

North Dakota Child Placement and Service Needs

Immediate and Mid-Range Needs

Listed below are some suggestions to help address the immediate and mid-range needs of North Dakota's child welfare system:

Immediate Needs:

- Develop a certification/licensing option for individuals to become authorized **emergency placements and licensing flexibility for community members and childcare providers to serve emergency, foster children.**
 - Develop a short-term provisional or emergency licensing process for emergency placements.
 - Funding is needed for paid, placement ability
 - Process should be streamlined, nimble, and be available in all North Dakota communities.
 - Emergency placements are short-term, community placements to meet immediate needs and to allow time for proper assessment, service planning, relative search, etc.
 - Goal is to have emergency homes throughout North Dakota to keep existing supports such as childcare, school, etc. in place while longer term planning is performed.
 - In addition, childcare is key to serving foster youth in both emergency and regular placements.
 - Create flexibilities/variances in childcare licensing rules to meet foster child needs.
 - Develop creative funding solutions to compensate childcare providers when they serve foster children. Funding solutions should consider best interest of foster child such as need for respite care and socialization.
- Create **incentives** for existing systems **to retain trained and quality workforce**
 - Support to certified youth shelters in providing services to at-risk youth by funding compensation incentives for their work force. Funding is needed to ensure operational stability, availability, and quality of operations.
 - Fund incentives to increase salary and compensation levels for professional child welfare workers and paraprofessionals in the child welfare system providing direct supervision and service to children and families.
 - Provide funding to develop and implement a student loan repayment program for child welfare workers.
- Develop a **network of specialty foster homes** across the state that provide specialized services – such as working with high needs teenage females or males.
 - Adjust funding and licensing structure to develop these homes into mini centers of specialization.
 - This would encourage community setting, supportive services, specialization, and consistency of service.

- **Funding flexibility** to meet behavioral management/supervision needs of youth with high level needs and to support individualized care planning.
 - There is great need for nimble, creative, and person-centered fiduciary tools to meet the needs of children in the child welfare system.

- **Assessment shelter facilities** to screen, identify the needs (physical, behavioral, educational), and stabilize. Assessment services would determine the most appropriate placement setting, as well as what community resources/services are necessary prior to discharge from the assessment center to another level of care or return home.
 - An assessment facility needs to be staffed by professional level staff, with specialty knowledge/experience in those domains.
 - Potential opportunity to be connected/supported by existing state systems such as the state hospital, human service centers, developmental center, YCC, etc.
 - Comprehensive and intensive discharge planning to ensure services are in place prior to discharge.
 - A strict criterion for admission, which includes exhausting all other placement options and a comprehensive list of reasons for denial.

- **Recommendations for North Dakota Service Provider Contracts.** Service providers who are contracted with or licensed by the Department of Human Services should be required to adhere to the following:
 - **No sudden/unplanned discharges.** A child should not be discharged until an appropriate discharge plan and services/placement is secured.
 - The requirement to provide services throughout an entire region or service area. Too often service providers are not willing to travel provide similar service beyond a 20-mile radius of a major city. This is not realistic in a state such as North Dakota. Contracts should include **incentives for providing rural service** such as rural differential mileage and service provision rates.
 - Contracts should require admission criteria focusing on child's needs vs. the needs of the provider agency. **Individualized care planning** should be the norm vs. the exception.

- **Increased wages and training for direct care staff that serve at-risk and foster care populations.**
 - Nearly every field & industry is experiencing a labor shortage currently. When an employee can make more money stocking shelves or work in a service industry, it is not realistic to expect them to earn less money for potentially more challenging work providing critical safety net services.
 - Recommended similar approach conducted by the 2009 Legislative Session (SB 2012) that provided Qualified Service Provider (QSP) personnel serving elderly/disabled populations a supported salary increase. In the current situation, a **legislatively appropriated and directed wage increase** for specific providers providing core services to at-risk youth such as shelter personnel, which helped to stabilize the workforce and invest in targeted services.
 - **Educational incentives** be provided to build workforce capacity and training competency for working with at-risk populations.

- FTEs and funding support for **Parent Aides and Transportation Aides** in human service zones to assist families and youth in the child welfare system. Parent Aides provide peer to peer coaching focusing on identified service plans and goals. Transportation Aides help ensure safe and reliable transportation and escort to critical appointments (behavioral and physical health) along with parent/child visitations.

Mid-Range Needs:

- Developing and funding a **system of treatment and care**, in North Dakota, that targets the common characteristics **of the youth most difficult to secure placement/service**. Including: cognitive impairment (below 70 IQ); a history of sexual acting out; physically aggressive; often males.
- **Legislative Study**. Considerable state and federal funds are invested in foster care. A study is recommended to analyze foster care trends, reasons for lack of placement options, identify system barriers and service gaps, and include a thorough analysis of why children are denied services. Furthermore, the recommended study would explore how can North Dakota develop prevention strategies and funding options to strengthen North Dakota families.
- **Specialty Services**. To help navigate and link North Dakota systems, several specialty services are recommended. This includes:
 - **Crisis team** of specialty child welfare workers that can work with placements/relatives to stabilize youth and their placement to avoid disruption
 - **Placement Recruiter**: Designated team to help strategize, locate, and recruit placement options for challenging to place youth in North Dakota.
 - **Licensing Gatekeeper**: There are many silos and gates to navigate when trying to access a licensed bed (foster home and/or facility) in North Dakota. There is need for a “gatekeeper” to help systems communicate clearly, to identify capacities and needs.
 - Incentives to grow **1915i providers** throughout North Dakota
 - Provide funding to develop and implement a **student loan repayment program** for child welfare workers.