



# **FOSTER PARENT LAW IMPLEMENTATION PLAN 2024**



**IMPLEMENTATION PLAN FOR THE ILLINOIS  
FOSTER CAREGIVER  
BILL OF RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES 2024**

**Foster Caregiver Rights:**

**1. THE RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH DIGNITY, RESPECT, AND CONSIDERED AS A PROFESSIONAL MEMBER OF THE CHILD WELFARE TEAM.**

UCAN believes that foster caregivers are an integral part of fulfilling UCAN's vision and mission for children and families. UCAN's vision is that youth who have suffered trauma can become our future leaders. UCAN's Professional Foster Parenting (PFP) case managers build meaningful relationships with caregivers by including them in collaborative planning for youth and families.

PFP case managers encourage foster caregivers to participate in staffings and assist in the development of youth-supportive service plans, behavior management and treatment plans for youth in the Adolescent and Specialized foster care programs, IEP and school meetings, court hearings, discharge planning meetings, staff meetings, therapeutic staffing/meetings, therapy appointments when requested and Administrative Case Reviews (ACR).

If unable to attend the abovementioned meetings, foster caregivers can provide feedback in advance and receive a verbal, and sometimes printed summary of meetings, recapping decisions made, and tasks assigned to all persons involved in the child's care. UCAN PFP staff are committed to demonstrating professionalism, respect and courtesy through the following:

- Foster caregivers are kept up to date with the program and staff changes such as a change in case manager.
- Foster caregivers are provided a phone list of after-hours emergency numbers, contact numbers and email addresses for each worker and several other resources and numbers. UCAN also has a 24-hour number where caregivers can gain access to a manager in an emergency. During the FY24 planning period, a list of important numbers was created on a magnet so that each foster caregiver has these important numbers readily available.

- Home and licensing visits are scheduled as far in advance as possible to accommodate the foster caregivers' schedules. They have also been informed that unannounced visits are possible as a licensing requirement.
- Foster caregivers are contacted timely to report canceled appointments, time changes or if the worker is running late.
- All UCAN staff are expected to respond to foster parent requests, questions and needs as they arise and return non-emergency emails and phone calls within 36 hours. UCAN created an email inbox for non-emergency foster caregiver requests that will be checked twice per day to ensure follow-up for foster caregivers. The email address is [UCANFostercare.customerservice@ucanchicago.org](mailto:UCANFostercare.customerservice@ucanchicago.org). By using an email inbox, we are able to gather data and metrics noting where the issues are and troubleshoot those problems in support of the foster caregivers.
- UCAN maintains up to date mailing lists to ensure all foster parents are in receipt of all materials distributed by the agency.
- UCAN requests foster parents' email addresses so that program and training information can be sent to them electronically. Training and meeting reminders are sent out electronically also. Foster Care staff update phone numbers and email addresses at least twice per year during in-person meetings/trainings (in addition to existing demographic updates).
- UCAN distributes a Foster Caregiver Satisfaction Survey on an annual basis. Results and comments are used to continually improve the foster care program and reviewed with the staff.

During foster parent orientation and during ongoing training events, UCAN encourages foster caregivers to directly contact case managers, licensing specialists, supervisors, or administrative staff with any questions or concerns.

UCAN realizes how integral foster caregivers are to our agency and honors them in the following ways each year:

- Foster Caregiver appreciation events in which the foster parents receive various forms of recognition to show continued appreciation.
- UCAN sends out condolences when a member of the foster family has passed away.
- Annual holiday parties and summer events for foster families and children in foster care to create family bonding.
- Includes foster caregivers in video clips and social media. Creation of a website specific to foster parent recruitment where prospective foster r parents can learn more about becoming a foster parent. [Ucanfoster.org](http://Ucanfoster.org).

UCAN believes positive relationships are the key to success of Foster Parents, children and birth families. Foster Parents have access to their Licensing representative, Case Manager, Case Manager Supervisor, and have the cell phone numbers of the program's senior management team members to help resolve any issues. The program Senior Vice President, agency President and CEO can/have been involved directly with foster parents to resolve issues in a timely manner.

We have several staff across UCAN who are foster and adoptive parents. Experiencing the child welfare system on both sides is helpful and we encourage staff to share their experiences in order to support current foster families.

## **2. THE RIGHT TO BE PROVIDED STANDARDIZED PRE-SERVICE TRAINING AND APPROPRIATE ON-GOING TRAINING TO MEET MUTUALLY ASSESSED NEEDS AND IMPROVE THE FOSTER PARENT'S SKILLS.**

The required pre-service training, PRIDE Redesign, is offered on the DCFS Learning and Development Center (LDC-30.5 hours) at times convenient to prospective foster caregivers. The DCFS Redesign E-learning training is also made available for those caregivers who feel that is a better fit for them. The LGBTQIA+ class is required for the initial license and for renewal if not previously completed. Educational Advocacy is offered virtually to foster caregivers as a requirement for ongoing licensing requirements and is provided by the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS).

In addition to the state pre-service and in-service training requirements, UCAN, as a Council on Accreditation (COA) accredited agency, has additional requirements based on the level of care the foster caregiver is interested in providing. The trainings are provided by UCAN, DCFS or other external partners.

### **Adolescent Foster Care**

- Sexual Abuse
- Behavior Management
- Medication Log
- Clinical Approach (Trauma, Attachment and Loss, Human Development, Social Systems)
- Various training topics to address the children's special needs
- Raising a Multi-Ethnic Family
- Culture of Inclusion
- Positive Youth Development
- Risk Reduction Training-Safe Sleep
- TCI-F (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families) De-escalation training
- CPR/First Aid
- Ongoing LGBTQIA+ Training
- Educational Advocacy
- Adoption/Guardianship Readiness Training \*
- Caring for Children Who Have Experienced Trauma

#### Specialized Foster Care

- Sexual Abuse
- Behavior Management
- Medication Log
- Clinical Approach (Trauma, Attachment and Loss, Human Development, Social Systems)
- Various training topics to address the children's special needs
- Raising a Multi-Ethnic Family
- Culture of Inclusion
- Positive Youth Development
- Risk Reduction Training-Safe Sleep
- TCI-F (Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families) De-escalation training
- CPR
- Ongoing LGBTQIA+ Training
- Educational Advocacy
- Adoption/Guardianship Readiness Training \*
- Child Trauma

#### Traditional Foster Care

- CPR/First Aid
- Raising a Multi-Ethnic Family
- Clinical Approach (Trauma, Attachment and Loss, Human Development, Social Systems)
- Risk Reduction Training-Safe Sleep
- Child Trauma
- Nurturing Parenting Program\*
- Educational Advocacy\*
- Ongoing LGBTQIA+ Training
- Additional training is accessed in collaboration with the agency and foster caregivers.

Due to the HMR Initiative, DCFS offers a six-hour virtual PRIDE training to relative caregivers on the Learning and Development Center and in-person HMR training classes. v HMR families are encouraged to complete the non-relative Pride Pre-Service training as well. Traditional Pride Pre-Service training is mandatory for all Home of Relative/Fictive Kin families parenting children who are considered Specialized or Adolescent Foster Care.

Foster caregivers participate as co-trainers with staff. An experienced foster parent speaks with each group of prospective foster parents during orientation and maintains contact with applicants throughout the licensing process. Members of the foster parent support groups suggest training topics, and they develop the agenda for their own support group meetings.

The training coordinator is available for one-on-one consultation with all foster parents. In addition, the licensing specialist creates a training plan with foster caregivers to ensure all training requirements are met as well as to encourage feedback from the individual foster caregiver about

their own training needs. Foster caregivers are encouraged to attend trainings that they believe will enhance their parenting abilities or fulfill their specific training needs in order to better support the children in their care. Training topics may also be suggested by case management staff based on needs they identify in working with caregivers.

UCAN has an on-going in-service training program. This training is offered several times each month, during the week and on Saturdays. The training coordinator sends regular notices of upcoming trainings to foster caregivers through mail, e-mail, phone calls and advises foster caregivers of upcoming training opportunities during the monthly foster caregiver meetings. UCAN requires the following *additional* in-service training hours for foster caregivers depending on the program they serve.

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|----------------------------|-------------------|
| • Relative and Traditional | 12 hours annually |
| • Specialized              | 27 hours annually |
| • Adolescent               | 27 hours annually |

Additional child specific trainings are created and available as needs arise. Medical training is also provided by hospitals where children receive their care prior to placement and ongoing if anything changes with the child's medical condition.

UCAN has a Lending Library, which enables foster caregivers to receive additional training hours by viewing DVDs or reading books in their own home. UCAN also has an online training platform, Relias, which is shared with foster caregivers. and externally via the DCFS and makes foster caregivers aware of the other training opportunities across the State via schools, hospitals, libraries or other social service agencies.

UCAN PFP trainers receive feedback from foster caregivers after all in- service trainings through a written evaluation form which asks foster caregivers about the usefulness of the training for their needs and those of the children in their care and what other training they may want or need.

Assessment of training needs is conducted by Licensing Specialists during their scheduled visitation with licensed Foster Parents and ongoing throughout the year. Opportunities for other Foster Care team members to voice areas of concern regarding the care of the children are provided and discussed as a team. Additionally, assessment occurs during Foster Parent meetings, as well as through Foster Parent satisfaction surveys. Regular meetings with Licensing Specialists and Supervisors also occur to discuss current needs of Foster Parents to revise or add trainings applicable to the needs identified. Training schedules are developed throughout the agency based on suggestions from all members of the team, which includes Foster Parents. Foster Parents are also encouraged to access the DCFS Learning and Development Center (LDC) for materials about specific parenting issues.

The Agency supports and encourages Foster Parents to participate in the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council. There are two UCAN Foster Parents on the Statewide Foster Parent Advisory Council and additional foster parents who attend when they can. UCAN Foster Parents created a UCAN Foster Parent Advisory Council that continues to operate. The Associate Vice President worked with them to create this council and they have continued to meet and help with special

events throughout the year.

**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 THEIR CARE.**

At the time of placement, the foster caregiver receives a placement packet, which outlines the current service needs of the child (ren) and the providers of those services. In this packet, the foster caregiver also receives the name and phone numbers of the assigned caseworker and supervisor who will be addressing the child (ren)'s service needs, along with resource numbers.

The Professional Foster Parent Agreement form was updated during the 2024 planning cycle and includes additional guidance on supportive services and information for foster parents.

UCAN also has an after-hours emergency number, (312) 464-2878, which is provided to foster parents. This is the number for after hours and weekend emergencies. All staff members are accessible by cell phone during business hours.

In the event of an emergency, the after-hours service will contact the appropriate case manager. If contact with the case manager is unsuccessful, the after- hours service will then follow the chain of command for contact: Supervisor, Director of Adolescent Foster Care (AFC), Associate Vice President and Senior Vice President. Each foster parent also receives a copy of the foster care program organization chart with phone and email addresses.

During the FY24 planning cycle, foster caregivers noted that they would like to meet all members of the professional foster parent team since there have been new team members hired during the planning year. The program plans to host "meet and greets" twice per year so that foster caregivers and new team members can get to know each other.

UCAN provides foster parents with other important phone numbers including:

- Caseworker
- Supervisor
- UCAN main number
- UCAN emergency line
- UCAN Foster Care Associate Vice Presidents, Senior Vice President and AFC Director's cell phone numbers
- Advocacy line
- Office of the Inspector General (OIG)
- Medical Card Hotline
- Daycare Referrals
- IDCFS Payment Unit
- Child Abuse Hotline
- IPS/Crisis Line

- CARES Line
- UCAN staff
- WIC offices
- DCFS medical consent line
- YouthCare Liaisons

Phone numbers are routinely updated and distributed to caregivers via board checks, mail and email. Many of these numbers are also included on the magnet which will be distributed by January of next year.

The Agency also uses formal resources such as Intensive Placement Stabilization (IPS), Screening Assessment Support Services (SASS), and general counseling to provide Foster Parent support. Agency staff are expected to provide this support during home and virtual visits, returning phone calls timely, encouraging Foster Parents to take an active role in caring for children, providing an avenue where Foster Parents can meet with other Foster Parent support groups and responding to Foster Parent concerns with respect and urgency. The relationship between Foster Parents and providers is essential in facilitating the care of children in the foster care system.

During the FY24 planning cycle, UCAN worked closely with foster caregivers and DCFS regarding children who required emergency placement planning. This was helpful for UCAN's foster caregivers because we experienced staff shortages where we had to slow our intake of children into UCAN. We were able to successfully place over 15 children/youth, some with complex medical needs, into homes which met the needs of children and foster caregivers. These cases continued to be managed by other agencies and many of them were eventually transitioned to UCAN's foster care program.

#### **4. THE RIGHT TO RECEIVE TIMELY REIMBURSEMENT COMMENSURATE WITH THE CARE NEEDS OF THE CHILD AS SPECIFIED IN THE SERVICE PLAN.**

UCAN issues monthly compensation to foster caregivers for providing foster care on the third Friday of each month. This compensation is for the care provided in the previous calendar month. During the FY24 planning period, we are continuing to explore and implement a pay card system for foster caregivers. We met with the Finance Team and foster caregivers on July 25, 2023, and fielded questions from caregivers. Follow-up information was provided on October 27, 2023, to answer any remaining questions that foster caregivers had. This pay card system will provide ease of access for caregivers where they will not have to travel to a UCAN site to receive their board payments.

UCAN provides a full continuum of foster care services, which allows a child to be supported on various levels according to their needs. Prior to a child's placement in a foster home, the foster caregiver is informed verbally or in writing what program the child is in and the corresponding monthly payment.

Respite is available when planned for extended periods (vacation, family illness) by a provider of the foster caregiver's choosing, on the condition that the identified respite provider passes



background screening (Traditional Foster Care only). UCAN caregivers in the Traditional and Home of Relative programs are encouraged to serve as respite resources for one another. This respite is paid through the foster caregiver board payment or is paid by the foster parent directly to the respite caregiver. Foster parents supporting children who are Specialized and in the Adolescent Foster Care Program receive 15 hours of respite monthly, provided by trained agency respite staff or a trained resource identified by the foster parents. Children and youth with medical needs require trained respite providers in their specific medical conditions.

If problems arise related to a foster caregiver's board payment, the foster caregiver may contact the case manager first, and may also contact the supervisor, AFC Director or Associate Vice President of Foster Care, who shall then work with the foster caregiver to resolve payment issues as soon as possible. Foster caregivers identified that there were too many steps in this process, so we changed the hierarchy so that one person from the program, the Associate Vice President, troubleshoots payment issues with UCAN's Finance team. This has helped to resolve issues at a quicker rate for foster caregivers.

As appropriate and based on needs (as detailed in the client service plan or treatment plan), UCAN will pay camp and/or special services fees, per child. To access these additional services, the foster caregiver should contact the child's caseworker. Foster caregivers are also eligible for special service fees by supervising sibling visits and parent child visits. With each of these, the foster caregivers turn in documentation to receive the special service fee as set by DCFS.

For children who require more care than traditional service support, the foster caregiver may contact their caseworker. The caseworker will initiate a Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP) when a child requires a higher level of care (Specialized or Adolescent foster care) by listening to the foster caregiver and acknowledging the caregiver's ability to advocate for the child in their care. Every effort is made to stabilize children in their current placements.

During the calendar year, a specific training session is held to review the payment policy, including amounts for various ages and levels of care, special fees that are available, and to review the process for resolving payment questions.

We also acknowledge that there are times when circumstances beyond a foster parent's control occur that impact them financially. When possible, UCAN has stepped in and assisted the foster parent through these financially challenging times to ensure that they felt supported and were able to continue to provide quality support to the families that we support.

**5. THE RIGHT TO BE SUPPLIED A CLEAR, WRITTEN UNDERSTANDING OF A PLACEMENT AGENCY'S PLAN CONCERNING THE PLACEMENT OF A CHILD IN THEIR HOME. INHERENT IN THIS POLICY IS THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SUPPORT ACTIVITIES, WHICH WILL PROMOTE THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO RELATIONSHIPS WITH HIS OR HER OWN FAMILY AND CULTURAL HERITAGE.**

Foster caregivers are invited to attend Child and Family Team Meetings and other staffings for child (ren) in their home to discuss strengths, successes, issues, concerns or problems and develop

a plan to resolve and address presenting problems. Foster caregivers are viewed as an integral part of the planning process. Their active participation and input is valued and incorporated in the development of the service plan. In advance of the Administrative Case Review (ACR) the assigned case manager will discuss with the foster caregivers the permanency goal and the service plan tasks for which they are responsible.

If a child's permanency goal is changed, the case manager will inform the foster caregiver in a phone call or face-to-face conversation within two business days, and in writing within ten days of the change. Foster caregivers are also encouraged to attend both court hearings and ACR's not only to get information, but also to have a voice in the planning process.

The caseworker will notify the foster caregiver if the change to the permanency goal necessitates changes to the visitation and service plan or to the foster care placement. While the needs of the children must be given primary consideration, case managers do make reasonable efforts to accommodate the schedules and interests of caregivers when planning parent-child and sibling visits. The caseworker will document discussion of Administrative Case Reviews in the case file and provide foster caregivers with their portion of the child's service plan.

Caseworkers help to establish, whenever possible, comfortable opportunities for caregivers and biological parents to share information and communicate regarding the needs of the child, and to coordinate regarding visiting arrangements. As both foster caregivers and biological parents gain comfort and trust, the case manager will support and encourage increased communication and cooperation toward the goal of reunification or biological parent support for another permanency option.

Hiring and onboarding of new case managers continues to be a challenge in the FY24 planning cycle; however, the agency's HR department hosts hiring fairs specific to case managers and we have experienced very little turnover throughout this planning year. UCAN has expanded its presence on virtual platforms to source case manager candidates and we built in the increases from DCFS that have been provided to enhance salary packages for child welfare staff.

**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 OF THEIR CHOOSING 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 DECISIONS CONCERNING A LICENSING CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN SPECIFICALLY EXPLAINED AND TIED TO THE LICENSING STANDARD VIOLATED.**

UCAN's policy regarding allegations of licensing violations and the appeals of those investigations follows DCFS Policy and Procedure 383. UCAN policy is as follows:

When a complaint is received that a foster caregiver has allegedly abused or neglected a foster child in their home, the Department of Children and Family Services (Division of Child Protection) is notified immediately through a hotline call. At its discretion, DCP shall conduct a

child abuse or neglect investigation in accordance with Part 302, Services Delivered by the Department. UCAN can also determine whether to launch an independent concurrent licensing investigation. When notified and as appropriate, UCAN can notify the foster parent when a hotline call is being/has been made or if a licensing complaint has been filed.

The UCAN Licensing Unit shall handle all other stand-alone complaints alleging violation of licensing standards and/or rules. After a complaint is received in Licensing, the Licensing Supervisor and Licensing Specialist shall determine whether an immediate home visit is necessary to ensure the safety of the children in care or preserve evidence of the alleged violations. The Licensing Specialist shall document this consultation and license investigation using the DCFS CFS 596 Series License Complaint Report forms.

When an immediate unannounced home visit is not necessary, the Licensing Specialist will conduct an unannounced home visit at the foster parent's home within 2 business days of the date the complaint was received in the Licensing department. In accordance with Foster Parent Law (20 ILCS 520), DCFS Procedures 383 and Rule 340, Foster Parent Code, the foster parent is given 4 hours to find an advocate/friend who can be present during all interviews with the licensee(s) during the investigation. The foster parent can choose to waive the right to have an advocate present. If the respondent chooses to refuse to allow the Licensing Specialist to conduct the licensing investigation, UCAN will then recommend revocation of the foster caregiver's license. The respondent will be notified by mail the following business day of an attempted visit and of UCAN's recommendation to revoke the foster home license. The respondent will be given a 24-hour deadline by which to cooperate with the licensing investigation.

During the announced or unannounced visit, the Licensing Specialist will clearly indicate to the foster caregiver the purpose of the visit. The Licensing Specialist will conduct non-accusatory, impartial fact-finding interviews with all people identified in the complaint as having information about the allegations and other people who may have relevant information and document interviews. The Licensing Specialist will also speak to all caseworkers who have a foster child placed in the home.

The licensing staff with the case management staff will take all necessary actions to protect the children in care, including implementing a Protective Plan, DCFS form CFS 596, and a licensing monitoring schedule is completed if needed.

If at any time during the investigation of a licensing complaint, it is determined that the licensee is in violation of a licensing standard that puts the child in placement in imminent danger, the child will be removed immediately. UCAN staff shall provide the foster caregiver with a "Notice of Decision" immediately, as well as an IDCFS Service Appeal Brochure. The notice of decision will serve as formal notification to a licensed foster caregiver that the agency has made the decision to remove a foster child (ren) from their care.

The investigation will be completed within 30 days of the date received in the Licensing unit. A 30-day extension can be requested by the licensing specialist. If needed, another 30-day extension can be requested, but can only be granted by DCFS. The license complaint

investigation is postponed until the child protection investigation is completed.

If the home is to be placed on hold, licensing supervisor or Associate Vice President will submit a CFS 2011 "Placement Hold Request" by email to the DCFS Associate Deputy Director for Licensing.

The licensee is notified of the findings, Unsubstantiated or Substantiated in a letter. If there are violations found during the investigation, all violations are stated clearly and a protective plan and/or corrective action plan is put into place. The foster parent has 60 days to correct all violations. The Licensing staff will assist foster parents with getting back into compliance with IDCFS Rule 402.

If the finding of a license investigation is substantiated, a supervisory review is offered to foster parents. The purpose of the supervisory review is to give the licensee(s) an opportunity to discuss the situation, to question any violations documented by the licensing specialist, and/or when the licensee disagrees with the violations. When the licensee requests a supervisory review, the licensing supervisor must schedule the informal review within 14 days of the request and hold the review at the earliest date. After a review is conducted, the foster parent is given a written letter containing results of the supervisory review and any changes to the corrective plan within 10 days of the supervisory review.

The Licensing Supervisor informs foster caregivers that if they are unsatisfied with the results or outcome of the supervisory review, they may request an informal review with DCFS.

A Foster Parent has 10 days to submit a written request for informal review with DCFS.

After the licensing investigation is completed, UCAN submits the complaint packet to DCFS A&I License Representative. When the DCFS A&I license representative approves the investigation and findings, the foster parent(s), complainant, all caseworkers who have a foster child placed in the home, and the GAL for each foster child in the foster home are notified of the results of the investigation in writing.

The licensing investigative packet and all relevant documentation is maintained in the foster parent file along with the licensing complaint and corrective action plan with appropriate follow-up dates and next steps if applicable.

## **7. THE RIGHT, AT ANY TIME DURING WHICH A CHILD IS PLACED WITH THE FOSTER PARENT, TO RECEIVE ADDITIONAL OR NECESSARY INFORMATION THAT IS RELEVANT TO THE CARE OF THE CHILD.**

To ensure that foster caregivers receive information relevant to the care of the child, both UCAN staff and caregivers have responsibilities.

UCAN staff have these responsibilities:

- UCAN case managers inform foster caregivers of all information available about child(ren) in their

care during pre-placement and upon initial placement, when additional information is available, and whenever significant changes occur that are relevant to the care of the child. Foster Parents must be invited to each Child and Family Team Meeting and Administrative Case Review in a timely manner to ensure their involvement/attendance or ability to provide feedback if unable to attend.

- UCAN staff receives training related to disclosure of information rules regarding confidentiality of client information and comply with rules regarding sharing confidential information. Caseworkers are also informed of what is mandated to share with foster caregivers.
- It is the responsibility of the caseworker to keep the foster caregiver informed of any changes in the child's case plan. This is monitored by supervisors through file reviews and regular supervision meetings.

Foster caregivers have these responsibilities:

- Foster caregivers participate in all Child and Family Team Meetings.
- Specialized foster caregivers participate in treatment planning meetings to discuss the most recent progress of and concerns about their child (ren).
- Foster caregivers consult with therapists serving children in their care, to ascertain and understand the special needs of the child and appropriate treatment goals.
- During treatment planning meetings and Child and Family Team Meetings, foster caregivers are encouraged to share information relevant to the child (ren) in their home.
- Foster caregivers exercise the right to elevate issues of communication problems with the caseworker to the supervisory level.

## **8. THE RIGHT TO BE GIVEN INFORMATION CONCERNING A CHILD (I) FROM THE DEPARTMENT AS REQUIRED UNDER SUBSECTION (U) OF SECTION 5 OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES ACT AND (II) FROM A CHILD WELFARE AGENCY AS REQUIRED UNDER SUBSECTION (C-5) OF SECTION 7.4 OF THE CHILD CARE ACT OF 1969.**

As part of the on-going training curriculum at UCAN, case managers receive training related to disclosure and confidentiality of client information. Caregivers also receive training regarding the management and protection of confidential information. Each caregiver signs a UCAN confidentiality agreement, in which they commit to compliance with statutes, regulations, and policies from DCFS and from UCAN regarding confidentiality. At the time of placement of a child, UCAN case managers provide caregivers with relevant and appropriate information available to them at the time, including case information and history, health and medical/medication information, educational information and history, placement history, and information regarding the child's behavior. Confidential information regarding the parents or family is not shared except to the extent necessary for the caregivers to be able to support the child.

As additional information becomes available, the case manager continues to provide information to the caregiver. Documentation to be given to the caregiver includes the child's portion of the service plan, medical documentation, copies of the current IEP, and other available written documentation as required by DCFS policy guide. The caseworker is mandated to provide the foster caregiver with the remaining information within 60 days.

During internal file reviews, caseworkers are held accountable to ensure that documentation is shared with the foster caregivers. If the placement of a child becomes an adoptive placement, the caregiver is provided additional information regarding the health history of the biological parents.

**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 THEIR 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 AGENCY CONCERNING THE CHILD; THE RIGHT TO HAVE THEIR INPUT ON THE PLAN OF SERVICES FOR THE CHILD GIVEN FULL CONSIDERATION IN THE SAME MANNER AS INFORMATION PRESENTED BY ANY PROFESSIONAL ON THE TEAM; AND THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE WITH OTHER PROFESSIONALS WHO WORK WITH THE FOSTER CHILD WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE TEAM, INCLUDING THERAPISTS, PHYSICIANS AND TEACHERS.**

UCAN strongly encourages foster caregivers to attend and participate in all meetings regarding the child(ren) in their care, including but not limited to IEP meetings; discharge planning meetings; psychiatric appointments; medical and dental appointments and family therapy appointments; as well as any other services the child(ren) may be involved in. Upon placement of a child into their home, case managers provide the names and phone numbers of all service providers, the UCAN caseworker, and caseworker supervisor. This assists in the development of a working relationship where the foster caregivers are able to communicate their knowledge and observations of the child's behavior, emotional and physical needs.

The foster caregivers are invited by the child's caseworker to attend in-house case staffings when appropriate, and they are always invited to Child and Family Team meetings. If they are unable to attend, caregivers are asked for information that is relevant to the family meeting or staffing, and case managers share appropriate information from the staffing with the caregiver.

Foster caregivers receive written notification of Administrative Case Reviews from IDCFS. Case managers inform foster caregivers about in-house case staffings, court dates, ACRs and all other appointments regarding children in their care, and they are responsible for assisting caregivers to participate in ACRs and other staffings and court appearances if needed.

Case managers schedule appointments for home and/or virtual visits prior to Court hearings and ACRs and incorporate information provided by the caregiver into the service plan or court report. If foster caregivers choose not to attend court or an ACR, it is the case manager's responsibility to inform the foster caregiver of case progress during home visits and through phone contacts. The importance of the foster caregiver's role and input in court, ACR, and any case staffing is an on-going dialogue addressed during pre-service and in-service trainings and outlined in the DCFS Foster Caregiver Manual.

Case managers encourage and welcome foster caregivers to share ideas, raise questions, and offer suggestions regarding the implementation of appropriate services for the child. These suggestions help UCAN staff make appropriate decisions for the child's service plan.

**10. THE RIGHT TO BE PROVIDED, IN A TIMELY AND CONSISTENT MANNER, WITH ANY INFORMATION A CASEWORKER 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 A CHILD'S FAMILY SHALL BE LIMITED TO INFORMATION, WHICH IS ESSENTIAL FOR UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS 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 PARENTS AND THE CHILD'S FAMILY, THE CHILD'S FAMILY MAY CONSENT TO DISCLOSURE OF ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.**

During the placement process/meetings, the foster caregiver is informed of the child (ren)'s permanency goal and current family relationships in addition to all the other information given to them about the child. UCAN staff and the foster caregiver also discuss visitation rights and schedules for both parents and siblings. Details are not given to the foster caregivers regarding the biological parents' progress or the content of their service plan. The case manager provides updated information within 60 days of the date of the placement, as new information becomes available.

During the placement process/meetings, the foster caregiver obtains information about the child (ren) that includes family information. This may include information about in-utero drug and alcohol exposure, family medical history (to ensure that foster caregivers are aware of physical and emotional challenges of the parent, and which may be inherent in the child) and any history of abuse and neglect, physical or sexual abuse. Information disclosed about the parent only contains parts of the shared history of the parent and the child, which are pertinent to, and impacts the care of the child. On-going information received by the case manager or other service providers in regard to the child's physical, emotional, educational or behavioral needs will be shared with foster caregivers during regular home visits and phone contact.

UCAN case managers encourage foster caregivers to meet and talk with biological parents before and after parent/child visits when appropriate. During this time, biological parents may disclose more personal information about themselves, and caregivers receive training to respect the confidential nature of such information. A UCAN caseworker may help facilitate a meeting between foster caregivers and parents. In specific instances, it may be necessary to solicit consent from parents to be able to share additional information with foster caregivers. Issues of permanency and confidentiality are also initially explained and addressed in PRIDE training. Foster caregivers are required to sign a confidentiality statement.

**11. THE RIGHT TO BE GIVEN REASONABLE WRITTEN NOTICE OF ANY CHANGE IN A CHILD'S CASE PLAN OR OF A PLAN TO TERMINATE THE PLACEMENT OF THE CHILD WITH THE FOSTER PARENTS AND OF THE REASONS FOR THE CHANGE OR TERMINATION OF PLACEMENT. SUCH NOTICES SHOULD ONLY BE WAIVED IN CASES OF A COURT ORDER OR WHEN THE CHILD IS DETERMINED TO BE AT IMMINENT RISK OF HARM.**

When all attempts for stabilization and/or corrective action plans have not worked out, it is UCAN's practice to follow IDCFS policy and give a foster caregiver a 14-day written notice, ("Notice of

Decision”) for the removal of a child (ren) from their care. The Notice of Decision cites the IDCFS Rule and Policy that supports the decision to remove the child and informs the foster caregiver how to appeal the UCAN decision to remove the child (ren). If the foster caregiver decides to file an appeal, they have three business days to do so. The number that they need to file the appeal is provided on the “Notice of Decision” form. The appeal is then scheduled with a DCFS clinical staffing team within 5 days. After the staffing takes place, the clinical team has 10 days to make their decision. UCAN adheres to the final decision of the clinical reviewer.

If there is a determination of imminent risk to the child in care, the foster caregiver is notified immediately, and the child (ren) is removed from the foster home. A child may be immediately removed from the caregiver’s home when his/her behaviors pose a serious risk of harm to themselves or others, including risk to the caregiver, or when the Juvenile Court orders that a child be removed immediately.

When the caregiver is requesting the removal of a child from the home, UCAN also requests 14 days advance notice. This allows time for matching and planning for the youth. Prior to the removal of any child (ren) from a foster home, unless there is a determination of imminent risk, a placement meeting is scheduled by the case manager. The placement meeting includes the case manager and supervisor. The caregiver may also be asked to participate in this meeting, to determine whether the disruption of the placement may be avoided. At the request of any of the participants, or at her own discretion, the Associate Vice President of Foster Care may also participate in the meeting. These meetings are considered Critical Decision meetings and are documented as such.

**12. THE RIGHT TO BE NOTIFIED IN A TIMELY AND COMPLETE MANNER OF ALL COURT HEARINGS, INCLUDING THE DATE AND TIME OF THE COURT HEARING; THE NAME OF THE JUDGE OR HEARING OFFICER HEARING THE CASE, THE LOCATION OF THE COURT PROCEEDING AND THE COURT DOCKET NUMBER OF THE CASE AND THE RIGHT TO INTERVENE IN COURT PROCEEDINGS OR SEEK MANDAMUS UNDER THE JUVENILE COURT ACT OF 1987.**

It is UCAN’s practice for case managers to inform foster caregivers of the purpose and date of hearings at Juvenile Court. Case managers notify foster caregivers during regular home visits or through phone contact. Case managers are also responsible for counseling caregivers on their need to virtually attend court or to obtain waivers of appearance when necessary. Case managers provide caregivers with the names and phone numbers of the Guardian ad Litem assigned to the child in their care, and the contact information for any assigned CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocate) volunteer. Supervisors monitor caseworker’s contacts and communication with foster parents as a regular part of supervisory meetings. Completion of documentation of sharing of information with foster parents is included in agency file review processes. Foster caregivers receive in-service training regarding their rights and responsibilities in juvenile court proceedings.

**13. THE RIGHT TO BE CONSIDERED A PLACEMENT OPTION WHEN A FOSTER CHILD WHO WAS FORMERLY PLACED WITH THE FOSTER PARENT IS TO BE RE-ENTERED INTO FOSTER CARE WHEN SUCH PLACEMENT WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH THE BEST INTEREST OF THE CHILD AND OTHER CHILDREN**



## **IN THE HOME.**

When a child re-enters the foster care system, UCAN gives priority to the previous foster placement. Consideration of re-placement includes review of the case file by the child's caseworker and the case management supervisor, as well as a review of the foster caregivers licensing file. The caseworker will use history to determine whether re-placement of the child is in the best interest of the child and other children in the home. The offer to replace the child in the foster home is contingent upon determination within a staffing.

If the child is verbally and cognitively able to contribute input as to their preference in returning to the home, consideration as to why the child left the home previously, the success of the placement in the home, and the current ability of the foster caregiver to meet the child's needs are discussed. UCAN practices an extensive matching and pre-placement process as well as operating a continuum of care that includes step down of children from more restrictive settings to a previous foster caregiver when appropriate. UCAN meets weekly with DCFS and the foster care management team to assess for Intake and plan for stabilization of homes. During this period, different homes are considered for placement of the child. The placement determination is made during pre-placement staffings.

The placement team consists of the assigned case manager, supervisor, licensing specialist, prospective foster caregiver and director or associate vice president. In cases of children being stepped down from a residential setting, the caregiver is included in the transition team and will be supported in the transition. Pre-placement visits and preparation for the transition will occur as outlined in the DCFS residential transition protocol. The foster care case manager is a part of the transition team and will continue to provide case management services following the child's placement back to foster care.

## **14. THE RIGHT TO HAVE TIMELY ACCESS TO THE EXISTING APPEALS PROCESS WITH THE CHILD PLACEMENT AGENCY. THE ASSERTION OF THE ACCESS TO APPEAL WILL BE FREE FROM ACTS OF HARASSMENT AND RETALIATION.**

In addition to the UCAN grievance procedure described below, UCAN also participates fully in the current IDCFS Appeal Process and provides foster caregivers with the IDCFS Service Appeal Process brochure at the time of placement. UCAN offers training regarding the service appeal process at least once a year, during the training session regarding the Foster Parent Implementation Plan.

UCAN encourages foster caregivers to request meetings with Supervisors and the Associate Vice President of Professional Foster Parenting to discuss differences of opinion in the case plan. Supervisors and the Associate Vice President will carefully consider the foster caregivers concerns and will decide based on best practice and interest of the child. UCAN staff and administrators continually assure caregivers that they will not experience any negative ramifications, or retaliation, for bringing grievances or appealing service decisions made within the foster care program.

### **UCAN Grievance Procedure**

If a foster caregiver believes they are being treated unfairly or that one or more of their rights have

been violated, they have the right to address their concern with agency staff and/or file a grievance. If necessary, the foster caregiver may have their concerns heard by the President/Executive Director of the agency. Certain procedures must be followed in the grievance process:

1. Address Issue with the Case Manager and Supervisor

If any issue or concern arises, the foster caregiver should first address concerns with the specific case manager/staff member and secondly, with that person's supervisor. The supervisor and caseworker will attempt to resolve the presenting issue with the foster caregiver and develop a plan to address the issues. If the presenting problem cannot be settled at this level all involved parties will report directly to the Associate Vice President of Professional Foster Parenting.

2. Submit a Written Report

If the foster caregiver is not satisfied with the outcome of their grievance, and feel that the problem has not been resolved, they may submit a written grievance to the Associate Vice President or Director of the Adolescent Foster Care program.

3. Address Issue with the Associate Vice President for Professional Foster Care or the Director of Adolescent Foster Care

If the foster caregiver cannot settle their grievance with the first level of staff, they should arrange to talk to the next level supervisor, which is an Associate Vice President or Director. This discussion can take place over the phone or in person. The team may wish to call a staffing or meeting to resolve the situation with the foster parent, staff and other involved parties. During the staffing, the foster caregiver has the right to have an individual of their choosing present for support.

4. Senior Vice President/Executive Vice President or President/Executive Director

If the foster caregiver has followed these steps and still believes that the grievance has not been settled, they may speak with the Senior Vice President, or President/Executive Director. The decision of the Senior Vice President/President/Executive Director is final. However, copies of the grievance, including the final decision, will be sent to Quality Improvement. A copy will also be kept on file with the foster caregiver's licensing information.

The UCAN Foster Caregiver Grievance Policy in no way affects the foster caregiver's ability to file an appeal through the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. In order to ensure that the foster caregiver's rights to a service appeal are upheld, UCAN will provide the foster caregivers with all necessary information on the policy and procedure regarding filing a service appeal.

**15. THE RIGHT TO BE INFORMED OF THE FOSTER CAREGIVER HOTLINE ESTABLISHED UNDER THE ACT AND ALL THE RIGHTS ACCORDED TO FOSTER PARENT CONCERNING REPORTS OF MISCONDUCT BY DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES, SERVICE PROVIDERS OR CONTRACTORS, CONFIDENTIAL HANDLING OF THOSE REPORTS AND INVESTIGATION BY THE INSPECTOR GENERAL.**

During PRIDE training, foster caregivers are given a copy and provided training on their Rights and

Responsibilities and the Foster Caregiver Hotline. A copy of the Foster Caregivers Rights and Responsibilities is kept on file at the agency and can be accessed at any time. UCAN's Implementation Plan, in English, is available on our agency's website for anyone to view at any time. In addition, brochures regarding the service appeal process, IDCFS Office of the Inspector General and IDCFS Advocacy Office are mailed to foster caregivers and are readily available at the agency. On-going training is provided to assist foster caregivers with utilizing IDCFS services. As part of the placement packet, the Foster Caregiver Hotline number, the number for the Child Abuse Hotline and the rights of the foster caregiver are included.

Other numbers that are provided include:

- ☐ Caseworker
- ☐ Supervisor
- ☐ UCAN main number
- ☐ UCAN emergency line
- ☐ IDCFS Advocacy Office
- ☐ IDCFS Office of the Inspector General (OIG)
- ☐ Medical Card Hotline
- ☐ Daycare Referrals
- ☐ IDCFS Payment Unit
- ☐ Child Abuse Hotline
- ☐ Foster Caregiver Hotline
- ☐ CARES Line
- ☐ YouthCare Liaisons

#### **Foster Caregiver Responsibilities:**

#### **16) (1) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO OPENLY COMMUNICATE AND SHARE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CHILD WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE CHILD WELFARE TEAM.**

During PRIDE training, the licensing process, and ongoing, foster caregivers are affirmed that they are an integral part of the child welfare team. They are encouraged to be open with caseworkers and other appropriate service providers about what is happening with the child in their home. Foster caregivers are informed about critical issues that require immediate notification of the agency and may require a call to UCAN's 24-hour emergency line.

UCAN provides opportunities for foster caregivers to share on-going information through frequent and regular home visits by the child's caseworker. Foster caregivers receive training to be able to effectively advocate for their children in court hearings and school staffings, foster caregivers are strongly encouraged to participate in school staffings, quarterly Child and Family Team meetings, discharge planning meetings, Administrative Case Reviews, and Court Hearings. Foster caregivers in the Specialized care or Adolescent Foster Care programs are expected to participate fully as members of the treatment team in quarterly treatment planning meetings.

#### **17(2) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RESPECT THE CONFIDENTIALITY OF INFORMATION CONCERNING FOSTER**

## **CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES AND ACT APPROPRIATELY WITHIN APPLICABLE CONFIDENTIALITY LAWS AND REGULATIONS.**

Foster Caregivers receive the Foster Caregiver Manual at Pre-Service training; outlined in this manual is the Department's policy on confidentiality. Additionally, the issue of confidentiality is reiterated annually during trainings, home visits and other structured events like Administrative Case Reviews and Court. Foster caregivers sign a UCAN confidentiality agreement at the time of licensing, indicating their acceptance and agreement to abide by rules and requirements regarding confidentiality.

### **18(3) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ADVOCATE FOR CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE.**

UCAN strongly encourages foster caregivers to advocate for children who are in foster care through involvement with juvenile court proceedings, participation in Administrative Case Reviews, Child and Family Team meetings, discharge planning meetings, treatment planning meetings, Clinical Intervention for Placement Preservation (CIPP) meetings, and IEP meetings. They know the children's day to day needs best.

All licensed foster caregivers are required to attend the Educational Advocacy Training, which is part of UCAN's in-service training curriculum. This enables the foster caregiver to participate more fully in their child's educational plan. Foster parents are encouraged and expected to participate in school conferences, IEP staffings, and other meetings regarding the educational services being provided for children in their care.

UCAN encourages both licensed caregivers and unlicensed relative foster parents and those seeking to become licensed to participate in all available trainings. Foster caregivers are provided training on court, service appeal procedure, and Administrative Case Reviews during PRIDE. On-going trainings covering these topics are also offered throughout the year and service appeal brochures are readily available. Caregivers have access to Educational Coaches via UCAN if they are in need of additional assistance navigating the education system. Additionally, case managers are trained in procedures related to accessing DCFS educational attorneys for difficult cases.

### **19(4) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO TREAT CHILDREN IN THEIR CARE AND THEIR FAMILIES WITH DIGNITY, RESPECT AND CONSIDERATION.**

The responsibility to treat children and families with dignity, respect and consideration is addressed in PRIDE training and through the licensing process. UCAN also has an in-service training curriculum, which more fully addresses issues related to the natural family. These topics include:

- ☐ Impact of Placement on the Foster Family
- ☐ Cultural Diversity and Self Awareness
- ☐ Understanding the Birth Family
- ☐ Stress Management
- ☐ Grief, Loss, and Attachment

UCAN provides in its in-service training, an abbreviated overview of the UCAN clinical approach, a 4-part perspective that addresses the issues of child development, separation and loss, childhood trauma, and social systems as they impact the lives of children and families. Caregivers are also encouraged to participate in agency-wide in-service training that explores each of these topics more fully. Case managers and therapists help caregivers to understand the challenging behaviors their children may exhibit as the result of childhood experiences and complex trauma. Caregivers are assisted in implementing behavioral strategies to more effectively address and positively shape those behaviors.

UCAN is also committed to the goal of cultural diversity and inclusion. Training sessions are provided to assist caregivers in gaining greater awareness of and appreciation of the richness of cultural diversity, and to enhance their ability to effectively serve children and families that identify with cultures, racial identities, religious beliefs, or sexual orientations different from their own. When a child with a different cultural background or heritage is placed in the home, the case manager works closely and openly to assist the caregiver in showing support, respect and sensitivity to the child's cultural background.

Through in-service training and continual support from licensing and case management staff, foster caregivers are also encouraged to recognize the role and importance of families of origin in the lives of children in their care. Caregivers are helped to become gradually more comfortable in efforts to more actively support reunification and the maintenance of strong family ties between the child in care and the biological family.

Case managers are required to monitor relationships between children in foster care and their birth families and support their cultural heritage during home visits. Caseworkers are also required to place comments in the case notes verifying that foster children, their birth families and their cultures of origin are being treated, by foster caregivers and UCAN staff, with dignity and respect. Supervisors are required to address these issues with caseworkers during regular staff supervision. Licensing staff also ensure foster caregivers are compliant with licensing standards during licensing monitoring visits. In addition, annual client satisfaction surveys are completed by foster families regarding the above issues. Biological parents also complete client satisfaction surveys.

**20(5) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN INDIVIDUAL AND FAMILIAL STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS WHEN DECIDING WHETHER TO ACCEPT A CHILD INTO CARE, RECOGNIZE THEIR OWN SUPPORT NEEDS AND UTILIZE APPROPRIATE SUPPORTS IN PROVIDING CARE FOR FOSTER CHILDREN.**

Referrals from the DCFS Case Assignment and Placement Unit for placement of children new to DCFS care come with identified homes. In selection of these homes, priority is given to the location of the home, with preference given to homes closest to the home of the parent. Stated preferences for gender and age of the child and capability of the caregiver to support reunification are considered as well. UCAN is certified through All Children All Families and part of this process is providing LGBTQIA+ specific training and support to caregivers and staff.

Licensing staff continually assess foster home strengths to assure that the foster home is an

appropriate match for the child (ren). For children stepping down from Residential care, foster caregivers, older children/youth and staff discuss the child (ren)'s needs and the foster caregivers' ability to meet those needs prior to and during residential step-down meetings. Older youth are also interviewed regarding their preferences including family composition and geography. Older youth who are able, make their own decision regarding whether to accept placement with a prospective caregiver. During these meetings, foster caregivers are encouraged to openly discuss their concerns about accepting the child into their home, so that the best decision can be made for them and the child. Additional training is recommended and implemented if it is determined that more skills are needed prior to placement.

UCAN provides additional supports to foster caregivers or youth at risk including support groups, nursing, psychiatric care coordination, respite care and psychotherapy. The case manager is required to assess the strengths and development areas of foster caregivers during each home visit and discuss any improvement areas with the foster parent.

The case manager must notify the licensing worker of any areas in need of improvement. UCAN staff will then assess the need for additional training or support and ensure that the foster caregiver receives the training and support necessary to provide care for the children in their home.

UCAN was awarded the Nurturing Parenting Program for Caregivers in the planning year 2020 and is currently conducting this curriculum virtually. This enhancement allows UCAN to provide another level of support to foster parents and children in their care. So far, UCAN has successfully graduated over 100 participants.

During the licensing process, foster caregivers are encouraged to evaluate their own strengths and areas in which they need improvement and are given the opportunity to select trainings to enhance their skills. The licensing specialist identifies and recommends in-service training which would be beneficial to the foster caregiver in providing care of the child (ren) in their home.

#### **21(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.**

UCAN maintains an active foster parent support group. The purpose of the foster caregiver support group is to provide an opportunity to share concerns regarding program operations and come up with solutions. Additionally, the support group provides encouragement for individual caregivers to voice their own concerns and identify their needs.

In addition to serving as a vehicle for communication between caregivers and the UCAN foster care program, the foster caregiver support group may carry out additional functions, such as conducting fund raising activities, organizing foster caregiver events and acting as a support and information network to the general foster caregiver population. UCAN encourages foster caregivers to serve as mentors for caregivers with less experience and with new placements.

At the foster parents' request, we created a foster parent directory to be shared with all UCAN foster

parents. UCAN created a consent form process for those foster parents who wanted their information to be shared. The directory is now available for use and distribution and updates to the directory are completed at least twice per year.

UCAN provides extensive and frequent in-service training. Foster caregivers are encouraged to participate in these trainings to meet their training requirements, but also to meet and network with other foster caregivers for support and information sharing. Foster caregivers receive regular e-mailed notices of upcoming trainings from the Training Coordinator in addition to being informed of upcoming trainings during the monthly foster caregiver meetings.

**22(7) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO ASSESS THEIR ONGOING INDIVIDUAL TRAINING NEEDS AND TAKE ACTION TO MEET THOSE NEEDS.**

A training needs assessment is conducted and given to all agency foster caregivers during licensing monitoring visits. Based on these results, a training plan is developed and implemented, and training suggestions are noted for future trainings. Staff and selected experienced caregivers who are interested in conducting pre-service and in-service trainings are provided with a training of trainer's curricula for core training sessions. Having both a staff member and foster caregiver train together affords an opportunity to enhance each other's skills, attitudes and values for learning.

Foster caregivers have access to UCAN's Workplace Learning Department, and they can request trainings via email or by phone. Foster caregivers are also encouraged to attend external trainings, bring information back to the training department as well as present a summary of their experience to the class or the support group to expand their learning spectrum and be motivated to explore external learning opportunities. UCAN licensing staff ensures that foster caregivers are not only aware of how many hours they have and how to obtain additional hours both internally and externally, but they also know exactly what mandatory classes they have taken and what mandatory classes they still need.

**23(8) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DEVELOP AND ASSIST IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF STRATEGIES TO PREVENT PLACEMENT DISRUPTIONS, RECOGNIZING THE TRAUMATIC IMPACT OF PLACEMENT DISRUPTIONS ON A FOSTER CHILD AND ALL MEMBERS OF THE FOSTER FAMILY AND TO PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT FOR THE FOSTER CHILDREN AND MEMBERS OF THE FOSTER FAMILY SHOULD PREVENTIVE STRATEGIES FAIL AND PLACEMENT DISRUPTION OCCUR.**

Through on-going, in-service training, a curriculum has been developed to educate the foster parent(s) in the identification of medical, educational and behavioral issues of children. These behaviors may contribute to placement disruptions if they are unaddressed/not treated. UCAN encourages foster caregivers to enable the children in care to participate in one of several UCAN positive youth development programs and to utilize local community programs which provide resources and services that may assist in preventing placement disruption.

UCAN added a "Shared Living Agreement" process that is used for older youth in care regarding their contributions to the household, agreements around technology, activities, conflict resolution, privacy, daily chores etc. These agreements are discussed in pre-placement interviews and meetings so that

expectations are known up front. We are hopeful that by involving both youth and caregivers in creating these agreements, there will be less placement disruptions and tense situations in the home environment due to lack of understanding and communication. This process identifies the areas that the youth needs or wants help in like cooking, proper way to do laundry, etc. so that they are better prepared for independence, which is something that the caregivers noted an interest in helping them prepare for.

UCAN provides support to foster caregivers through frequent home visits where they are encouraged to discuss their successes, strengths, problems and concerns with the child's caseworker. The licensing specialist is also receptive to concerns reported by the foster caregivers regarding the placement and reports concerns to the Licensing Supervisor, Case Management Supervisor, and the Associate Vice President of the Program. If the conditions exist which create the possibility of placement disruption, the case manager must convene a staffing to include, at a minimum, the licensing specialist, caseworker, licensing and case work supervisors and the foster parent. This staffing will determine what services are needed to stabilize the placement. Depending on the child and family, the stabilization plan could include respite services, parenting coaching, counseling, psychological or psychiatric evaluation and treatment, contracting with the child, putting in place a behavior management plan, additional training for the foster caregiver, etc. Continued training workshops are offered which serves as a strategy to preserve placement.

Foster parents receive information in training and through contacts with the case manager regarding resources and services that are available to stabilize placements that are in jeopardy of disruption. If a foster caregiver feels they can no longer provide care for a child, and all placement stabilization and crisis intervention services have not resolved the problems, UCAN requires a 14-day written notice to find a new home but encourages foster caregivers to maintain the placement until another home is found. Unless there are safety issues involved, continued relationships are encouraged to promote life-long connections versus relational disconnection between a foster caregiver and a foster child.

UCAN staff recognizes that disruptions may occur regardless of the efforts of the foster parent to stabilize the placement. UCAN assures caregivers that a disruption of a placement will not necessarily prevent the agency from utilizing the home again, especially if the caregiver has clearly worked diligently to avoid the disruption and helped to the fullest extent possible in minimizing the trauma for the child experiencing the disruption. Licensing and case management staff works closely with foster parents following a disrupted placement to assess the reasons for the disruption and to address training or support needs that may enable the foster parent to maintain subsequent placements without disruption. Foster Parents recommended, when appropriate, that a transitional meeting between the original foster home and receiving foster home, occur to share thoughts and strategies on how to best support the child (ren) for their future success.

Foster Caregiver Mentoring/Networking programs are used as a vehicle to provide stabilization support. Foster caregiver meetings can provide direction on how to access appropriate support services, as well as a forum to discuss preventative strategies and stabilization services.

Foster caregivers are also provided the Foster Caregiver Manual in PRIDE training. Outlined in the manual is DCFS's policy on placement disruption.



**24(9) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW THE IMPACT FOSTER PARENTING HAS ON INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS AND ENDEAVOR TO MINIMIZE, AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE, ANY STRESS THAT RESULTS FROM FOSTER PARENTING.**

UCAN understands the challenges of foster parenting and the effects it may have on their families. These challenges are addressed during PRIDE training and in the licensing process. During the licensing process, licensing specialists discuss with foster caregivers the changes that foster parenting will have on their family. Licensing specialists help foster caregiver applicants to assess their ability to become foster caregivers and measure the impact it will have on the lives of them and their family. The Licensing Specialist also makes a recommendation, which is documented in the licensing file, regarding the level of care the foster caregiver appears to be equipped to provide. This recommendation is based on the level of commitment displayed by the prospective foster caregiver throughout the assessment process. Additional on-going training is offered to address the on-going needs of foster caregivers.

UCAN also helps to coordinate supportive services to foster caregivers such as respite care, in-home behavior management and counseling. UCAN created a respite guide to help foster caregivers cultivate respite and back-up caregivers. The statewide staffing shortage of paraprofessional roles has made it difficult to find community respite programs, but the agency provides payment to those respite providers who are identified by the foster caregivers. UCAN utilizes its clinical and counseling services department to provide services with individual or family therapy to assist families in time of crisis. UCAN's clinical department hosts weekly virtual platform support groups for foster caregivers to provide a platform to talk through challenges related to the 24/7 care of children in their home.

During the FY24 planning cycle, emphasis was placed on strengthening the identified foster caregivers' back-up caregiver role. Due to unforeseen circumstances and/or children who require psychiatric or other hospitalization, the back-up caregiver's role becomes crucial so that foster caregivers can balance the needs of the youth in the hospital and their household. The wait time for admission for psychiatric care varies and sometimes youth remain in the emergency room of hospitals for an extended period of time. Foster caregivers must then rely on their back-up caregiver and the agency also assists, if possible, in covering the supervision in the emergency room. This is an advocacy area for DCFS in terms of crisis management support for youth awaiting psychiatric care.

Respite is also available with supervisory approval for extended periods (vacation, family illness) by a provider of the foster caregiver's choosing who clears a background check and receives training and can demonstrate competency if needed for specialized needs. This planning year, the foster parents requested training to breakdown how respite is utilized and the eligibility requirements. This respite is paid through the foster caregiver board payment. Each family is required to discuss with the child (ren)'s caseworker the development of a respite plan. The plan is dependent on the level of care the child requires (children with special needs must have a trained respite provider in those identified needs), and the number of children in the home.

Foster caregivers can initiate a "voluntary hold" which means that no children will be placed in their home while this hold is active. It is at the foster caregiver's discretion to determine when this hold will

be lifted. UCAN recognizes that from time-to-time foster caregivers may need to take a break from foster parenting responsibilities, and ensure foster caregivers are aware that a voluntary hold will not have an adverse impact on their eligibility to receive children.

UCAN provides a training course entitled “Compassion Fatigue” to offer support to foster caregivers. The agency also, on a case-by-case basis, involves the caregiver in the foster child’s therapeutic sessions to support the relationship between foster caregiver and child. When appropriate, case managers and licensing staff may encourage foster caregivers to utilize outside resources for counseling or other services to meet the needs of the caregiver and his/her family.

**25(10) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW THE REWARDS AND BENEFITS TO CHILDREN, PARENTS, FAMILIES AND SOCIETY THAT COME FROM FOSTER PARENTING AND PROMOTE THE FOSTER PARENTING EXPERIENCE IN A POSITIVE WAY.**

UCAN foster caregivers are recognized annually in a Foster Caregiver recognition dinner hosted by the agency. This event is designed to convey appreciation for the year-round efforts and selfless dedication of UCAN foster caregivers. Testimonies from youth in care are often shared during these recognition events, reminders of the positive impact caregivers have on the lives of children.

Foster caregivers are encouraged to be involved in recruiting efforts and are provided a financial incentive for successfully recruiting a new foster caregiver. In previous years, caregivers have been called to provide testimony before the Illinois legislature, or in legislative hearings regarding the challenges and rewards of foster caregiving. UCAN’s Development staff guide and support foster caregivers regarding testifying for legislative hearings and presenting foster parenting in conversations with the media.

**26(11) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW THE ROLE, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF FOSTER PARENTS, OTHER PROFESSIONALS IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM, THE CHILD AND THE CHILD’S OWN FAMILY.**

UCAN recognizes the importance of informing foster caregivers of their rights and responsibilities as well as those of other members of the professional foster care team. This information is discussed during PRIDE and in the licensing process. Foster caregivers receive the IDCFS copy of foster caregiver rights in their IDCFS Handbook during PRIDE. UCAN also has an in-service training curriculum, which more fully explains this information to foster parents (the in-service training is available to traditional and home of relative foster parents). The PRIDE training model is implemented with a staff and foster caregiver as co-trainers facilitating the curriculum. Open forums are scheduled monthly to discuss the on- going roles of UCAN professional staff. To ensure that all foster caregivers are aware of professional staff roles, the information presented in these forums is made available by letter to all foster parents. Foster caregivers are strongly encouraged to attend at least two of the open forums each year. The Senior Vice President of Professional Foster Parenting is present during open forums twice a year and sometimes more if needed.

During monthly foster caregiver meetings, UCAN staff are present to address any concerns/issues.

The management team serves as the liaison between foster caregivers and the agency to ensure their needs are being met. Representatives from IDCFS are also invited to foster caregiver meetings and provide trainings on relevant topics. UCAN's management staff is responsive to foster caregivers via their presence at foster caregiver meetings, welcoming phone calls, and their availability at staffings requested by the foster parent. Foster caregivers are also included in behavior planning and treatment planning meetings and service plan development.

The IDCFS approved Implementation Plan for the Illinois Foster Caregiver Bill of Rights & Responsibilities is reviewed with foster caregivers in order to solicit feedback and suggestions from them. Two meetings with foster caregivers were held in July and September, prior to the submission of the revised plan. Foster caregiver recommendations are taken seriously and incorporated with revisions of the plan for the next year.

**27 (12) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW AND, AS NECESSARY, TO FULFILL THEIR RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVE AS MANDATED REPORTERS OF SUSPECTED CHILD ABUSE/NEGLECT UNDER THE ABUSED AND NEGLECTED CHILD REPORTING ACT AND TO KNOW THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY'S POLICY REGARDING ALLEGATIONS THAT FOSTER PARENTS HAVE COMMITTED CHILD ABUSE OR NEGLECT AND APPLICABLE ADMINISTRATIVE RULE AND PROCEDURE GOVERNING INVESTIGATIONS OF SUCH ALLEGATIONS.**

During PRIDE training and the licensing process, foster parents learn of their role as a mandated reporter. Additional in-service training on the topics of mandated reporter requirements and caregiver rights and responsibilities are available annually. During the licensing process or upon placement with a relative caregiver, the foster caregiver signs an acknowledgment of their "Mandated Reporter Status". The foster caregiver is also given a copy of IDCFS Rule 402, which outlines this requirement.

Foster caregivers are made aware that they may be subject to an investigation by the Division of Child Protection or the Licensing Department at UCAN if a call is made to the Child Abuse Hotline involving them as caregivers. This process is explained during PRIDE class and the licensing specialist also explains this process during the family home study assessment.

Additional in-service training on this topic has been developed to more fully explain what the law requires of both foster caregivers and UCAN staff regarding reporting possible child abuse or neglect. This training instructs foster caregivers in recognizing what signs and behaviors may indicate that a child has been a victim of abuse, what signs and behaviors must be reported, and to whom they should be reported. This training also instructs foster caregivers that their child advocacy and mandated reporter responsibilities require them to escalate reports to supervisory levels within UCAN or to agencies outside UCAN (such as IDCFS or law enforcement agencies) if they believe it necessary to ensure allegations are adequately investigated and children in their care are protected.

Sexual abuse training and training regarding sexually reactive and problematic behavior in children is offered to educate foster caregivers about the behaviors they may observe and their reporting responsibilities under the Child Neglect and Abuse Reporting Act. Foster caregivers are also informed

during the home study process that they must report any concerning behaviors of a foster child to their case manager.

IDCFS also added an on-line reporting system to increase ease and access of reporting abuse and neglect.

**28 (13) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW AND RECEIVE TRAINING REGARDING THE PURPOSE OF ADMINISTRATIVE CASE REVIEWS, CLIENT SERVICE PLANS AND COURT PROCESSES, AS WELL AS ANY FILING OR TIME REQUIREMENTS ASSOCIATED WITH THESE PROCEEDINGS, AND ACTIVELY PARTICIPATE IN THEIR DESIGNATED ROLE IN THESE PROCEEDINGS.**

Foster caregivers receive a comprehensive orientation to the child welfare system during PRIDE pre-service training and during the home study and licensing process. During the home study assessment process, the licensing representative encourages the foster caregiver to become involved in Administrative Case Reviews and the court processes to share valuable input about a child in their care. Case managers provide on-going information on the children placed in the foster home and their specific court and service plan involvement.

**29(14) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY'S APPEAL PROCEDURE FOR FOSTER PARENTS AND THE RIGHTS OF FOSTER PARENTS UNDER THE PROCEDURE.**

Foster caregivers are given the Foster Caregiver Manual in PRIDE pre-service training. Outlined in the manual is the UCAN grievance policy. The grievance policy is distributed to all foster caregivers by their case workers. The UCAN grievance procedure is reviewed annually along with foster parent rights and responsibilities during ongoing training. Foster parents were reoriented to UCAN's grievance policy in January of 2023.

**30(15) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING ACCURATE AND RELEVANT RECORDS REGARDING THE CHILD'S HISTORY AND PROGRESS AND IS AWARE OF AND FOLLOWS THE PROCEDURE AND REGULATIONS OF THE CHILD WELFARE AGENCY WITH WHICH THEY ARE LICENSED OR AFFILIATED.**

The topics of health passports and proper record keeping are discussed during PRIDE training and the licensing process. Upon placement, foster caregivers receive a placement packet, which consists of a folder containing pertinent information on the child and his/her special needs. The folder is utilized to maintain records for each child. During subsequent visits in the first month, the case manager discusses with foster caregivers the importance of documentation of medical issues, any issues with filling medications, and informs foster caregivers what specifically should be documented for children with identified medical needs, i.e., immunizations, medication logs, asthma plans, etc.

The licensing department conducts licensing compliance visits during which they audit all child specific documentation/records. The licensing representative must certify that all records are complete and correct or describe any deficiencies and establish a plan to correct them. The importance of

maintaining complete records is stated during each monthly foster caregiver meeting. Foster caregivers are held responsible for ensuring that all child specific records are maintained. The importance of maintaining records is also stated in Rule 402 Licensing Standards for Foster Family Homes. Foster caregivers receive a copy of Rule 402 prior to signing the IDCFS foster care application and are informed that they can obtain updated copies of that policy through the licensing worker or online.

**31(16) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO SHARE INFORMATION THROUGH THE CHILD WELFARE TEAM REGARDING THE CHILD'S ADJUSTMENT IN THEIR HOME WITH THE SUBSEQUENT CAREGIVER, WHETHER THE CHILD'S PARENT OR ANOTHER SUBSTITUTE CAREGIVER.**

UCAN staff members encourage foster caregivers to provide feedback on the child's adjustment during home visits and regular case staffings. Foster caregivers are involved also in the matching and pre-placement procedure into another home if appropriate.

The foster caregiver is encouraged to share information about the child specific needs/behaviors with the subsequent foster caregiver or with the child's parent before the placement or reunification occurs. UCAN informs foster caregivers during PRIDE training that they have the right to receive additional information about the foster child's history as it becomes available.

**32(17) THE RESPONSIBILITY TO PROVIDE CARE AND SERVICES WHICH ARE RESPECTFUL OF AND RESPONSIVE TO THE CHILD'S CULTURAL NEEDS AND ARE SUPPORTIVE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CHILD AND HIS/HER OWN FAMILY. RECOGNIZE THE INCREASED IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING A CHILD'S CULTURAL IDENTITY WHEN RACE OR CULTURE OF THE FOSTER FAMILY DIFFERS FROM THAT OF THE FOSTER CHILD AND TAKE ACTION TO ADDRESS THESE ISSUES.**

The issue of providing care to children that is sensitive to the cultural needs of that child begins in pre-service training. The PRIDE curriculum includes competencies that speak to the importance of being respectful of the child and family's culture. Foster caregivers learn the distinctions between culture, ethnicity and race and the role each of these concepts plays in the life of a child.

During the matching and pre-placement process, natural family, cultural and language issues are discussed with the foster caregivers. At that time, it is determined if the foster caregivers feel comfortable with the child and capable of meeting their needs and embracing the child's racial, religious, cultural identity and sexual orientation. UCAN provides a wealth of training opportunities addressing a range of issues of diversity, equity and inclusion.

UCAN offers mandatory in-service foster caregiver training on Cultural Diversity and Inclusion, which is available to foster caregivers to increase their knowledge and comfort level. Cultural Diversity and Inclusion issues are also discussed during PRIDE training and during the initial licensing process. The caregiver's capacity and willingness to competently care for children from diverse backgrounds is fully explored during the home study.

UCAN's training curriculum includes courses in Self-Awareness, Cultural Issues, and Understanding the Birth Family. Specific training is provided regarding hair and skin care for caregivers who are cross-

culturally serving children. Outside resources are available such as training on Interracial Adoptions. Foster parents also sign an agreement to respect the religious beliefs of the child in the home.

When desired by foster parents, UCAN encourages mentor relationships between new foster caregivers and foster caregivers of the child's ethnic/cultural heritage or who have fostered children of the child's ethnic/cultural heritage. These mentoring relationships enable foster caregivers to gain insight into cultures and traditions different than their own and how this impacts a child's adjustment and comfort in their home.