

NEW YORK STATE  
OFFICE OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES  
Attachment B

**ATTESTATION OF USE OF FAMILY FIRST TRANSITION FUNDS**

**Instruction:**

This form must be completed to receive Family First Transition Funds. Please complete and return to [FamilyFirstNY@ocfs.ny.gov](mailto:FamilyFirstNY@ocfs.ny.gov) by **June 15, 2019**. Such funds will not be used to supplant any other state or local funds. Claims for reimbursement under this appropriation will not be submitted for the same type and level of funding covered by any other state or locally authorized appropriation.

**Section I**

This is to certify that Westchester County Department of Social Services (insert LDSS name) plans to use the allocation of these funds authorized in the amount of \$ 115,543 toward one of the purposes listed below. This plan is subject to change based on individualized technical assistance and strategy selection. How the funds were used will be documented in the *Family First Transition Fund Progress Report* (Attachment C). Outcomes resulting from such expenditures will be documented in the *Family First Transition Fund Outcomes Report* (Attachment D).

**Plan for use of funds: (Check all that apply.)**

- Additional/enhanced targeted technical support
- Family search and engagement
- Enhancing support for foster parents
- Supporting kinship foster parents in meeting approval/certification requirements
- Improving recruitment and retention of foster families, including kinship caregivers
- Establishing administrative review teams to review proposed placements in non-kinship and congregate care settings
- Other (describe) In home behavioral health service for the 1055 caregiver and/or kinship care provider with a focus on managing behavioral disorders that are often the key disrupters in continual kin care.

**Section II**

The LDSS agrees to participate in OCFS administered centralized technical assistance, and may receive additional technical assistance which may include one or more of the following:

- OCFS administered LDSS-specific technical assistance to assist with data analysis
- Consultant administered strategy development, system improvements and monitoring progress toward target goals

The LDSS has already received technical assistance toward the goal of reducing children in congregate care and increasing children in kinship foster care settings:

- Yes  No

If yes, describe:

**Section III**

**Instruction:**

OCFS has set statewide target goals for the percentage of children in foster care living in congregate care and kinship foster care, to be achieved by September 30, 2021, as follows: **12% congregate care placements and 30% kinship foster care placements**. To assist the state in meeting these targets, the LDSS must identify target goals to reduce congregate care and increase kinship foster care to be achieved by September 30, 2021. Progress toward these goals, as of September 30, 2020, will be documented in the *Family First Transition Fund Outcomes Report* due November 1, 2020.

Utilizing the data provided on the next page, fill in the placement percentages as of December 31, 2018. Establish and fill in target goals<sup>1</sup> which may also be identified in the 3-year Retention and Recruitment Plan:

1. Reduce congregate care from 26 % (on December 31, 2018) to 12 % by September 30, 2021
2. Increase kinship<sup>2</sup> foster care from 13 % (on December 31, 2018) to 30 % by September 30, 2021

Describe below how the LDSS will engage kinship resources with direct custody orders (1017) to consider becoming certified or approved foster parents

In 2017 Westchester County (WCDSS) recognized the need to shift our focus from direct custody orders (1017/1055) to one that put a greater value on kinship care. An emphasis was placed on the importance of using kin caregivers and how increased use of kin could lead to better permanency outcomes. This shift has helped successfully increase our use of KinGap and that increase now even includes; non-relatives that have had family-like relationships with children (Fictive Kin) to be considered as potential resources that are eligible to enter into KinGAP agreements.

In order to improve and increase the use of kin and fictive kin as placement options WCDSS built units of specialized kinship staff in 3 district offices. The Kinship Specialists are well versed in working with families in the safety plan stage or 1017/1055 phase. They support families by explaining their options of having a child in their home. The specialized staff are able to help families navigate through the permanency planning options and seek to alter court ordered direct placements (1017/1055) into special arrangement foster homes so that KinGAP can be the permanency option for children that are unable to return home.

The kinship unit's responsibility is to advance kin and fictive kin placements through in-depth and ongoing family engagement. They will provide the family with an extensive overview of the OCFS Placement Planning Options, review publications and weigh their options. Kinship resources will be made aware of how permanency, safety, and well being outcomes increase when children are placed with kin. In addition, the 1055 caretakers are linked to Kinship Navigators either through NAFI or FSSY to help navigate through some of the systemic barriers, apply for benefits, link to schools and community based resources while they work through the approval/certification requirements and process.

Through Families First funds we will use funds to purchase goods and/or services that will assist in the certification process. Funds will be used to enhance living conditions in the physical residence (i.e. purchase of window guards, purchase fire extinguisher and/or smoke detectors) in order to meet the OCFS Safety review standard for certification/approval. We presently provide Mini-Mapp and Caring for Our Own trainings; however, in order to avoid any delays and expedite the Kinship Foster Care certification/approval process we are exploring the Deciding Together Curriculum to see if that would provide the level of training in a more expeditious manner.

With these funds WCDSS will hire or contract for Family Finder to locate and engage families of children living in out of home care using the Family Finding Model developed by Kevin Campbell. If a child is placed with kin under a formal safety plan which will result in an abuse/neglect petition and the kin is not willing to provide care beyond the safety plan period Family Finder will begin to locate kin who will commit to the permanency plan and kinship foster home approval process.

While there is strong evidence that children do better with their families, we find that they are not equipped to parent children with trauma and challenging behaviors. This can be stressful and beyond the caretaker's ability resulting in a request for the child's replacement. We believe that we can preserve the

<sup>1</sup> Measured from an in-care sample of children in the care and custody of the LDSS in such setting on December 31, 2018 and September 30, 2021

<sup>2</sup> Kinship foster care includes both approved foster homes, and certified foster homes where the foster parent is a relative or a non-relative with a positive relationship to the child or child's family (i.e. godparent, neighbor, family friend).

home with the support of the Behavior Specialist. The Behavior Specialist will provide the caregiver with some skills in managing child behavior problems that are a result of trauma exposure.

WCDSS continues to reduce congregate care placements through a combination of robust gate-keeping of two kinds – maintaining more youth in the community through our investments in joint decision-making with Probation and when a youth must be placed, through the Congregate Care Consultation review process. These two initiatives reduced the number of youth initially placed in congregate care. For youth placed in congregate care, Westchester increased its level of on-site conferencing with agency staff to transition youth placed in congregate care to permanency, if possible, or if not, to a lower level of care. The Department will continue to reduce congregate care placements with the ongoing recruitment of therapeutic and foster boarding homes that are capable, willing and properly surrounded by supportive services to care for our older youth.

#### Section IV

Name and title of person completing the form:	<u>Michelle Bethencourt-Garcia</u>	Date:	<u>6 / 13 / 2019</u>
Child Welfare Manager I Program Office			
Name of commissioner:	<u>Kevin McGuire</u>	Date:	<u>6 / 14 / 19</u>
Commissioner's signature:			