children, families and foster families. Concerns and recommendations are recorded by each support group's secretary and are presented to the agency-designated (staff member) support group liaison who in turn presents the concerns and recommendations to the agency's Director of Licensing for further review and action on the part of the agency's administrative team.

Documentation of the rights of the birth family is provided to foster parents prior to licensure on the ***Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Placement Agreement*** (Appendix C). Foster parents are expected to be familiar with this document and verify that they have read and understand it. Foster parents receive written documentation of the roles and responsibilities of all members of the child welfare team (including foster parents) prior to licensure and as a part of both the licensing study and pre-service training. The foster parents' signature on the ***Caritas Family Solutions Agreement of Understanding*** (Appendix E) is accepted by the agency as verification of the foster parents' understanding of (and agreement to uphold) their responsibilities as foster parents and members of the child welfare team. Additionally, foster parents are encouraged to hold other members of the team accountable for their responsibilities. Foster parent concerns are addressed in the same manner with which concerns of any other team member are addressed.

Foster parents are given a new copy of the ***Caritas Family Solutions Foster Parent Law & Implementation Plan*** each calendar year. Foster parents are expected to be familiar with this document and verify that they have read and understand it on the ***Caritas Foster Parent Implementation Plan Sign-Off Form*** (Appendix G).

Foster parents are also encouraged to ask questions of their case manager or licensing worker to help familiarize and educate them with each individual role.

Finally, foster parents are encouraged to participate in the DCFS in-service classroom course training module #6, ***Working as a Professional Team Member***.

(12) The responsibility to know and, as necessary, fulfill the foster parent's responsibility to serve as a mandated reporter of suspected child abuse or neglect under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act; and the responsibility to know the child welfare agency's policy regarding allegations that foster parents have committed child abuse or neglect and applicable administrative rules and procedures governing investigations of those allegations.

Prior to licensure, and as a part of Foster PRIDE training, foster parents are trained regarding their role as mandated reporters of child abuse/neglect. Specific information on “what to report” and “how to make a report” is thoroughly presented. Foster parents are required to sign a the Acknowledgement of Mandated Reporter Status form (CANTS 22B) prior to licensure. Foster parents are also trained in regards to the Agency’s policy concerning allegations of child abuse/neglect by foster parents Agency training is provided to ensure that foster parents understand the reasons for investigations as well as the responsibility of the Department and Caritas Family Solutions to investigate allegations of abuse/neglect by foster parents. In the event of a licensing investigation, foster parents are given written documentation regarding the rationale and procedures for conducting investigations via the Caritas brochure, ***What You Need To Know About Licensing Complaint Investigations***. Foster parents may also access this document on the **Caritas** web-site as it is included with the agency’s annual Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan.

(13) The responsibility to know and receive training regarding the purpose of time requirements associated with those proceedings; and the responsibility to actively participate in the foster parent’s designated role in these proceedings.

As part of Foster PRIDE training for foster parents, information is provided to foster parents regarding their responsibilities concerning administrative case reviews, client service plans, court processes, etc. The importance of the foster parents’ involvement in such meetings/staffings/proceedings is emphasized by caseworkers and licensing specialists. Additionally, foster parents are notified of, and are encouraged to attend (and participate in) meetings and staffings concerning the youth in care placed in their home.

The child’s caseworker notifies the foster parents of all decisions made by the courts or the agency concerning the child. Documentation of notifications and decisions are maintained in the child’s case file. Foster parents are encouraged to keep a copy of all documentation regarding the child/ren in their care.

14) The responsibility to know the child welfare agency’s appeal procedure for foster parents and the rights of foster parents under the procedure.

Upon initial licensure, all Caritas Family Solutions foster parents are given a Foster Parent Folder which includes a copy of the service appeal process and foster parent rights pertaining to appeals as set out by DCFS. Additionally, training is provided to ensure that foster parents have a working knowledge of the process. When the Foster Parent Folder is presented to the foster parent(s), the foster parent(s) sign the Caritas form, ***Foster Family Folder Sign-Off Sheet*** (Appendix I) stating that they have received the information regarding the agency’s appeal procedure.

(15) The responsibility to know and understand the importance of maintaining accurate and relevant records regarding the child’s history and progress; and the

responsibility to be aware of and follow the procedures and regulations of the child welfare agency with which the foster parent is licensed or affiliated.

As a part of the licensing study, the Caritas Family Solutions Licensing Specialist thoroughly explains the importance of keeping relevant records in order to remain in compliance with **Rule 402, Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes**. Foster parents are required to keep accurate records of receipts for clothing purchased for the child and distribution of allowance money to the child as is designated on the monthly foster care reimbursement check the foster parent receives for each youth in care placed in their home. (Forms have been designed and distributed to foster parents to assist them in keeping track of these records.) Foster parents also keep accurate records regarding (but not limited to): dispensation of medications; school and all other education related records; medical records (Health Works Health Passport); and an inventory of the child's belongings.

Upon placement of a child in the home, the caseworker and/or licensing specialist periodically (but not less than once annually) inspect relevant records in the foster home to ensure compliance. Compliance of record keeping is monitored by the child's caseworker at monthly visits, and by Licensing Specialists during semi-annual monitoring visits. Foster Parents are also encouraged to keep a "Life Book" documenting achievement of developmental milestones, and special events in the child's life for each child in care. The Life Book is presented to the foster parent upon the child's initial placement in foster care. When the child is returned home to his/her birth parents, the Life Book should follow him/her home as well.

(16) The responsibility to share information, through the child welfare team, with the subsequent caregiver (whether the child's parent or another substitute caregiver) regarding the child's adjustment in the foster parent's home.

In compliance with laws regarding confidentiality, Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parents to disclose to the child welfare team all information relevant to the child which may help enhance the child's adjustment and ensure placement stabilization in subsequent placements. When a child is moved to a new placement (whether home to the birth parent or to another foster home) the child's folder is provided to the new caregiver by the current foster parent. When possible and appropriate, Caritas Family Solutions encourages foster parents to dialogue with the parent (or new caregiver) about the child's needs, schedule, habits and other information that may make the new placement easier for both the child and the caregiver.

(17) The responsibility to provide care and services that are respectful and responsive to the child's cultural needs and are supportive of the relationship between the child and his or her own family; the responsibility to recognize the increased importance of maintaining a child's cultural identity when the race or culture of the foster family differs from that of the foster child; and the

responsibility to take action to address these issues.

Foster parents accepting the placement of children from cultures other than their own are provided with on-going training regarding the child's cultural needs, and the importance of finding outlets to meet those needs. Caritas Family Solutions assists foster parents in finding such cultural opportunities. The importance of supporting the relationship between the child and his/her family and their cultural background is stressed through on-going cultural awareness training. In addition, Foster Parents are encouraged to take part in the Digital "Foster PRIDE" training module 7 entitled, ***Promoting Children's Personal and Cultural Identity***. This training demonstrates the impact of "culture" to a child's self esteem. It also teaches foster parents how to manage cultural diversity, and how to discuss sensitive cultural issues with children.

Foster Parents agree to abide by their responsibilities as enumerated in Foster Parent Law (Public Act 89.19) Section 1-20.

Descriptions of Other Aspects of the Plan and the Planning Process

Caritas Family Solutions received a score of “acceptable” by the DCFS appointed Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Review Council in March of 2017. Upon notification of approval, Caritas distributed copies of the plan to foster parents and foster care staff members. The plan was also posted on the Caritas Family Solutions web-site. Those reading the plan (staff, foster parents and the general public) were invited to submit questions and comments to the Foster Parent Law Liaison, Mary Savage for consideration in the development of the 2018 plan.

The approved plan (including the Foster Parent Law Grievance Procedures) was presented at foster parent support groups held in each of the agency’s four regions. Foster parents were asked to discuss the concepts, ask questions, and offer insight into how the plan might be improved. Foster care staff members were trained in the same manner during monthly foster care team meetings. Staff was also invited to ask questions and offer suggestions for clarification and improvement.

During the month of September comments from the formal (and informal) trainings were gathered and a team of “editors” was appointed to update sections of the plan that were designated as needing improvement. These revisions also included the comments designated as areas for improvement by the DCFS Foster Parent Law Implementation Plan Review Council.

The final draft of the agency’s 2018 plan was presented to staff and foster parents during the month of October and November. Staff and foster parents were asked to read the plan in its entirety and offer their “official seal of approval/endorsement.” Those individuals who reviewed and endorsed the plan are listed in *attachment d* of this plan.