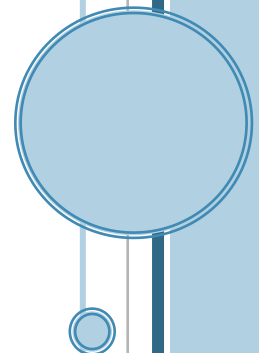


NEBRASKA
STRENGTHENING
FAMILIES ACT
COMMITTEE 2018
ANNUAL REPORT

Submitted Pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4218(4)

July 2018



Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee
2018 Annual Report

Statutory charge: The Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee shall monitor and make recommendations regarding the implementation in Nebraska of the federal [Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act, Public Law 113-183](#), as such act existed on January 1, 2017, and the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act, [Neb. Rev. Stat. [§43-4701](#) to [§43-4715](#)].

Priorities

- Priority 1: Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Act
- Priority 2: Promote normalcy as the foundation to: prevent trafficking; address disparate impacts on minorities; and support the successful transition to adulthood
- Priority 3: Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies

For more information or to get involved, please visit childrens.nebraska.gov, or email necc.contact@nebraska.gov.

Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee

2018 Annual Report

Nebraska thrives when its families, youth, and children have healthy and productive lives and reach their full potential. Youth in child welfare out-of-home placements face extra challenges in accessing these protective factors due to past abuse and neglect, the trauma of removal from their homes, and frequent moves due to placement changes. All children who are state wards in out-of-home placements have incredible potential, and the Strengthening Families Act empowers families, foster parents, caseworkers, guardians ad litem (GALs) and other stakeholders to support children’s well-being.

STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT COMMITTEE BACKGROUND

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, [LB746 \(2016\)](#), 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 in 2018 and 2017 to accomplish its statutory mandates. The Committee created three subcommittees to fulfill the detailed work of prioritized initiatives. These include: 1) the Trafficking Subcommittee, 2) the Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA) Subcommittee and 3) the Court Implementation Subcommittee.

The Committee periodically creates and archives subcommittees depending on their fulfillment of assignments from the Committee. Archived NSFA Subcommittees include: Community & Family Voice, Grievance Procedure, Normalcy and Training. These groups may be called upon, reviewed and/or revived depending on need of the Committee and emerging issues.

105TH LEGISLATURE, 2ND SESSION HIGHLIGHTS

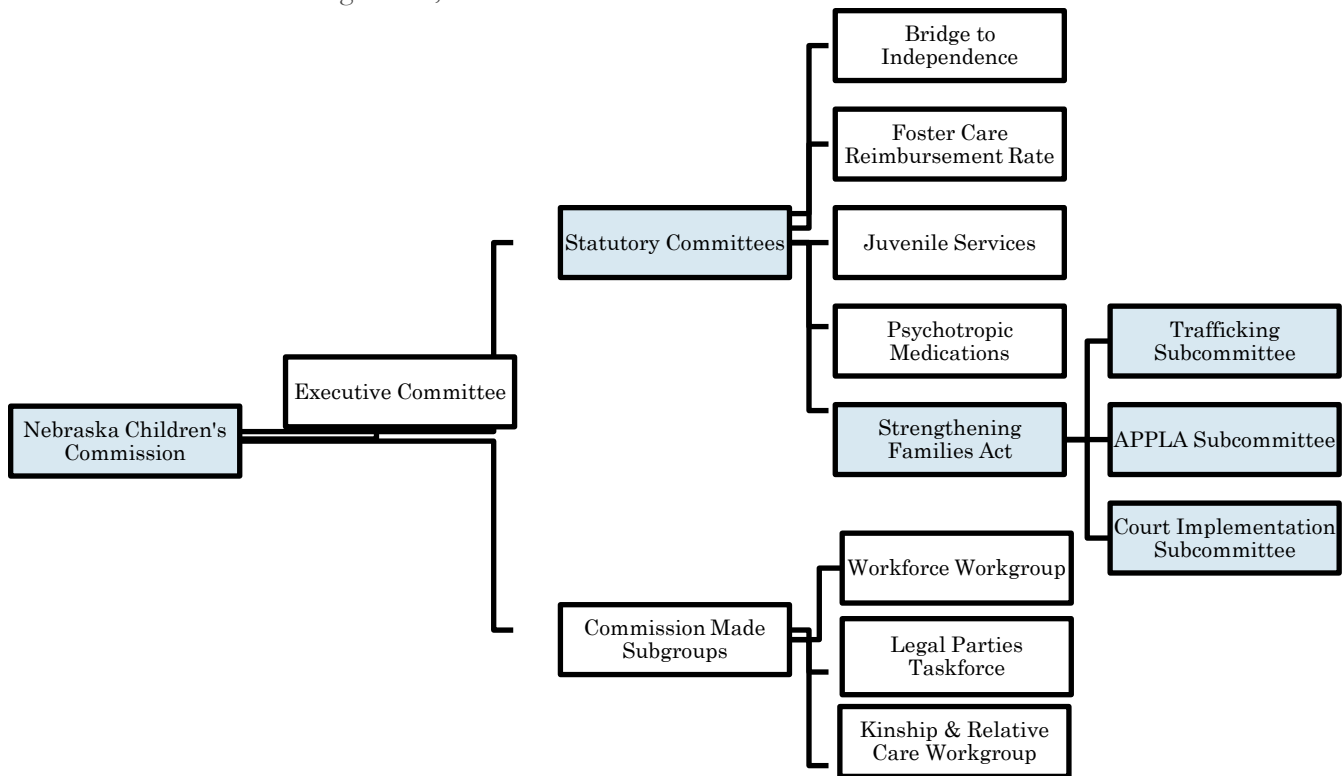
LB732

[Legislative Bill 732](#) (Riepe) changed the annual reporting requirements related to the Nebraska Children’s Commission and the NSFA Committee. The annual report to the Legislature deadline has been changed from December 1st annually to September 1st annually. This abbreviated report will cover the shortened period of December 2017 to June 30, 2018. For subsequent years, the NSFA Committee will report on state fiscal year, July 1st to June 30th for each September 1st annual report.

LR451

[Legislative Resolution 451](#) (Bolz) was introduced on March 27, 2018. The interim study is to examine the work of the Nebraska Children’s Commission and to evaluate the need for the commission’s continuation and any revisions to its structure and purpose.

Under [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4218](#) the NSFA Committee was created. Members are appointed by the Nebraska Children’s Commission. The Committee is to report annually to the Nebraska Children’s Commission, the Health and Human Services Committee of the Legislature, and the Governor.



The NSFA Committee was appointed in July 2017. Attendance records have been reviewed and indicate participation is active and a quorum is consistently met. The Committee meets quarterly despite no statutory mandate of minimum annual meeting requirements. The need for the NSFA Committee to remain as a statutory body has been reviewed. **The NSFA Committee recommends remaining a statutory committee in the event the Nebraska Children’s Commission were to sunset as scheduled June 30, 2019.** While statute indicates membership appointment by the Commission, and required annual reports from the Committee, it does not specify if the Committee is to continue in the event that the Commission sunsets. Great progress has been made by the Committee, and further work remains.

NEBRASKA STRENGTHENING FAMILIES ACT PRIORITIES

The NSFA Committee has identified the following three priorities to guide its work.

1. Continue to monitor the implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts.
2. Promote normalcy as the foundation to:
 - a. Prevent trafficking;
 - b. Reduce disparate impacts on minorities; and
 - c. Successful transition to adulthood.
3. Coordinate implementation with other policy-making bodies.

Priority 1: Monitor the Implementation of the Strengthening Families Act

The Legislature charged the group with monitoring the implementation of the State and Federal SFA, and the group has made this task its first priority. The Department of Health and Human Services – Division of Children and Family Services (DHHS-DCFS), service providers, foster parents and system-involved youth provide regular feedback and updates. The Committee understands that implementation requires time and coordination, and strives to serve as a forum for stakeholders to exchange information, provide support, and create innovative solutions to the challenges facing families, children, and youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

Monitoring Activities

To comply with this mandate, the NSFA Committee engages in the below monitoring activities:

- Serve as a collaborative forum to support the implementation of this important Act.
- Engage with families and youth to receive their feedback and allow community members to participate actively in the implementation.
- Receive updates from stakeholders on implementation.
- Identify and target specific processes for enhancements.
- Provide recommendations and feedback to the legislature, Commission, Governor, and stakeholders.

The NSFA Committee has identified and targeted specific processes for enhancements which would strengthen the implementation of the Acts. These include the Youth Bill of Rights, grievance process, Normalcy Plan review and implementation of NSFA specific legislation passed in 2017.

Youth Bill of Rights

The Committee will support the DHHS-CFS as it works to create a Youth Bill of Rights, and to support the Court Improvement Project as it updates its “What Now” guides for youth. Youth need to be regularly notified of their rights in a developmentally and age appropriate manner. Youth and families need more information and awareness of the resources that are available to them. The Committee continues to endorse and recommend inclusion of the rights identified in the report of the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee approved in 2016 which is available at <https://goo.gl/86CKRv>.

Grievance Process

Youth need an enforcement mechanism and grievance or complaint process for their rights. The Grievance Subcommittee has created a comprehensive guide to best practices available at <https://goo.gl/FrQg71>. The Subcommittee works with providers and state agencies to ensure that youth in foster care can enforce their rights.

Normalcy Plans Pursuant to LB225 (2017)

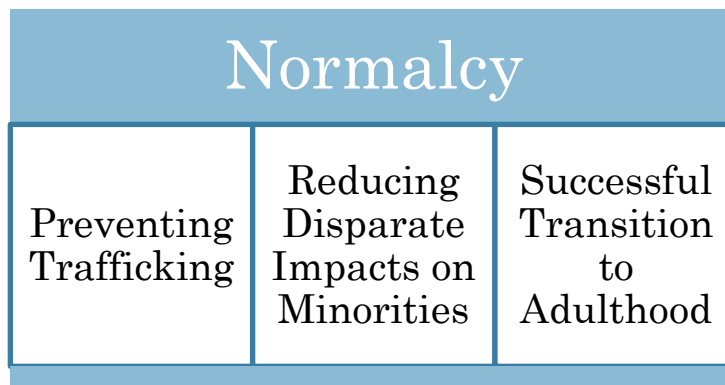
The Committee will actively review and analyze the Normalcy Plans provided pursuant to LB225 and thoroughly identify areas where stakeholders need support and advocacy to ensure that all youth have as much access to normalcy as possible.

Implementation of 2017 Legislation

In the 2017, the Nebraska State Legislature and Governor Pete Ricketts approved a number of additional provisions to support the implementation of the NSFA. Upon further review, the additional provisions respective to the Administrative Office of Probation and the DHHS- DCFS have been implemented. The 2017 SFA Annual Report cited a number of strategic actions to further support the continued implementation of the 2017 legislation. A review of these provisions and strategic actions are provided in [Appendix A](#).

Priority 2: Normalcy as the Foundation to a) Preventing Trafficking; b) Reducing Disparate Impact on Minorities; and c) Successful Transition to Adulthood

Normalcy is about supporting youth to reach their full potential by accessing protective factors like extracurricular activities, employment, and healthy supportive connections. Foster parents are empowered by the SFA to use the Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standard, which allows the freedom to make decisions as a caregiver that support normalcy, such as consenting to sleepovers, enrollment in sports activities, and participation in extracurricular activities. This connection to normalcy allows youth to build the foundation of protective factors needed to reach their full potential.



Priority 2(a): Normalcy as the Foundation to Prevent Trafficking

While the federal Preventing Sex Trafficking and Strengthening Families Act focuses primarily on sex trafficking, the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act incorporates both sex and labor trafficking.

The Trafficking Subcommittee has served since 2016 as a forum for stakeholders to create innovative solutions to prevent and respond to trafficking among youth in out-of-home placements. This complex issue requires stakeholders to work together to improve outcomes for children. The Trafficking subcommittee affirms the recommendations of its [2017 Annual Trafficking Subcommittee Report](#), and offers this report as a thoughtful contribution to promoting the identified priorities.

Trafficking Subcommittee Priorities

1. Monitor and make recommendations to ensure that the implementation of the Federal and State Strengthening Families Acts support the prevention of trafficking.
2. Minimize victimization for system involved youth by creating and supporting collaborative approaches to trafficking.

The Subcommittee has focused implementation monitoring efforts on the following strategies: culture change through normalcy activities; policy language and practice review; foster parent training, workforce support; legal system support; and community education.

At the heart of normalcy is authentic youth and family engagement. Many strategies have been developed, recommended, enacted, and considered to address trafficking prevention. Above all, the approach to youth and family engagement ought to be genuine, non-biased, youth-centered, and empowering. Strategies referenced in the [2017 Annual Trafficking Subcommittee Report](#), such as “cooling off” spaces and the use of a “code word” youth can use, are examples of youth-driven normalcy efforts to prevent trafficking and safe disclosure of concerns to professionals working with youth.

Alternatively, professionals and systems must be coordinated and integrated in order to adequately prevent and respond to trafficked youth and minimize further victimization. The Subcommittee continues to advocate for a collective data sharing platform and centralized agency or organization to receive reports and coordinate the response of trafficked minors in order to increase communication,

serve youth in a more holistic way, maximize resources and minimize traumatization through multiple screenings, interviews, and assessments. During the last few years, Nebraska’s implementation of the Acts has highlighted the degree to which systems must connect and work together in order to adequately prevent and respond to trafficking.

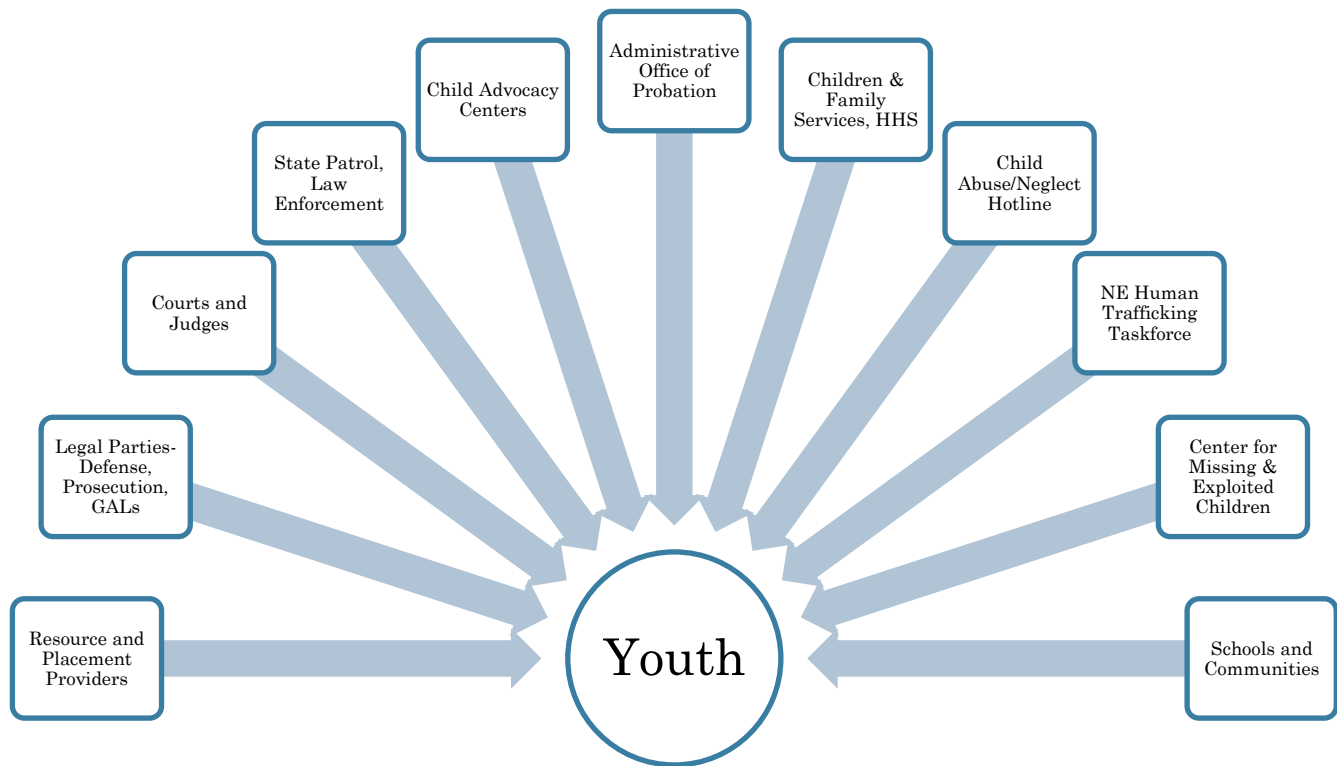
What is Trafficking?

According to the national [Human Trafficking Hotline](#), “Human trafficking is a crime involving the exploitation of someone for the purposes of compelled labor or a commercial sex act through the use of force, fraud, or coercion. Human trafficking affects individuals across the world, including here in the United States.

Sex trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, obtaining, patronizing, or soliciting of a person for the purposes of a commercial sex act, in which the commercial sex act is induced by force, fraud, or coercion, or in which the person induced to perform such an act has not attained 18 years of age (22 *USC* § 7102).

Labor trafficking is the recruitment, harboring, transportation, provision, or obtaining of a person for labor or services, through the use of force, fraud, or coercion for the purposes of subjection to involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage, or slavery, (22 *USC* § 7102).

For more information on these legal definitions, [click here to visit the Federal Laws page.](#)”



During 2018, the Trafficking Subcommittee supported and took an active role in [LB 1132](#) (Pansing Brooks). This important legislation affirmed the Subcommittee’s position that sealing, expungement, and vacatur of records are extremely important for youth or adults who have received a criminal record for either prostitution, or a collateral offense related to being trafficked. Through this bill, a procedure is established to set aside convictions of victims of sex trafficking and to expunge records. The Subcommittee will monitor the impact of this bill and any need for modification.

For the remainder of 2018, the Subcommittee will continue to partner with the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force (NHTTF) in order to collaborate and emphasize the importance and necessity of integrated data. The Subcommittee also plans to continue to work on a coordinated and collaborative response to youth missing from care and those who are at risk of being trafficked through the use of Child Advocacy Centers and Multidisciplinary Team staffing.

The Trafficking Subcommittee of the SFA Committee has proposed several systemic and programmatic strategies and recommendations in order to support the implementation of the Acts since its creation in 2016. A review and status update can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y7he3kk2>.

Priority 2(b): Normalcy as the Foundation to Address Disparate Impact on Minorities

The Normalcy Subcommittee has recognized normalcy as a powerful tool to connect minority youth with their communities and families. The Nebraska State Legislature has recognized the importance of race, culture, and identity for children in out-of-home care, as per [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4702](#). A larger percentage of youth in welfare placements are minorities compared to the overall percentage of minorities in Nebraska's population. Minority youth and families have different experiences of the child welfare system, and the Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that normalcy is used as a tool to help all families and youth connect to their culture.

Strategic Action Steps to Address Disparate Impacts on Minority Children and Families.

- Normalcy activities and family contact should be used to attain the goals set forth in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster connections for youth with tribal affiliation to their families and tribes as much as possible.
- Minority youth deserve to have their holistic identities understood and respected. These youth are entitled to experience normalcy and have their rights respected in light of their holistic identity and individual experiences.
- Youth contact with individuals they identify as family should be a right, and contact should not be denied unless there exists a documented safety concern or a court order preventing contact.
- The diversity of family structures of youth who are minority, refugee/immigrant, or youth with tribal affiliations should be recognized. Every culture has a distinct concept of who is included in a family, and may be broader than just immediate blood relations. Stakeholders must respect the rights of youth to spend time with individuals they identify as family. Discussions of who the youth considers family should be youth driven and support the youth in understanding how to have positive and healthy relationships with family.
- Support the work of the communities and stakeholders to reduce the disparate impact of the child welfare system on minorities and prevent disproportionate amounts of minority families from entering the child welfare system or out of home placements.
- The right to cultural activities should include access to activities that reflect the cultural practices and religious beliefs of the youth and family.

Priority 2(c): Normalcy as the Foundation to a Successful Transition to Adulthood

Normalcy for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system includes creating a supportive network to help youth face life's challenges and a baseline of independent living skills. In addition to skills, youth need permanent families to face the challenges of growing up. Though the majority of youth will eventually live independently, emotional and legal permanency should remain a focus throughout the entire case.

The Committee has focused its efforts on the provisions of the State and Federal SFA related to Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA). This permanency goal means that the youth will be self-sufficient, including caring for themselves independently and providing for themselves financially, through either employment, supportive services, or public financial assistance, and that reunification, adoption, and legal guardianship were attempted, but unsuccessful or not in the youth's best interest. Without a permanent family, these youth need extra support to attain their goals, achieve emotional permanency, and transition to adulthood.

NSFA APPLA Subcommittee

The APPLA Subcommittee created a comprehensive best practices guide for stakeholders in Nebraska. The [Stakeholder Guide to Best Practices in the Transition to Independent Living](#) includes guidance to support a successful transition to adulthood following the core principles:

1. **Youth-Driven:** Legal and emotional permanency for youth must be youth-driven, regardless of the permanency objective, and must include youth in all conversations about the youth's permanency.

2. **Significant Supportive Connections:** Stakeholders consider the identification of significant supportive connections at each point in the case, including at the start, throughout, and at the close of the case, regardless of the youth's court approved permanency goal.
3. **Intensive & Ongoing Efforts:** Intensive and ongoing efforts to return the youth home or place the child with a relative, legal guardian, or adoptive parent should include a youth driven staffing process. Each family team meeting includes a discussion of an independent living skill, and creates a goal to attain an additional independent living skill.
4. **Transitional Living Plan:** The required transitional living plan is essential to a youth's successful transition and should support the youth's growth into adulthood and independent living, with a heavy focus on life skills, skill attainment and based on an assessment. The plan should be youth driven and informed, and reflect the goals, values, and abilities of the youth.
5. **Independent Living Skills:** Life skill attainment should be tracked as youth move from placement to placement. This tracking can be achieved through a paper form but would ideally be through a web-based application or other electronic/digital means. This will help foster parents identify gaps in independent living skills and support acquiring necessary skills.

The APPLA Subcommittee identified the SFA Advisor/Advocate pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03\(2\)](#) as a priority for 2018. This year, the APPLA Subcommittee worked diligently to create Tip Sheets for Children & Family Service (CFS) Specialists at DHHS and SFA Advisors to provide detailed information regarding this important role. The Subcommittee worked with DHHS-DCFS, youth, families, and community partners to inform the content. A survey of stakeholders and the Youth Citizen Review Panel provided important feedback incorporated into the Tip Sheets. The Tip Sheets can be found in [Appendix B](#).

For the remainder of 2018, the APPLA Subcommittee plans to continue to focus on the SFA Advisor role by educating Child & Family Service Specialists, Family Permanency Specialists, and Probation Officers about the importance of the role and how to help young people identify individuals. **The Committee recommends curriculum for CFS Specialists and Family Permanency Specialists be added to new worker training. The Committee also recommends system enhancements be made to N-FOCUS in order to store information, collect data and track the use of advisors within youths' electronic case file.**

Priority 3: Coordinate Implementation with Other Policy Making Bodies

Implementing the State and Federal SFA is a collaborative effort. The implementation represents a culture change, and stakeholders need time to learn together. As systems work together, the paramount consideration should be the enhancement of normalcy for youth in care and the protection of youth rights.

Strategic Action Steps to Coordinate Implementation with Other Policy Making Bodies

Forum for Best Practices and Implementation

The SFA Committee will continue to serve as a forum for discussion and the identification of innovative solutions to the challenges posed by implementation.

Youth Engagement

The SFA Committee is dedicated to ensuring that implementation is youth informed, and encourages this through its engagement with youth members. Additionally, the APPLA Subcommittee has held a meeting with the Citizen Review Panel (CRP) to receive feedback from youth who were previously in out of home placements. The APPLA Subcommittee intends to continue to collaborate with the CRP as much as possible to promote youth driven and informed policies.

Strengthening Families Act Advisors

As mentioned above, the APPLA Subcommittee worked diligently to identify and recommend best practices for the role of the SFA Advisor, pursuant to [Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03\(2\)](#). The Subcommittee will collaborate with other groups such as the Trafficking Subcommittee and the Court Implementation Subcommittee to continue educating stakeholders on the importance of this role.

Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force Collaboration

The Trafficking Subcommittee receives regular updates from the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force (NHTTF), in addition to receiving and providing feedback to and from the group. The NHTTF focuses on adult victimization, while the Trafficking Subcommittee focuses on preventing and responding to minor victims of trafficking. The Committee and Subcommittee support the work undertaken by the NHTTF to create and implement pre-screening and screening tools.

NSFA Court Implementation Subcommittee

The Court Implementation Subgroup was initiated in July 2017 by the SFA Committee to collaborate with the Courts in supporting Normalcy and achieving improved outcomes for youth. The group met twice in 2017 and has met three times so far in 2018. The group has been very productive and has identified the following priorities for implementing the SFA within Nebraska's Juvenile Court system:

1. Variances in judicial practices exist across the state regarding normalcy within court hearings, court orders and court reports.
2. Judges and GALs across the state must take initiative to learn about and follow through on the requirements within the SFA. Additional training and education about the SFA is needed for legal parties for further implementation.
3. Children and youth attendance at court, or input via court forms, must occur in order for Judges to make statutorily required findings. The DHHS-DCFS Court Report is one piece of evidence to be considered for these statutory findings, but other information can and should also be considered.

This group has developed the following strategies to address the gaps in implementation within the court setting.

Legal Party Education and Awareness about the Strengthening Families Act

DHHS-DCFS has SFA within their new worker training and a requirement for normalcy to be documented within the Court Report.

GAL online training has been updated with the passage of the Act in 2016. A supplemental GAL training is being developed to include federal legislation impacting Juvenile Courts and is planned to be available in June. This will satisfy three hours of GAL required training.

The Nebraska Court Improvement Project (CIP) and Nebraska Appleseed have developed a statewide training for court stakeholders in July and August 2018 at the following locations: Grand Island, Omaha and Fremont. These presentations will include a recorded webinar, live in-person webinar and will be available for CLE credits.

The Court Implementation subgroup will continue to consider training for the other relevant groups such as the State Bar Association, local bar associations, judge specific trainings and/or county attorney associations.

Court Information Forms

CIP has been working on updating their "What Now" Guide for children and youth. This guide is a modernized and updated version of the CIP's "Know Your Rights" guide. This document was created with input from the SFA Committee, Youth Citizen Review Panel, Probation, and DHHS.

Other court documents under review include the Child and Youth Court Information forms available through the CIP and the DHHS-DCFS Court Report.

Once the court information documents have been updated and the advanced training has been made available statewide, this group has completed its goal to increase education and awareness surrounding the SFA.

Prevention for Youth with Tribal Affiliation

The Trafficking Subcommittee has identified youth with Tribal affiliation as an important population. The group will pursue partnerships with the tribes and the Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition to support these youth.

Prevention and Education

The Trafficking Subcommittee is exploring the Department of Education as a partner to identify numbers of homeless youth for prevention efforts. The Subcommittee will also explore training for educators and trafficking prevention education for students.

Engagement with the Administrative Office of Probation

The Committee receives updates from the Administrative Office of Probation on related initiatives and activities that support youth development. While the SFA does not apply to youth in juvenile justice out-of-home placements because youth remain in the legal custody of their parent and are not state wards, Probation provides information about practices and procedures for handling important aspects of out-of-home placements, such as family engagement, religious preferences, and connection to activities.

Driver's Licensure

The Committee will support efforts to connect youth in the child welfare system to driver's licensing services, car insurance, and automobile access and purchase.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The SFA Committee and its subcommittees are committed to monitoring the implementation of the Acts, developing strategies that support normalcy, engagement, and stakeholder collaborative efforts to prevent trafficking, disparate impacts on minorities and successful transitions to adulthood. While much has been accomplished, further work remains to improve outcomes for youth in care. For 2019 state fiscal year, the NSFA Committee will pursue the dissemination and promotion of materials referenced herein to ensure everyone involved in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems has access, knowledge of their existence, and are actively implementing the SFA. Strategies will be specifically formulated to legal parties, out of home placement providers, youth in care and the DHHS-DCFS and Probation workforce.

STATUTORY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Advisory Committee recommends the continuation of the Strengthening Families Act Committee irrespective of the Nebraska Children’s Commission statutory sunset date (June 30, 2019). A review and amendment of membership appointments cited in Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4218 will be needed when the Commission is no longer the parent body to the Nebraska Strengthening Families Act Committee.

PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

2. The Strengthening Families Act Committee continues to recommend a comprehensive Bill of Rights that includes the rights identified in the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Report from 2016, available at <https://goo.gl/86CKRv>.
3. The Committee recommends curriculum for CFS Specialists and Family Permanency Specialists be added to new worker training regarding the role of the SFA advisor.
4. The Committee also recommends system enhancements be made to N-FOCUS in order to store information, collect data and track the use of advisors within youths’ electronic case file.

Appendix A

2017 Strategies		Update as of June 2018	Status
Priority 1: Monitor the Implementation of the State and Federal Strengthening Families Acts			
1	Serve as a collaborative forum to support the implementation of this important Act.	The Committee and subgroup membership consists of individuals from all levels of system stakeholders.	Implemented/ Ongoing
2	Engage with families and youth to receive their feedback and allow community members to participate actively in the implementation.	Family and youth voice is collected through membership, surveys, and outreach of our partners.	Implemented/ Ongoing
3	Receive updates from the Administrative Office of Probation on related initiatives and activities that support youth development.	Probation is represented on the Committee and subgroups and provide regular updates.	Implemented/ Ongoing
4	Collaborate and provide feedback on regulations required by LB225 and await the promulgation of regulations in accordance with state statute. These regulations are to require training for foster parents on recognizing human trafficking, including both sex trafficking and labor trafficking.	Regular updates are provided by DHHS representatives at Committee and subgroup meetings and feedback is provided by members. A review of current DHHS rules indicates this change has not yet been finalized.	In Progress
5	Provide in depth review and analysis of the Normalcy Plan reports as required by LB225.	The Committee will be reviewing Normalcy Plan reports at their July 2018 meeting.	In Progress
6	Conduct an analysis of existing grievance processes to determine if additional legislation or policy is necessary. The Committee continues to promote that Youth are regularly notice of their rights. The updated report of the Grievance Subcommittee is available at https://goo.gl/FrQg71 .	Recommendations were submitted and DHHS policy updated. Currently allowing time for implementation prior to collecting data to determine the need for additional recommendations.	In Progress
7	Support the Department of Health and Human Services and the Court Improvement Project as they create the Bill of Rights and Know Your Rights Guide in collaboration with the Youth Citizen Review Panel	The Committee continues to support this initiative and excellent progress is being made.	In Progress
8	The Community and Family Voice Subcommittee will remain available to serve as a forum for engagement and feedback from the community and families.	This subgroup is willing to reconvene if need arises and continues to be a resource to stakeholders.	Implemented/ Ongoing
9	The Strengthening Families Act Committee continues to recommend a comprehensive Bill of Rights that includes the rights identified in the Community and Family Voice Subcommittee Report from 2016, available at https://goo.gl/86CKRv .	The Committee continues to support this recommendation. In lieu of the comprehensive Bill of Rights, the Committee continues to support the DHHS and CIP collaboration to create the Bill of Rights and Know Your Rights Guide referenced above.	Ongoing
10	The right to cultural activities should include access to activities that reflect the cultural practices and religious beliefs of the youth and family.	The Committee continues to support these overarching principle and best practices.	Ongoing
11	Youth need to be regularly notified of their rights in a developmentally and age appropriate manner.		
12	Youth need an enforcement mechanism and grievance or complaint process for their rights. See the Grievance Subcommittee’s report for additional information on the best practices for grievance systems.		
13	Youth and families need more information and awareness of the resources that are available to them.		

2017 Strategies		Update as of June 2018	Status
Priority 2a: Promote normalcy as the foundation to prevent trafficking.			
15	Promote a system wide culture change where youth are treated as stakeholders would want their own children treated.	Training to implement this culture shift has begun. Coordination between law enforcement, Administrative Office of Probation, DHHS, PromiseShip, CACs, and other community organizations has begun to provide training and share information to implement a culture change around sex trafficked youth and youth at risk of being trafficked. DCFS created culture change within the Division to talk to and speak of the youth we advocate for in a positive way. Instead of placing another negative label on our youth, staff does not refer to youth as "runaways" or "on run" but as youth who are missing from care. Youth need to feel important and respected. The way we interact with our youth can help to keep them safe. DCFS and PromiseShip have developed a partnership when youth in our care go missing from placement. PromiseShip has a dedicated email address to help staff coordinate and communicate when a youth has gone missing and has dedicated staff to help in the process.	Ongoing
16	Normalcy activities should go beyond extracurricular activities, and should include acquiring life skills, such as driving, jobs skills and experience, and social activities such as prom and homecoming dances.	This philosophy is included in current training for both staff and foster parents.	Implemented/ Ongoing
17	Members of the public must be able to identify the trafficking of minors, and understand it as child maltreatment that requires reporting to law enforcement or the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline.	NHTTF is working on a standard trafficking 101 curriculum that is in progress to be available to the public. The DCFS Program Specialist has provided community trainings to educate the public on the indicators of trafficking, how and when to report possible situations of trafficking and information about foster care youth who are missing from care and its relation to trafficking.	In Progress
18	Child placing agency and DHHS-CFS staff must have access to the training they need to identify and support foster parents who can provide placement to this vulnerable population.	Trainings are available to staff; Operation Youth Success (OYS) has a "runaway taskforce" doing education on missing youth; The National Runaway Safeline is also being reviewed as a training resource. The Administrative Office of Probation has provided resource materials to their staff and are preparing to implement training being developed by the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force.	Implemented
19	The Committee commends the DHHS-CFS for their efforts in establishing training for foster parents related to identifying and responding to trafficking.	The Subcommittee continues to be a resource for DHHS in supporting their trafficking related initiatives. DHHS has increased efforts to include youth voice in their placement decisions. DCFS created a Human Trafficking for Nebraska Foster Parents training, this was mandated by NRS 43-4715. All Nebraska foster parents and Nebraska Foster Agency staff were trained to understand the definition, indicators and the risk factors of human trafficking, how to prevent trafficking and the resources available in Nebraska. Over 1300 foster parents received this training.	Implemented
20	The Nebraska Children's Commission should work with the Department of Health and Human Services, the Administrative Office of Probation, providers, families, and other stakeholders to make recommendations on a treatment level out-of-home placement for youth who have been victims of trafficking.	Further work and collaboration is needed in order to implement this. The Treatment Foster Care workgroup of the Foster Care Rate Reimbursement Committee is currently evaluating the service definition and Medicaid regulations for treatment family care.	Delayed

Appendix A

2017 Strategies		Update as of June 2018	Status
21	DHHS-CFS and the Administrative Office of Probation should establish processes for the youth to work with caseworker or probation officer, foster parents, biological parents (if applicable), Strengthening Families Act Advisor/Advocate (if youth is child welfare involved) to create a plan to prevent youth from going missing from care by allowing them to designate a “cooling off” area.	Probation has recently implemented this practice into policy for youth under supervision; DHHS training includes practices of identifying safe spaces to go in times of high stress or crisis.	Implemented
22	Professionals support youth in out-of-home placements by allowing them to designate a code word that signals a need to have a confidential conversation outside of the placement.	Work is in progress to integrate this practice into training for workers.	In Progress
23	Design or designate a centralized procedure to receive reports and coordinate the response to trafficked minors.	There is currently no overarching central navigator for all cases of sex trafficked minors. Cases of sex trafficking are directed to the hotline. From there, DHHS becomes the lead coordinator for cases involving caretakers and Law Enforcement become the lead coordinators for cases involving third party perpetrators.	Delayed
24	DHHS-CFS should respond to reports of trafficking with an investigation within 24 hours, whether or not the trafficker is a third party perpetrator or a caregiver, and whether or not the trafficker is living in the home.		
Priority 2b: Promote normalcy as the foundation to address disparate impacts on minorities.			
25	Normalcy activities and family contact should be used to attain the goals set forth in the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and foster connections for youth with tribal affiliation to their families and tribes as much as possible.	The Committee will further explore disparate impacts on minorities in 2018 and 2019, in coordination with other Nebraska Children's Commission Committees.	Delayed
26	Minority youth deserve to have their holistic identities understood and respected.		
27	The diversity of family structures of youth who are minority, refugee/immigrant or youth with tribal affiliations should be recognized. Every culture has a distinct concept of who is included in a family, and may be broader than just immediate blood relations.		
28	Support the work of the communities and stakeholders to reduce the disparate impact of the child welfare system on minorities and prevent disproportionate amounts of minority families from entering the child welfare system or out of home placements.		
Priority 2c: Promote normalcy as the foundation to support the successful transition to adulthood.			
29	All stakeholders should continue to focus on legal and emotional permanency for youth transitioning out of the child welfare system, regardless of the court approved permanency goal.	The Committee continues to support these overarching principles and best practices.	Ongoing
30	All conversations about youth's permanency are youth driven and informed.		
31	Stakeholders consider the identification of significant supportive connections at each point in the case, including at the start, throughout, and at the close of the case, regardless of the youth's court approved permanency goal.		
32	Intensive and ongoing efforts to return the youth home or place the child with a relative, legal guardian, or adoptive parent should include a youth driven staffing process.		
33	The staffing is youth driven, youth informed; opportunity focused and takes a team approach. This process will include approximately three staffing meetings. Based on youth feedback, the first meeting should consider all permanency goals, the second should review the progress made toward permanency goals, and in the third meeting the youth and team will make a decision.		

Appendix A

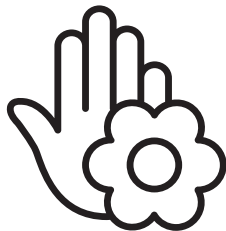
2017 Strategies		Update as of June 2018	Status
34	The required transitional living plan is essential to the youth's success and should support the youth's growth into adulthood and independent living, with a heavy focus on life skills.	The Committee continues to support these overarching principles and best practices.	Ongoing
35	The transition plan must include planning for life skill attainment, and an assessment to determine gaps in skills.		
36	Life skill attainment should be tracked as youth move from placement to placement. This tracking can be achieved through a paper form but would ideally be through a web-based application or other electronic/digital means.		
37	Each family team meeting includes a discussion of an independent living skill, and creates a goal to attain an additional independent living skill.		
Priority 3: Coordinate implementation with other policy making bodies.			
38	Data sharing amongst agencies within Nebraska must be a central part of statewide response to trafficking. Several data and information sharing endeavors are occurring, and the Trafficking Subcommittee commends these efforts and recommends they continue.	Work to share data is under review with LB225, the Children and Juvenile Data Feasibility Study; DHHS and Probation provide regular updates to the FCRO on trafficked youth.	In Progress
39	The Strengthening Families Act Committee is dedicated to ensuring that implementation is youth informed, and encourages this through this engagement with youth members.	The Committee continues to support this overarching principle and best practice.	Ongoing
40	The APPLA Subcommittee and the Trafficking Subcommittee will collaborate to identify and recommend best practices for the role of the Strengthening Families Act Advocate/Advisor, pursuant to Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-1311.03(2). The groups will work with DHHS-CFS, youth, families, and community partners to make recommendations.	Membership overlap has occurred and communication between groups has assisted mindful conversation and joint goals. (Ex: the need for trafficking education for the APPLA Advisor)	Implemented
41	The Committee and Subcommittee support the work undertaken by the NHTTF to create and implement pre-screening and screening tools.	In addition to the training for law enforcement, the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force has engaged in significant amounts of collaborative work in creating a statewide official screening tool and in in-depth screening tool. The subcommittee supports the work of the Nebraska Human Trafficking Task Force as they develop these tools, collect and analyze the data, and supports DHHS and law enforcement as they implement screening tools.	Ongoing
42	The Committee has created the Court Implementation Subcommittee to collaborate with the Courts in supporting Normalcy and achieving improved outcomes for youth.	The Court Implementation Subcommittee continues to meet and is making great progress.	Implemented
43	The Trafficking Subcommittee has identified youth with Tribal affiliation as an important population. The group will pursue partnerships with the tribes and the Indian Child Welfare Act Coalition to support these youth.	The group members who attend Nebraska ICWA Coalition meetings and report out. Additional work is needed in this area.	Delayed
44	The Trafficking Subcommittee is exploring the Department of Education as a partner to identify numbers of homeless youth for prevention efforts. The Subcommittee will also explore training for educators and trafficking prevention education for students.	Some of this data was reviewed at the 9/7/2017 meeting, but additional work is needed in this area.	Delayed
45	The Committee will support the DHHS-CFS as it works to create a Youth Bill of Rights, and to support the Court Improvement Program as it updates its "Know Your Rights" guide for youth.	The Committee continues to support this initiative and excellent progress is being made.	In Progress

Appendix A

2017 Strategies		Update as of June 2018	Status
46	The Grievance Subcommittee has created a comprehensive guide to best practices available at https://goo.gl/FrQg71 . The group will reconvene to review data and update its recommendations. The Subcommittee works with providers and state agencies to ensure that youth in foster care can enforce their rights.	Recommendations were submitted and DHHS policy updated. Currently allowing time for implementation prior to collecting data to determine the need for additional recommendations.	In Progress
47	The Committee will actively review and analyze the Normalcy Plans provided pursuant to LB225 and thoroughly identify areas where stakeholders need support and advocacy to ensure that all youth have as much access to normalcy as possible.	The Committee will be reviewing Normalcy Plan reports at their July 2018 meeting.	In Progress
48	The Committee will support efforts to connect youth in the child welfare system to driver's licensing services, car insurance, and automobile access and purchase. If the Nebraska State Legislature approves LB226, the Committee will accept the statutory tasks related to this important topic.	LB226 (Wishart) is postponed indefinitely.	Delayed

Strengthening Families Act Youth Advisor

CASEWORKER TIP SHEET



ADVISOR

Definition

Definition of Advisor -

By definition, an advisor involves speaking on behalf of a person to ensure that their rights and needs are recognized. The SFA Advisor is an individual identified by the youth to be designated as the youth's advisor on the application of Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS). RPPS allow foster parents to use their best judgment in making day-to-day decisions about activities foster youth are involved in. This applies to activities and being able to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, academic, enrichment, and social activities that promote a sense of "normalcy" while in foster care. Advocacy is about increasing the amount of control that a person has over their own lives, the advisor needs to ensure they are working in a way that fosters independence.



IDENTIFY

An Advisor

Identify reliable and caring adults who can serve as a stable, ongoing connection and can provide support

- Talk about family members (who is close to the youth)
- Talk about family friends
- Talk about adults that are around at school, church, other youth-involved activities
- Talk about who the youth would put down for a reference when applying for a job
- Talk about who would be invited to a get together or party their family was hosting
- Talk about where the youth spends holidays
- Talk about who the youth goes to for help at school
- Talk about who the youth would call when something exciting happens to them
- Advisor cannot be a current caseworker or foster parent



ROLES OF

An Advisor

Advisor roles and responsibilities the youth may want help with

Example: What activities or changes would help build your sense of normalcy while you're in care?

- Attending school activities
- Participating in Cultural/Religious activities
- Advocating for social activities with friends
- Advocating for extracurricular activities
- Getting driver's licenses other certifications
- Assisting with employment/education
- Celebrating age appropriate milestones

What makes the young person feel different from their peers?

Allow the youth to identify roles and responsibilities for the advisor.

Individuals identified by the youth to be a potential Advisor -

How is the identified advisor going to be invited to the team if not a part of the team already?

How will the team handle disagreements with the advisor?

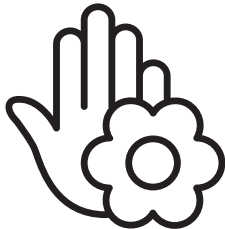
- Try to reach a compromise
- Agree to disagree (the worker has the ultimate decision)
- Listen to all opinions

How will the worker ensure the advisor make sure the youth's voice is heard?

Disclaimers:

DHHS/PromiseShip reserves the right to deny an identified individual to act as the youth's advisor if it is not in the best interest of the youth. Provide the advisor with a list of contact information for team members for cases of emergency.

Strengthening Families Act Youth Advisor **ADVISOR TIP SHEET**



ADVISOR
Definition

Definition of Advisor -

By definition, an advisor involves speaking on behalf of a person to ensure that their rights and needs are recognized. The SFA Advisor is an individual identified by the youth to be designated as the youth’s advisor and advisor on the application of Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS). RPPS allow foster parents to use their best judgment in making day-to-day decisions about activities foster youth are involved in. This applies to activities and being able to participate in age-appropriate extracurricular, academic, enrichment, and social activities that promote a sense of “normalcy” while in foster care. Advocacy is about increasing the amount of control that a person has over their own lives, the advisor needs to ensure they are working in a way that fosters independence.



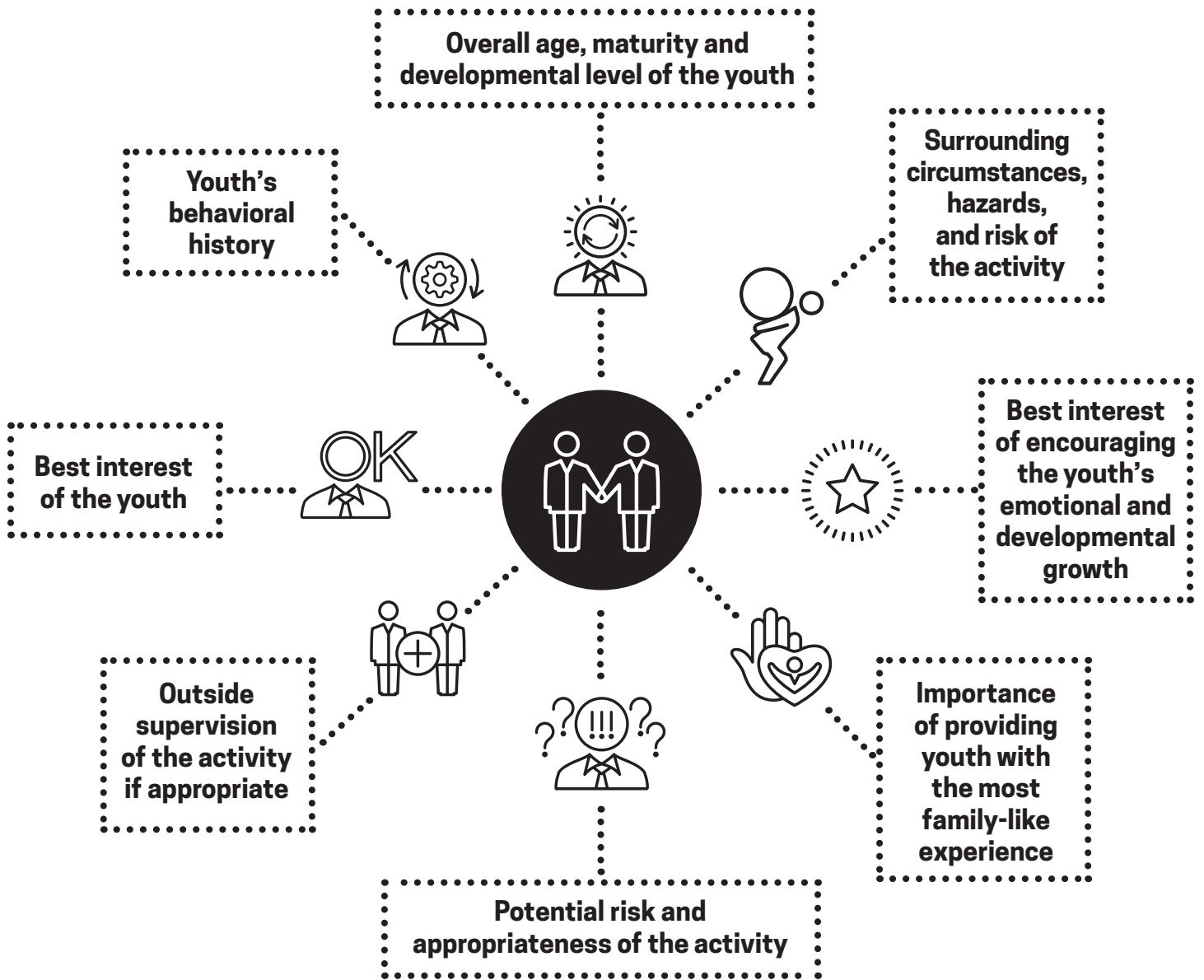
ROLES OF
An Advisor

The Advisor must agree to be a participant on the team (as defined by the youth and team).

- Build relationships and communicate with team members to best serve the youth.
 - o Team members that may be a part of the team
 - ◆ Family Permanency Specialist (FPS) – Case Manager
 - ◆ Guardian ad Litem (GAL) – Legal advisor for the youth, attorney who represents the youth’s interests at court
 - ◆ Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) – Volunteer who gathers information and make recommendations to the judge
 - ◆ Independent Living Specialist (ILS) – Worker assigned to help set and meet goals of the youth in order to build self-sufficiency skills.
 - ◆ Foster parents – Foster parents provide care for children who cannot safely remain in their own home.
- Roles, responsibilities, participation, and communication may change based on the youth’s current situation.
- The advisor has the option to withdraw from the position at any time.
- The youth has the option to rescind the offer to advisor at any time if they feel the individual is not working in their best interest.
- Specific situations the youth would like the advisor to assist them with:

Identify how the advisor is going to communicate. How is the youth’s voice going to be heard?

FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN ADVOCATING FOR RPPS AND NORMALCY ACTIVITIES



TIPS FOR THE ADVISOR



Know the facts



Identify the problem, if there is one



Identify key decision makers



Use respectful and assertive communication



Maintain confidentiality



Know who/how to contact in cases of emergency

HELPFUL SUGGESTIONS FOR ADVISORS

SET BOUNDARIES AND KEEP UP YOUR SELF-CARE

It can be difficult to navigate your own wellness and also provide peer support to someone else. If you aren't healthy or practicing self-care yourself, you may not be able to help someone at this time. Becoming a successful advisor for others is only possible once you're able to advocate for your own health and well-being. Before you decide to become an advisor, it's important to ask yourself if you are in a place where you will be able to offer support, or if you need to set a boundary. And if all you can offer is friendship, you're still helping so much!

Setting boundaries is a great tool to help you manage the support you can give (e.g. when you can connect, what's out of your comfort zone, etc.). If you're coming from a place of compassion, setting a boundary with the support seeker is an act of support; it means you want to make sure you can be as helpful as possible, even if that means connecting them to other support options. Even when you're able to act as an advisor for others, or simply connect with them, it's important to manage expectations and draw boundaries that protect your own needs.

Let the support seeker know that you aren't responsible to provide them with counseling, social services crisis intervention, financial assistance. Someone you're talking with is probably going through a difficult time, so ask, "How can I help?" and make sure you listen to what they need from you. That person's needs are valid, but it's up to you to decide if you are able and willing to offer them help.

BE A CONFIDANTE

Acting as an advisor for others means people may confide in you. Your goal is to create an environment where people feel safe to share and connect. In doing that, someone may share information that's difficult to understand or shocking to hear. Focus on the person and not their actions. Offer them support in a positive and non-judgmental way.

Trust is a fragile thing, so it's important to honor that confidentiality except in the case of a crisis situation. At the same time, be clear about the circumstances where you will have to reach out to a 3rd party for help.

KNOW THE CRISIS WARNING SIGNS

Part of being an advisor for others means being aware of signs that someone is in crisis. If you realize someone is in crisis, remember to stay calm when you talk to them, while still taking them seriously and not underacting – if you're worried, it's okay to show that you're worried. It's also important to not promise confidentiality, as you may need to contact a professional on their behalf if they aren't willing to. If they are not in immediate danger, it's best to try to help them connect with another competent professional. If they need convincing, share concrete reasons why you believe they are in crisis and need to reach out for more help. Acknowledge their feelings and reassure them that there is help out there. Don't be argumentative or judgmental; just listen, be honest, and don't relieve the person of responsibility for their actions. Try to stay in contact with them until you're sure they've connected with a professional.

BE SENSITIVE IN YOUR LANGUAGE

Be deliberate in the choices of language you use when talking with someone who needs support. Be careful not to monopolize the conversation, but you don't have to be a silent sounding board, either! Share your thoughts and opinions about what the other person is saying, without giving advice or telling them what to do. Instead, try to respond emotionally, with understanding and compassion. If something they've said resonates with your own experience, share it if you feel comfortable doing so. Sometimes sharing a piece of your own journey is the best way to show you understand someone else's.

SOMETIMES ADVOCACY IS JUST BEING A GOOD FRIEND

If you're acting as a support for someone who isn't in crisis, the most important thing to do is be a caring friend! Remember to ask "how are you?" and genuinely listen to the answer. Don't act uncomfortable if someone confides in you that they are going through a difficult time; just listen and say "how can I help?" or offer to help them with something specific. Be patient if they are down during a rough patch. Be happy with them when the rough patch is over. Be one of the people in their life who sees them as a whole person

Strengthening Families Act Committee Membership

Member Name	Member Type	Title and Organization	Representation
Vacant	Voting	,	professional who has relevant practical experience
Vacant	Voting	,	representative of the Executive Branch of Government
Vacant	Voting	,	parent who has experience with the Foster Care System
Vacant	Voting	,	representative of a child care institution
Payne Ackerman	Voting	Former Foster Youth , Project Everlast	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Ashley Brown	Voting	Program Director , Nebraska KVC	representative from a child welfare service agency
Nathan Collier	Voting	Former Foster Youth , Former Foster Youth	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Heather Colton	Voting	Associate Attorney/Guardian Ad Litem , Pollak & Ball, LLC	Guardian Ad Litem who practices in juvenile court
Vernon Davis	Voting	Young Adult Previously in Foster Care , Young Adult Previously in Foster Care	young adult currently or previously in foster care
Patricia Frost (Co-Chair)	Voting	Education Specialist II , Nebraska Department of Education	representative of the Department of Education (non-statutory)
Kim Hawekotte	Voting	Executive Director , Foster Care Review Office	Executive Director of the Foster Care Review Office
Sarah Helvey	Voting	Child Welfare Program Director / Staff Attorney , Nebraska Appleseed	representative from a child welfare advocacy organization
Nicole Seymour	Voting	Family Engagement Director , PromiseShip	representative from a child welfare service agency (NFC)
Deb Shuck (Co-Chair)	Voting	Central Service Navigator for the Older Youth System of Care , CAPWN	representative from an agency providing independent living services
Lisa Story	Voting	Foster Parent Representative , Foster Parent Representative	current or former foster parent
Juliet Summers	Voting	Policy Coordinator for Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice , Voices for Children in Nebraska	representative from a child welfare advocacy organization
Vacant	Ex-Officio	,	representative of the Legislative Branch of Government
Jim Bennett	Ex-Officio	Director of Placement, Supervision Services , Administrative Office of Probation, Juvenile Services Division	representative from the Juvenile Probation System
Deb VanDyke-Ries	Ex-Officio	Director , Nebraska Court Improvement Project	A representative of the Judicial Branch of government

Appendix D

In 2017, the Nebraska State Legislature and Governor Pete Ricketts approved a number of additional provisions to support the implementation of the SFA.

IMPLEMENTATION OF 2017 LEGISLATION	
Provision	Status
DHHS was tasked with promulgating rules and regulations requiring additional training for foster parents on recognizing human trafficking, including sex and labor trafficking. (Neb. Rev. Stat. §43-4707).	DHHS-CFS has implemented the training for parents and has begun training foster parents in collaboration with the Child Advocacy Centers and other stakeholders.
The legislation provides that DHHS must also require, as a condition of each contract entered into by a child-care institution to provide foster care, a written normalcy plan describing how the child-care institution will ensure that all children have access to age or developmentally appropriate activities to be filed with the department and a normalcy report regarding the implementation of the normalcy plan to be filed with the department annually by June 30.	DHHS-CFS has implemented these contractual requirements.
DHHS and Probation are required to establish procedures for the immediate dissemination of a current picture and information about a child who is missing from a foster care or out-of-home placement to appropriate third parties, which may include law enforcement agencies or persons engaged in procuring, gathering, writing, editing, or disseminating news or other information to the public. Any information released to a third party is subject to state and federal confidentiality laws and must not include that the child is under the care, custody, or supervision of the department or under the supervision of probation. Such dissemination by probation shall be authorized by an order of a judge or court.	<p>The Administrative Office of Probation has implemented this process in collaboration with the youths' parents.</p> <p>The Department of Health and Human Services collaborates with the Nebraska State Patrol's Missing Persons Clearinghouse to disseminate pictures of youth missing from care to ensure safe disclosure of information.</p>