



# Reducing Reliance on Non-Family Placements

## *A Judicial Toolkit*

### **A Checklist for Judges and Legal Partners** **Collaborating with Non-Family Placements, the Child Welfare Agency,** **and Other Stakeholders about Policies and Practices**

Judges should meet regularly with the child welfare agency and with the directors of residential programs and other services. In these meetings judges and legal partners should ask for specific information on each residential program and may request that this information be required on a monthly or quarterly basis via reports submitted to the judge and/or multidisciplinary committee. This checklist provides questions judges and legal partners should ask when reviewing residential interventions as part of a multidisciplinary collaborative.<sup>1 2 3</sup>

#### **I. Questions to Ask Non-Family Placements, the Child Welfare Agency, and Other Stakeholders about Policies and Practices**

##### *Organizational Culture & Structure*

- ◇ Is the residential program licensed by its state authority and do they hold national accreditation?
- ◇ Does the residential program provide regular and consistent training, coaching and supervision to its staff?
- ◇ Does the residential program employ trauma informed care and utilize evidence based or evidence informed practices?
- ◇ Will the residential program send a representative to court, if needed or requested?

##### *Cultural and Linguistic Competence*

- ◇ Do youth have the opportunity to engage in religious practices representative of their faith or beliefs with their families in their home communities?
- ◇ Do the residential program's staffs reflect the diversity of the youth being referred for treatment?
- ◇ Do all residential program staff receive training on cultural and linguistic competence?
- ◇ Is the residential program able to meet the linguistic needs of all of the youth and families referred?

##### *Trauma-Informed Care Environments*

- ◇ Are staff trained in trauma-informed care and have written plans available to them on how to engage and interact with each individual youth and family as well as what not to do?
- ◇ What is the program's policy on the use of restraints and seclusions? What has been done to minimize restraints/seclusions? Is the use of restraints debriefed and is data collected to improve outcomes in this area?
- ◇ What is the policy or what guidance is given regarding when staff is to call law enforcement?

<sup>1</sup> For more information see [Every Kid Deserves a Family: A Judicial Guide to Better Placements and Best Practices for Residential Interventions for Youth and their Families: A Resource Guide for Judges and Legal Partners with Involvement in the Children's Dependency Court System](#)

<sup>2</sup> See also Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Every Kid Needs a Family* Policy Report, available at <http://www.aecf.org/resources/every-kid-needs-a-family/>

<sup>3</sup> Residential programs should establish policies and philosophies that mitigate the use of seclusions and restraints.

### *Family & Community Connections*

- ◇ Are there opportunities for youth to have daily contact and weekly time at home with their family or other supports?
- ◇ Are aftercare services provided by or coordinated through the residential program to ease the transition from the non-family setting to another, less restrictive placement?
- ◇ What personal property are children allowed at the facility?
- ◇ Are youth allowed to attend public school where indicated as well as spend time in the community developing prosocial peers in positive activities and events – preferably in their home communities?

### *Availability of Services*

- ◇ Who makes up the treatment team?
- ◇ What medical staff are available at the facility? How do they monitor medications and how are medications reviewed with the child and the family?
- ◇ Are youth advocates made available to engage, guide, support and help empower the youth in the program?
- ◇ Are any specialized services available for children who have been identified as victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in the residential program? What precautions are being taken by the residential program to prevent youth from the residential program from becoming victims of CSEC?
- ◇ Does the program discharge children who runaway or will a space be held for a child who runs away? For how long?
- ◇ Will the program transport a child to court if the child wishes to attend?

## **II. Data Judges Should Request from Non-Family Placement Facilities**

- ◇ Has the residential program developed a method for data collection and benchmarking its performance? What outcome data is available?
- ◇ What is the ratio of direct care staff to children in the residential program in the awake and non-awake shifts?
- ◇ What is the capacity of the residential program and what is the age range?
- ◇ What is the average length of stay for the children currently in the home?
- ◇ How many children have returned home from the residential program or moved to less restrictive placements in the past twelve months?
- ◇ How many children have aged out of the residential program in the past twelve months? How many have entered extended foster care?
- ◇ How frequently are restraints/seclusions used?
- ◇ How many children from the residential program have been arrested in the past twelve months?
- ◇ How many children have been identified as victims of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) in the past twelve months?

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