

INITIATIVES

Revised and Trained the Immediate Danger Assessment

The immediate danger assessment is the tool that child protection specialists use to determine if an emergency removal is necessary. CFSD updated the tool and retrained it with a focus on the thresholds necessary for removal.

Developed and Began Enhanced Staffing Protocol

Enhanced staffing protocol requires supervisors to review all investigations involving children under the age of three with a team of supervisors to ensure investigations are thorough, child safety is controlled for, and creative options to keep children in their homes are utilized when necessary.

Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)

This act reforms the federal child welfare financing stream to provide services to families who are at risk of entering the child welfare system. FFPSA aims to prevent children from entering foster care by allowing federal reimbursement for mental health services, substance use treatment, and in-home parenting skill training. It also seeks to improve the well-being of children already in foster care by incentivizing states to reduce placement of children in congregate care.

Meadowlark Initiative

In partnership with the Montana Healthcare Foundation, the Meadowlark Initiative brings together clinical and community teams to improve maternal outcomes and reduce newborn drug exposure, neonatal abstinence syndrome, and perinatal complications by providing essential care to patients and their families when it is most needed. This initiative has helped CFSD to reduce the removal of children under one year of age by 22% over the past two years.

[The Meadowlark Initiative® - Montana Healthcare Foundation \(mthcf.org\)](https://mthcf.org)

Family Support Teams

Family support teams aim to keep children in their own homes while safety threats are being managed by providing necessary services to the family as quickly as possible. Goals and referrals are developed during the meetings to provide wraparound services in a transparent manner that improves family engagement and involvement. The structure created by the family support team meetings ensures in-home safety plans are routinely monitored by child protection specialists and service providers.

Kinship Navigator Program

The Kinship Navigator Program serves kinship caregivers across Montana by offering support, education, and access to resources to assist caregivers in raising their children so they can live happier, healthier lives and can, in turn, raise children who know

emotional and physical safety, excel in school and social situations, and are prepared to take on the challenges of their new lives.

[Montana Kinship Navigator Program - Grandparents Raising Grandchildren | Montana State University](#)

Safety Resource Specialist/Prevention Specialist

CFSD redefined the Child Protection Specialist job description to include specific responsibilities pertaining to the oversight of protection plans and prevention plans. The focus on these plans allows for children to be safely maintained in their home while addressing the parents' behaviors that lead to the children being unsafe.

Pre-Hearing Conferences

A Pre-Hearing Conference is a conversation among the parties that occurs before the Emergency Protective Services Hearing. The purpose of the conference is to discuss the child's placement, family time between the parent and child, treatment services, and the condition of the child's return to their own home. The meeting is conducted by a neutral facilitator and is comprised of parents, CFSD workers, attorneys, tribal representatives, CASAs, guardian ad litem, foster parents, family members, and children, if appropriate. Pre-Hearing Conferences provide an opportunity for all parties to establish a mutual understanding of what is in the best interest of the children, and to begin working as a team toward reunification of the family.

Emergency Protective Services Hearings

Emergency Protective Services (EPS) Hearings give parents an opportunity to appear in court within five business days of a child's removal. It also expedites the appointment of legal counsel and seeks to engage the parents in supportive services aimed at reunifying the child with their family.

Moving the Dial Conferences

In collaboration with the Court Improvement Project (CIP), CFSD has held six virtual conferences comprised of judges, public defenders, county attorneys, CASAs and CFSD staff to identify ways to improve the child welfare system. Topics on the agenda include CFSD's safety model, training on substance use disorders and how they impact families, the importance of permanency for children in foster care, ICWA best practices and requirements, and improving timeliness to permanency while engaging the voice of the child.

Safety Committee

CFSD re-established the safety committee to conduct the review of the safety model that guides investigations to ensure documents reflect current policy and best practice. The committee assessed and made changes to documents so the application of and reason behind specific forms were streamlined and clear to staff. To ensure evaluation and changes would be supported and implemented statewide, the committee engaged

staff at all levels in this process. The committee was comprised of a child protection specialist and supervisor from each region, a centralized intake specialist and supervisor, the training development specialist supervisor, a continuous quality improvement specialist, and two regional administrators.

Wellness Program

Beginning in July 2021, CFSD engaged with consulting firm Alvarez & Marsal to develop a greater understanding of the needs and concerns of child welfare workers with the goal of increasing worker retention and enhancing employee wellness. Using insights obtained through a staff survey with a 70% response rate, CFSD developed wellness programs and other interventions to increase employee satisfaction and retention. CFSD also hired a wellness coordinator to establish and evaluate programs aimed at enhancing staff resiliency and increasing staff retention.

TRAININGS

Community CORE Training and Child Welfare 101

These trainings are conducted across the state to educate local community providers, Legislators, and legal partners about CFSD's safety and practice model. The training focuses on how child protections specialist make safety decisions, as well as how local communities can play an active role in preventing removals and providing services to families.

Engagement Training by Casey Family Programs

CFSD contracted with Casey Family Programs to provide an engagement training to all supervisors, family group decision coordinators, and permanency planning specialists. The training highlighted the importance of engaging families throughout the life of the case. This was an important step in laying the foundation for an improved culture of engaging families.

Supervisor Training created in Partnership with University of Montana

With the support of University of Montana's Center for Children, Families and Workforce Development, CFSD developed and implemented a training for CFSD supervisors. The training consists of four on-line modules: 1) Foundations for Child Welfare Supervisor, 2) Coaching and Implementing the Safety Model, 3) Leading Your Staff to Positive Safety, Permanency and Well-Being Outcomes for Children and Families, and 4) Child Welfare Leadership Academy.

Trauma Informed Practice

Linking Systems of Care (LSOC) was a demonstration project undertaken by the U.S. Office of Victim of Crime (OVC), the Montana Board of Crime Control, and the University of Montana Criminology Research Group. The project called upon stakeholders

(including CFSD) from across the state to partner to “Heal individuals, families, and communities, link systems of care, and facilitate informed decision making.” The Linking Systems of Care Trauma Informed Training Curriculum was an outcome of this demonstration project. CFSD worked with the LSOC team and developed a child-welfare-specific curriculum. CFSD has trained multiple employees regarding trauma informed practice and has implemented the training into the department’s wellness program.

New Supervisor Safety Model Training

An extension to the supervisor training developed with University of Montana, all new child protection specialist supervisors participate in a weeklong training to enhance their skills specific to supervisor the safety model.

Safety Model Trainings

As required through the 2021 legislative practice audit, CFSD reviewed, enhanced, and trained the safety model multiple times throughout the past two years. The following components were trained: immediate danger assessment, protections plan, safety management plan, overall procedures, and fidelity review process.

Monthly Advanced Practice Trainings

In accordance with HB459 from the 2021 Legislative Session, CFSD has implemented monthly advanced practice trainings to ensure employees can meet their 20 hours of continuing education. Topics trained in 2023 included ethics, legislative changes, ICWA, engaging absent parents, quality home visits, child development, time management, case review, and supporting kinship families.

CULTURE

Guiding Leadership Principles

CFSD leadership created these principles during a Casey Family Programs Workshop to set expectations for the culture within the agency. The principles are identified as: clear objective, leadership, teamwork, and shared decision making, respect, continuous improvement and celebrate success. The guiding leadership principles have served as the foundation for change and improvement within the Child and Family Services Division.

Learning Culture and Team Decision Making

Using the Guiding Leadership Principles, CFSD Leadership created a culture of learning and team decision making. Child protection is a complex, high-stress career. Employees do best when they have support in decision-making and learning. Practice Principles were developed to guide day-to-day work and to support consistent practice across the state. These principles were built with the belief that families are the experts about their own needs. Delivering services in a respectful, engaging, family-centered manner will

result in positive outcomes for the children, families, and communities we serve. The principles are an extension of the Guiding Leadership Principles.

Continuous Quality Improvement

The Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) implementation team oversees improvement efforts within CFSD. The team is responsible for monitoring program data to identify and prioritize challenges, identify strategies to address challenges, and to test strategies to learn how to improve as a program.

Collaborative Safety Science

This body of science engages disciplines such as human factors engineering, systems engineering, organizational management, psychology, sociology, and anthropology. Furthering this unique blend of sciences is the integration of Behavior Analysis, Forensic Interviewing and Trauma Informed Care, ultimately resulting in the Collaborative Safety model. The integration of Behavior Analysis science into the model supports understanding how staff make decisions in an organizational setting, as well as understanding how managers and supervisors shape employee performance to achieve successful outcomes.

Policy and Procedure Manual

CFSD has updated and enhanced its policy and procedure manual to better clarify the work conducted by the agency and to provide staff with straightforward procedures. Several procedures align with best practice, and each one focuses on helping staff to understand how the procedure helps to achieve better outcomes for families. CFSD's overarching policy areas are identified as safety, permanency, well-being, fiscal, and training.