

Transforming Wisconsin's Child Welfare System

The last several years have shown us that every family needs help sometimes. We all play a key role in helping build a system supportive of healthy families.

Since 2018, Wisconsin has been working toward transforming the child welfare system to become more in-home, family-focused, and collaborative. This effort aims to dramatically reduce the proportion of CPS and YJ children and youth who are served outside of their family home.

Research Supports the Transformation

- Increased investment in prevention services has been linked to:
 - decreased maltreatment,
 - improved outcomes
 - and decreased downstream costs.
- Removals, regardless of length, have a profound impact on the child and family and have been long associated with negative outcomes for both children and families.
- Findings also suggest that removal from home leads to increased likelihood of long-term negative consequences.
 - This was true even when comparing children who were removed, to children who experienced similar maltreatment but were not removed from their parent's care.
 - For justice-involved youth, even short stays in detention increase the risk of recidivism.

For more information:

Capacity Building Center for States. (2021). *The evidence for strengthening families*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/evidence-strengthening-families>. PDF download.

Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2020, July 1). Study: Pretrial Juvenile Detention Increases Odds of Felony Recidivism by 33%. *Annie E. Casey Foundation*. Study: [Pretrial Juvenile Detention Increases Odds of Felony Recidivism by 33% - The Annie E. Casey Foundation \(aecf.org\)](https://www.aecf.org/study/pretrial-juvenile-detention-increases-odds-of-felony-recidivism-by-33%/).

Putting Families First: <https://dcf.wisconsin.gov/family-first>.

How is Putting Families First changing child welfare practice in Wisconsin?

4.5

Fewer children removed per day in 2021 compared to 2017

3,000+

children and 1,600 families served with flexible funding (Targeted Safety Support Funds – TSSF)

77%

of families who were supported w/ flexible funds as part of an in-home plan never experienced a removal

Administrative data reflects 2021 information and comes from the eWiSACWIS case management system.

The Department of Children and Families is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. If you have a disability and need to access services, receive information in an alternate format, or need information translated to another language, please call the Division of Safety and Permanence at (608)266-8787. Individuals who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind or speech disabled can use the free Wisconsin Relay Service (WRS) – 711 to contact the department.

Judicial & Legal Stakeholders: Supporting In-Home Planning

Child welfare systems, including child protective services and community-based youth justice, and legal partners have long had to balance the harm of removing a child and the potential risk of a child remaining in-home.

Research makes clear that child welfare systems have a significant responsibility to support children, youth, and families remaining safely together.¹

DCF and local child welfare agencies have increased supports to keep children safely in-home as part of Putting Families First. This has included a renewed commitment to:

- Creative efforts to keep children in-home & prevent removals
- Increased partnership with a family's extended support network
- Renewed emphasis on partnering with community supports

Legal Partners can support in-home planning in several critical ways:



Hearing from Parents

Legal partners have a key role in helping families navigate the system. Hearing directly from parents about what they need to be successful is vital to in-home planning. Ensure parents understand what is needed from them at key points of the case.



Partner With Your Local Child Welfare Agency

Ask your local partners what ways they are implementing efforts to keep more children safely in-home!



Ask Key Questions

Asking key questions during court proceedings has been found to help decrease removals and increase relative placements.

¹ Capacity Building Center for States. (2021). *The evidence for strengthening families*. Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Service. <https://capacity.childwelfare.gov/states/resources/evidence-strengthening-families>. PDF download.

For more information on Putting Families First:
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Key questions to support in-home planning may include:



- What does the family think is needed to be successful in home?
- What can be done to remove the safety concern instead of the child?
- Can someone the child knows move into the home to support the family?
- Can the caregiver and the child move together to a relative's home?
- Can public safety threats be reduced by matching services with delinquency-related needs?
- What are you seeing in the home that makes you think this plan will be successful?
- What ensures monitoring/accountability of this plan?
- If the child has been removed, what is the path for this child to go home?

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