



The Request

Guardian Light Family Services (GLFS) is responding to the State of Nebraska, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Request for Information (RFI) for working toward a solution of a single service to include:

- Agency Supported Foster Care
- Family Support
- Parenting Time / Supervised Visitation

This single service solution will be referred to going forward as Foster Care Combined Services (FCCS).

Outcome/Goal/Objectives

The Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS) has identified the FCCS Outcome as:

Outcome

1. Ensure child safety
2. Prevent recurrence of maltreatment.

This will be achieved through the DCFS Goal of:

Goal

1. Provide stabilization to Biological Families
2. Provide an education curriculum

It will utilize the DCFS Objectives (criteria):

Objectives

1. Providing Safety in a home environment
2. Support biological families
3. Offer a permanent family home to children who need permanency, when appropriate.
4. Providing stabilization to biological families
5. Parent education curriculum

Change in Philosophy

FCCS will require a sound philosophy of “helping families” vs the often motivating idea of “helping a child” for all parties involved. This will require more fluidity in responsibility, changes in roles and communication between providers, foster parents, biological parents, community supports, and Child Family Specialists (CFS). This change in philosophy will come at a perfect time to match with the Family Choice Initiative.



The Challenge

The challenge in putting together a program that utilizes more involvement from Foster Parents is multi-layered. In creating a program we need to be cognizant of the following issues:

- Safety – Not all families will be appropriate. Will the Biological family pose a risk by trying to abscond with the children? What happens if the Biological Parents coming to the foster home intoxicated? Will they see the Foster Parent as trying to “take” their children and retaliate against the foster home?
- Time Constraints – If there are two parents working with biological children involved in activities, will Foster Parents have time to provide services? What if they have more than one family represented in their home?
- Risk of Burn Out – If the Foster Parents are engaged in work, providing care for children and now need to provide supervised visitation/support to the Biological Family, when will there be down time and self-care opportunities?
- Potential Bias – In the past, Foster Parents struggle with feeling like Biological Parents should not be reunified with their children. Are we asking for the number of biased Foster Parents to increase by asking Foster Parents to be in charge of monitoring visits? And if they are biased, will they have more opportunities to sabotage the family through skewed reporting of visitation monitoring, or unknowingly creating a culture during visits through micro messaging that the parents are never “good enough”? Is there a greater risk for Pre-Adoptive homes to adequately support the Bio-logical Parent, when they will be blessed with a child if the reunification is unsuccessful?
- Confidentiality – With more than one Foster child represented in the home from different families, how will confidentiality be maintained? Do you ask the non-visited child to be in the other room for 3-5 hours while another family has a visit? Does the foster-parent take the visiting family to the park? Then who cares for the children left behind?
- Predictable Problems – If the referral family is working on sobriety and they come for their visit intoxicated, what does that do for the relationship amongst everyone if the Foster Parent has to end the visit? What if the police have to be called? If there is allegations of abuse or mental health behaviors, what power will the Foster Family have to keep everyone safe? Again, what will the implications be for the relationships amongst everyone? Will it be more traumatic for the child who has to see Foster Mom call the police on his Biological Mom?
- Low Foster Parent Referrals – If Foster Parents are concerned about some of the challenges listed above as part of the role in being Foster Parents, are we going to take an all or nothing approach? Do we need to be concerned that the inflexibility toward potential Foster Parents (who could handle most of the challenges) would dramatically drop our numbers of candidates for Foster Homes?



A Solution

To address the challenges identified above we cannot create a “one-size fits all” approach to Foster Parenting to achieve the outcome of child safety and prevention of recurrence of maltreatment.

We need to look at a continuum consisting of our current Foster Care Program and the desire to utilize Foster Parents in traditional roles/responsibilities done by Family Support Workers. In the middle, lies the answer; a blend, a graduated level of care.

A 4 tier system of Foster Care Homes that provide

- Different levels of support and engagement with the Biological Family
- Based on the referrals stage of reunification (Full Supervision, Semi-Supervised and Reunification with In-home Family Support).
- And the Skill level, Flexibility and Permanency desire of the Foster Home

Foster homes can then be recruited and categorized into the four types of homes based on

- Skill level and Training
- Availability and Flexibility
- Permanency desirability

These 4 levels would be identified as:

- Tier 1 Kinship Foster Home
- Tier 2 Foster Home
- Tier 3 Pre-Adoptive Home
- Tier 4 Advanced Support Foster Home

These 4 Tiers will also represent the level of engagement, support and role modeling they will be providing for the Biological Family to support the 5 basic objectives (criteria) for FCCS (safety, support, permanency option, stabilization and education for biological family).

This chart indicates the level of support and engagement the Foster Parents will have with the Biological Family at each stage of reunification.

	Types of Service		
	Full Supervision	Semi - Supervised	In-home Support
Kinship Foster Home	None	Yes - provisional	None
Basic Foster Home	None	Yes	Yes
Pre-Adoptive Home	None	Yes	None
Advanced Foster Home	Yes	Yes	Yes



All 4 Tiers would provide the initial Engagement Protocol, regardless of stage of reunification. The Following is an outline of basic expectations for each Tier of Foster Homes

Engagement Protocol with the Biological Families:

- Phone contact with 24 hrs. Foster Parents will contact Biological Family by phone within 24hrs of placement for the foster family to introduce themselves and give the Biological Family a chance to talk to their children. Family phone calls will be encouraged and a flexible schedule will be discussed for maximum connection via phone or video chat.
- Face-to-Face within 5 days. FSW will schedule and lead a face to face visit in the foster home within 5 days of placement for both families to meet. The goal is to have a positive exchange, clarify expectations of services and discuss schedules, school and medical needs. Children should be present for part of this meeting to observe positive interactions, so they can feel support by both families.
 - *Pre-adoptive homes and Tier 2 Foster homes will meet in a neutral setting until any safety concerns can be resolved.*
- Coordination of Activities and Appointments. Foster Family will notify and invite biological families to attend all school functions, sporting events, school pictures, medical appointments, hair appointments, and any other community activity. Sharing rides will be encouraged when appropriate for time and travel.
 - *Pre-adoptive homes and Tier 2 Foster homes will meet in a neutral setting until any safety concerns can be resolved.*
- Family Connections. Foster Family and Biological Family should discuss family videos and photos to be shared and exchanged between the 2 families. This is strongly encouraged as a way to stay connected and help parents capture milestones; first steps, first words, missing tooth, new haircut, first day of school, etc.. Also, having a photo album of important family, friends and pets for the child who they are away from while being in the foster home.

New Service Created:

Re-Charge Services (RCS) – This will be a new service and expectation of Advanced Level Foster Homes. The goal is to help stabilize a Biological Family in the beginning stages of reunification (first 6 months) and reduce recurrence of maltreatment. This would be offered through RCS, where Biological Parents could call their previous Foster Parent and ask for a 24 hour overnight visit for the children without the fear of “losing” their children by asking for help. Reasons that might prompt the call: ending a relationship, overwhelmed and stressed by several bad days in a row, needing to move, or maybe a new mom needs a full-night sleep. The options would be 2 separate call incidents during the first 3 months, and then one call incident a month until the 6 month mark of reunification.



TIER 4 - Advanced Support Foster Homes

Requirements of Foster Parents:

- **Availability and Flexibility** – This Tier has 1 parent that works less than 20 hours a week. They have flexibility in their schedule to meet the needs of the Biological Family when in crisis.
- **Permanency desirability** – Their main purpose in becoming a Foster Parent is not for adoption, but to help many families in need.
- **Skill level and Training** – Skill level is higher with this home. Beyond the initial Foster Parent Training, they will learn more about challenges Biological Parents face, skills of engagement, and conflict resolution.

Additional Services Provided and at What Stage of Reunification by Foster Parents:

- **Full Supervision and Semi Supervised visit stage:**
 - Safety and Monitoring style visitation in the Foster Parent’s Home.
 - Visits will be between 5 and 15 hours a week.
 - First week of visits in the Foster Parent’s Home, FSW will be conducting to provide additional support, engagement and structure for both families.
 - The above hours are in addition to hours provided by the Family Support Worker (FSW) for supervised visits. FSW supervised visitation fall under “Change service”. These visits will focus on teaching skills and providing feedback to the family to work toward reunification and will take place in the Biological Family’s home.
 - Biological Parents will be responsible for their own travel.
- **In-home Family Support:** (children returned to the Biological Parents, but still have services)
 - Re-Charge Service (RCS) - can be utilized 2x month during the first 3 months, then once a month up to 6 months after reunification.
 - Foster Parents will offer a once a month family support get together for both families months 1, 3, and 6 after children are reunified.



Tier 3 – Pre-Adoptive Homes

Requirements of Foster Parents:

- **Availability and Flexibility** – This level may have up to 2 full-time parents reducing the number of hours available for addition services of supervised visitation beyond Engagement Protocol.
- **Permanency desirability** – This home is identified as wanting children who are in a greater need category of needing permanency and may be available for adoption.
- **Skill level and Training** – This home will have the Basic Foster Parent Training, and additional training on Attachment Disorders and Trust Based Relational Interventions (evidence based practice utilizing Attachment Theory and Trauma Theory).

Additional Services Provided and at What Stage of Reunification by Foster Parents:

- **Full Supervision**
 - No Supervision will be provided at this stage, to assist with reducing potential for negative micro messaging due to conflict of interest in wanting to adopt. Full supervision is early in the reunification process, and it can still be uncertain if the case will need permanency
- **Semi Supervised visit stage:**
 - Safety and Monitoring style visitation in the Foster Parent’s Home. (Because the progression to Semi-supervised, this shows clear direction that the family is doing well and making progress).
 - Visits will be between 4 and 6 hrs a week with half the session, taking place in the Foster Home.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 10:00, leave for activity just the Biological Family and child and return to finish the visit 3:00 to 5:00.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 12:30, leave for lunch and activity, return just for drop off.
 - The above hours are in addition to hours provided by the Family Support Worker (FSW) for supervised visits. FSW supervised visitation fall under “Change service”. These visits will focus on teaching skills and providing feedback to the family to work toward reunification and will take place in the Biological Family’s home.
 - Biological Parents will be responsible for their own travel.
- **In-home Family Support: (children returned to the Biological Parents, but still have services)**
This home will have the option of being exempt in offering this service to help bring closure for a family hoping to adopt. This will take into the decision the feelings of the Pre-adoptive parents and if they are able to be a support afterward.
 - Optional - Re-Charge Service: can be utilized 2x month during the first 3 months, then once a month up to 6 months after reunification.
 - Optional - Foster Parents will offer a once a month family support get together for both families months 1, 3, and 6 after children are reunified.



Tier 2 – Basic Foster Homes

Requirements of Foster Parents:

- **Availability and Flexibility** – This level may have up to 2 full-time parents reducing the number of hours available for additional services of supervised visitation beyond Engagement Protocol.
- **Permanency desirability** – Their main purpose in becoming a Foster Parent is not for adoption, but to help many families in need.
- **Skill level and Training** – This home will have the Basic Foster Parent Training

Additional Services Provided and at What Stage of Reunification by Foster Parents:

- **Full Supervision:**
 - No Supervision will be provided at this stage. Full supervision is early in the reunification process. Parents may still be struggling with addictions, compliance and mental health issues.
- **Semi Supervised visit stage:**
 - Safety and Monitoring style visitation in the Foster Parent’s Home. (Because the progression to Semi-supervised, this shows clear direction that the family is doing well and making progress).
 - Visits will be between 4 and 6 hrs a week with half the session, taking place in the Foster Home.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 10:00, leave for activity just the Biological Family and child and return to finish the visit 3:00 to 5:00.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 12:30, leave for lunch and activity, return just for drop off.
 - The above hours are in addition to hours provided by the Family Support Worker (FSW) for supervised visits. FSW supervised visitation fall under “Change service”. These visits will focus on teaching skills and providing feedback to the family to work toward reunification and will take place in the Biological Family’s home.
 - Biological Parents will be responsible for their own travel.
- **In-home Family Support:** (children returned to the Biological Parents, but still have services)
 - Re-Charge Service (RCS) - can be utilized 2x month during the first 3 months, then once a month up to 6 months after reunification.
 - Foster Parents will offer a once a month family support get together for both families months 1, 3, and 6 after children are reunified.



Tier 1 – Kinship Care

Requirements of Foster Parents:

- **Availability and Flexibility** – This level may have up to 2 full-time parents reducing the number of hours available for additional services of supervised visitation beyond Engagement Protocol.
- **Permanency desirability** – This home is identified as wanting to support a relative or kinship Biological Family that needs assistance for placement of children. This will be a Family Choice, as to some Biological Families recognize the best placement for their children may NOT be with relatives due to past history, family disagreements or Biological Parents fear judgment and potential for interference from the Kinship placement.
- **Skill level and Training** – This home will not be licensed. They will be asked to go through an abridged version of Basic Foster Parent Training

Additional Services Provided and at What Stage of Reunification by Foster Parents:

- **Full Supervision (Optional)**
 - Supervision will be reviewed on a case by case basis to assist with reducing potential for negative micro messaging, desire to adopt or an inability to hold Biological Parents accountable due to the closeness in relationship. This family will not have the same level of training as an Advanced Support Foster Home, and may not be equipped to handle issues related to substance abuse, mental health, and compliance.
- **Semi Supervised visit stage:**
 - Safety and Monitoring style visitation in the Foster Parent’s Home. (Because the progression to Semi-supervised, this shows clear direction that the family is doing well and making progress).
 - Visits will be between 4 and 6 hours a week with half the session, taking place in the Foster Home.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 10:00, leave for activity just the Biological Family and child and return to finish the visit 3:00 to 5:00.
 - Ex. Visit Saturday 8:00 to 5:00. In the home 8:00 to 12:30, leave for lunch and activity, return just for drop off.
 - The above hours are in addition to hours provided by the Family Support Worker (FSW) for supervised visits. FSW supervised visitation fall under “Change service”. These visits will focus on teaching skills and providing feedback to the family to work toward reunification and will take place in the Biological Family’s home.
 - Biological Parents will be responsible for their own travel.
- **In-home Family Support (children returned to the Biological Parents, but still have services)**
 - This home will not be expected to provide additional support after reunification because they are not licensed and monitored by Guardian Light Family Services.



Conclusion

The 4 Tier Foster Home System would offer an option of flexibility to members in the community who would like to find a way to make a difference and help families who are struggling. It would allow Foster Parents to commit and provide assistance at their skill level, availability and desire for permanency. This 4 Tier System also reduces the number of concerns and challenges in asking Foster Parents to transition into a more active role.

By adding the new Re-Charge Service, we will also be positively impacting the outcome of stabilization and reduction in recurrence of maltreatment by adding another layer of support for Biological Families.

This RFI does not include any changes to our Family Support Worker standards in the field. FSWs will continue contacting families within 24 hours of being referred and resulting in face to face meetings in 72 hours. FSWs will continue with excellent communication with 48 hour case note delivery to CFS after services.