

Round 4 CFSR PIP

Arkansas CFSR Round 4 Program Improvement Plan *A Home for Every Child*



Division of Children and Family
Services, Arkansas Department
of Human Services, Round 4
CFSR PIP

Arkansas has elected to opt into the *A Home for Every Child* Program Improvement Plan (PIP), focusing on safely reducing entries into foster care, ensuring children who enter care are placed in safe, stable, family-based settings, and achieving timely permanency.

Arkansas is also implementing a comprehensive redesign of its staff training and coaching model to better align with practice expectations. This includes increased use of simulation, structured coaching, and reinforcement of Safety Decision Making (SDM) tools in daily decision making. These changes are intended to strengthen decision making, improve placement outcomes, and support timely permanency.

To drive measurable improvement, Arkansas will focus on four core strategies that address front end decision making, placement capacity, and permanency outcomes.

1. Improve Initial Placement Decisions and Expand Family-Based Placement Capacity

Arkansas will strengthen both initial placement decision making and overall placement capacity to ensure children are placed in the most appropriate, family-based settings at the time of removal. This includes a dual focus on prioritizing relatives and fictive kin as the first placement option, while also expanding and stabilizing traditional foster home capacity to meet the needs of children who cannot be placed with kin.

A. Relatives and Fictive Kin (First Placement Priority)

Arkansas will prioritize placing children with relatives or fictive kin at the time of removal and will strengthen early identification, engagement, and assessment practices to ensure family-based placement is considered immediately and throughout the life of the case.

Key actions:

- Initiate and document relative and fictive kin search at the time of removal and continue throughout the life of the case
- Increase the percentage of children placed with relatives and fictive kin by strengthening early identification, engagement, and assessment of kin at the point of removal
- Open relative and foster homes within 90 days by tracking progress at key milestones and addressing delays in real time
- Finalize and implement relative placement standards to ensure consistency in approval, support, and expectations across the state

Measures:

- % of children entering care whose first placement is with a relative
- % of children placed with relatives

- Length of time (in months) until approval of relative foster family homes

B. Traditional Foster Homes (Capacity and Stability)

Arkansas will expand and stabilize its network of traditional foster homes to ensure sufficient capacity for children who cannot be placed with relatives or fictive kin, with a targeted focus on older youth and children with complex behavioral and medical needs.

Key actions:

- Partner with Every Child Arkansas (a statewide network-including Arkansas Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Private Licensed Placement Agencies (PLPAs), child welfare advocates, non-profits, and other community organizations) to increase targeted recruitment efforts to identify gaps and prioritize recruitment for older youth and children with higher needs
- Improve timeliness of opening homes by identifying and resolving licensing barriers
- Meet regularly with placement providers to review capacity, identify barriers, and align on placement needs across the state
- Improve caregiver experience through communication, support, and access to resources to increase retention and reduce home closures
- Enhance and maintain the foster parent portal to improve access to information and streamline communication

Measures:

- Net gain/loss of foster homes
- Length of time (in months) until approval of foster family homes
- Placement stability of children in foster care

2. Reduce Entries Through Front End Decision Making and Prevention

Arkansas will reduce unnecessary entries into foster care by strengthening primary prevention services and improving consistency in front end decision making.

Key actions:

- Expand utilization of evidence-based primary prevention services pre child welfare, including Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs, Community Pathways, Community Schools, Family Centered Treatment (FCT) and Intercept to safely reduce entries into foster care and support families prior to removal
- Focus on the front door of child welfare

- Strengthen Differential Response (DR) and front-end decision making
- Consider expansion to DR for appropriate cases to safely serve families in their communities
- Improve safety and risk decision making through consistent use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools
- Review Hotline and Investigation Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) reports to identify trends and implement targeted practice improvements

Measures:

- Entries into foster care
- % of cases with timely and accurate SDM completion
- Re-entries into foster care

3. Improve Permanency Outcomes Through Case Practice and Family Engagement

Arkansas will improve permanency timelines by strengthening case planning, family engagement, and reunification practices.

Key actions:

- Improve quality and consistency of case planning practices by strengthening expectations for timely, individualized plans and reinforcing alignment between case plans and service delivery
- Strengthen family time practices to support reunification by increasing the frequency, quality, and purpose of family time and ensuring they are directly connected to case plan goals
- Continue strong partnership with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to improve shared accountability for permanency outcomes, including timeliness of hearings, engagement of families, and progress toward permanency goals
- Implement targeted strategies to address long-stayers experiencing foster care, including enhanced case review, permanency staffing, and individualized permanency planning
- Partner with other divisions and stakeholders on a Transitional Youth Services Workforce workgroup to improve permanency outcomes for older youth and successful transitions into adulthood

Measures:

- Time to permanency by discharge type
- % of children achieving permanency within twelve (12) months
- % of family time visits occurring as planned

- % of children in foster care 24 months or longer
- % of children exiting to family-based permanency

Measurement Plan (Chaser and Lead Measures)

Arkansas will utilize both lead and chaser measures to monitor performance and drive continuous improvement.

Lead:

- Entries into foster care
- Net gain/loss of foster homes
- Length of time until approval of foster family homes
- % of maltreatment reports with timely Safety Decision Making (SDM) completion
- Placement stability of children in foster care
- % of children achieving permanency within twelve (12) months
- % of children in foster care 24 months or longer
- Time to permanency by discharge type
- Re-entries into foster care

Chaser:

- % of children entering care whose placement is with a relative
- Use of congregate care
- Recent maltreatment history
- Home disruptions

Performance will be reviewed monthly at the state and area level. Data will be used to identify gaps, inform decision making, and require targeted action plans when performance does not meet established benchmarks.

Conclusion

Through these strategies, Arkansas is taking a focused and practical approach to improving outcomes for children and families. By strengthening front-end decision making, prioritizing family-based placements, expanding and stabilizing placement capacity, and improving permanency outcomes, Arkansas aims to safely reduce entries into foster care, minimize placement disruptions, and achieve timely permanency.

These efforts will be supported by a redesigned training and coaching model to ensure staff are equipped to apply these expectations consistently in practice. In addition, Arkansas will use

ongoing CQI processes to monitor performance, identify gaps, and make real time adjustments to practice and strategy.

This approach allows Arkansas to remain responsive to data, accountable for outcomes, and maintain a strong focus on safety, permanency, and well-being while ensuring children and families receive the support they need at the right time.

This work is only possible through a strong, supported workforce and meaningful partnerships across communities. Sustained success will require continued investment in our staff, collaboration with community partners, and a shared commitment to improving outcomes for Arkansas children and families.

**Minor formatting adjustments may have been made to this document for 508 compliance.
Content is unaffected.**