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Indiana moves to keep families together — Fort Wayne organization leads the way

Lifeline Youth and Family Services is leading the way on a new service designed for families — with a substantiated case of abuse or neglect — that DCS believes could safely care for the children in their home with the assistance of appropriate services.

[FORT WAYNE, IN] — After years of groundwork, the state of Indiana Department of Child Services has moved toward a “Family Preservation” model for families in crisis. This program will allow state agencies to better support families in overcoming problems that lead to losing custody of their children.

The program has a focus on safely keeping families together to reduce trauma for children and limit the necessity for foster care families, which had doubled in the last decade.

“It’s an opportunity to provide better services and meet the families’ needs,” said Liz Day, Vice President of Home-Based services for Lifeline Youth and Family Services.

The Family Preservation model allows care providers to individually assess a family’s needs and create a treatment plan that is customized to achieve their goals. This is different from the standard model, which limits service providers to services ordered by the court. It puts the agencies directly in charge of the case with a list of evidence based services to better meet the family's needs with an increased likeliness for long term success.

The program centralizes the services provided to families to a single provider, like Lifeline Youth and Family Services, who can advocate for the families’s needs and work on keeping families together. This approach is intended to limit the trauma caused to children when they are removed from their families and placed in foster care.

Day remarked that safety is a key element to the program.

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4150 Illinois Road, Fort Wayne, IN 46804 | lifelineyouth.org | info@lifelineyouth.org



“We have a huge emphasis on safety,” said Day “We have internal standards and built in checks to ensure that the home remains a safe place for children as families work with our home-based care staff to create a more stable environment for the children.”

The program, which was officially rolled out in June 2020 positions the state to adopt a The Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), which allows for more federal funding for preventative services that have been shown to keep families from losing custody of their children or sliding more deeply into the court system.

Lifeline Youth and Family Services, an organization based in Fort Wayne with programs in all 92 counties in Indiana has received 25% of the referrals out of 94 eligible organizations to receive referrals from DCS.

Day attributes this primarily to the organization’s ability to provide a wide range of services and positioning in all counties across the state. With more than 450 home-based service specialists, the organization is positioned to lead the way for this new approach to providing social services to families in need.

The Family Preservation model has requirements for evidence-based practices in order to be eligible for funding. Day noted that Lifeline is certified to do eight of these practices, a significantly larger number than most organizations.

“We’re excited to be on the frontlines helping families every day and are optimistic that this new model will give new hope to families and better outcomes for children,” said Day.

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About Lifeline Youth and Family Services:

Lifeline Youth & Family Services, Inc., was founded in 1968 when a small group of business leaders felt compelled to do something to help kids in trouble who desperately needed a safe and loving home. Now 50 years later, Lifeline continues to work toward the mission of changing hearts and bringing hope to individuals, families, and communities.

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