

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Normalcy should extend to youth in care in all systems as appropriate and considering parental preference. The Committee recommends the statutory requirement for Normalcy Plans and Reports pursuant to §43-4706 be amended to include facilities which provide treatment services as a component of the placement, including treatment group homes and psychiatric residential treatment facilities.
2. Stakeholders should make every effort to make decisions that enhance and maximize normalcy for children placed out of home.
3. DHHS should utilize an evidence-informed, strength-based, youth-led intervention for case management that includes older youth best practices. This intervention should incorporate a tested evaluation tool.
4. DHHS should address barriers to foster youth attaining a Driver's License.
5. DHHS should designate Transition Youth Advocates in each service area, modeled after the ICWA Advocate structure.
6. Children, youth and foster caregivers should be given the opportunity to be present at every court hearing. When this is not possible, court information forms should be available in every jurisdiction and provide to youth and their foster caregivers.
7. The court forms must have a party responsible for ensuring youth and foster caregivers receive forms and have a user-friendly way to return those forms to the Court prior to the hearing (§43-1314).

Strengthening Families Act Committee

**Misty Flowers, Payne Ackerman, & Ron
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The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act (NSFA) Committee was created as the Normalcy Task Force under the umbrella of the Nebraska Children's Commission (Commission) to monitor and make recommendations related to Nebraska's implementation of the Federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183 (referred to in this document as the "Strengthening Families Act" or "SFA"). Nebraska's Strengthening Families Act, [§43-4702](#), implements the federal SFA and initial stakeholder recommendations. Both the federal and state SFA represent a culture shift to allow children and youth to grow and thrive in less restrictive, more family-like environments and participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. Additional legislation related to best practices in implementation was passed as [LB225 \(2017\)](#).

The Committee has met quarterly for the last year to accomplish its statutory mandates. The Committee is responsible for fulfilling the Commission's requirement to review normalcy plans, consider and review trafficking efforts in Nebraska, and make recommendations related to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) planning.

Summary of Activities 2022-2023

During FY2022, the SFA Committee completed a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis to determine what areas within SFA. The Committee identified there are opportunities to improve engagement with members, senators, youth, and community members to further progress on recommendations each year.

The Normalcy Subcommittee is charged with reviewing Normalcy Plans and Reports submitted by child-caring agencies (pursuant to [§43-4706](#)) and is working with DHHS to accomplish this task. The subcommittee continues to provide feedback to agencies to strengthen normalcy opportunities for youth.

The APPLA Subcommittee has begun uncovering the barriers behind foster teens being unable to obtain their driver's licenses. The first step this group has taken is to survey foster parents to provide some of the reasons they have encountered issues. Future work includes finding solutions to the barriers and providing those recommendations to the legislature and DHHS.

The Trafficking Subcommittee has not been active this year but did meet once to discuss work being done in Nebraska. Nebraska Children and Families Foundation, Child Advocacy Centers, Nebraska State Patrol, and DHHS are all actively engaging in work to prevent and identify youth trafficking. The group plans to meet biannually to review current efforts and will meet more frequently should the need for active review occur.

The Strengthening Families Act Committee 2022--2023 Annual Report is available at:

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