



Family First Prevention Services Act Opportunities for Children, Youth and Families in Minnesota *July 2019 - a working document*

Implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) provides Minnesota an opportunity to examine how we engage, support and serve families, children and youth facing unique challenges. The prospect of developing true prevention services that meet families where they are at, and meeting unique needs as defined by the family, is inspiring.

As service experts, leaders within the community and collaborators with government, we know well that today's system presents inherent complexities that will require all stakeholders to bring creativity, expertise and clarity of purpose as we collaborate to design FFPSA strategies within Minnesota. In this process we will strive to support planning and implementation efforts that build capacity, engage families, and lead us to become a whole new system in the service of our children, youth and families.

The following **values**, **system reforms**, and **practical applications** for FFPSA were composed by service providers from across the current continuum of children's services. This contribution is offered to support the development of a vision for how FFPSA implementation can inspire system transformation that results in deep and lasting benefit for Minnesota's children and families.

Values that should shine through MN's implementation of FFPSA

Culturally responsive – racial disparities in our child welfare system are the top priority to be addressed as a new system is developed. Every process, every committee, every system decision must incorporate considerations of equity and cultural responsiveness. For the new system to be culturally responsive we will need to imagine approaches that are not yet but should be available to all Minnesota families.

Family-centered – placing children's needs at the center of decision making should include deep engagement with and creative support for parents and the family system. Building on the strengths of families, new approaches should clearly support parent engagement and empowerment, emphasize parent skill building and strategize for long-term family stability.

Child and youth-centered – working with children and youth as partners and experts, service design should identify their hopes and dreams, goals, unique strengths, assets, interests, cultures and histories to assist them in finding the best fit possible for long term connections.

Family system service orientation – seeing families with their strengths and needs services must address immediate challenges while building toward family stability, and importantly *should not require a clinical diagnosis* to initiate problem solving with families to support new levels of health, sustainability, and wellbeing.

Services designed for children, youth and families – a system designed around meeting people’s needs will yield different results. Included in this child and family centered design should be prioritization on:

- Reducing barriers to services.
- Providing right service at the right time. Arbitrary timeframes for systems to deliver services should not be imposed on children and families, and, children should not be required to “fail” out of service levels prior to accessing the needed level of care.
- The full continuum of services is valued and supported to meet all needs - including group home levels of care for children and youth who require a congregate setting to be stable, supported, and plan for their futures.

Prevention is valued – FFPSA will create opportunities for prevention services to the extent that Minnesota courageously defines candidacy for foster care to allow for true prevention to take place, meaning interventions to assure stability and safety for the child and family prior to considering removal based on eminent risk. ***Prevention with the family at the center is the most promising part of the FFPSA discourse.*** Our deep and sincere aspiration for this implementation work is to design Minnesota’s approach so that we are claiming all opportunity for true prevention work with children, youth and families.

Sustainable systems need sustainable design – today’s systems are fragile and FFPSA implementation must create opportunity to further stabilize the excellent work happening today – instead of further destabilizing an overburdened and underinvested in system. Specifically:

- Our workforce requires long-term investments and thoughtful strategies for all leadership levels within the workforce to include full representation of communities served.
- We must leverage the scholarship, evaluation and expertise that we have today from implementation of current practice models. Excellence in practice requires constant quality improvement, pursuit of new and updated models – and that can only be possible on a foundation of solid practice, not a constantly shifting practice environment.

Trust and recognize the experts:

- Children and youth should be engaged in their services, they are experts of their experiences. Our system should attend to the immediate needs and longer-term dreams articulated by children and youth served.
- Families are experts to their experiences and to identifying natural or external supports that will be of greatest value.
- Service providers should be recognized for their expertise.

System Reforms made possible through FFPSA implementation

In today's system, a family must experience some level of crisis to access services. Typically, in the experience of receiving or seeking services, there are a host of barriers – from eligibility criteria to medical necessity, from a lack of insurance coverage to long waiting lists. We can build it differently. We can develop services that feel different – where families actively seek early support to address issues prior to crisis, and feel welcomed, supported and congratulated as they solve their problems by accessing the specific services they need.

Minnesota's FFPSA implementation process brings new attention, momentum and opportunity for system reforms that can set the foundational structures for a new way of serving.

We honor the family with its full capacity and full potential to identify its own best solutions and define what success looks like for them.

A family systems focus foundationally will:

- Provide the resources and flexibility to align to meet family needs – with a trauma-informed approach, instead of expecting families to meet system needs (financial eligibility, medical necessity, timelines, etc).
- Place the child and family needs at the center of service delivery – with early assessment to identify needs, and ability to provide targeted support without diagnosis, without deep system involvement, and with active facilitation that has clients and families driving service design and decisions.
- Honor the full continuum of needs and interventions includes access without reliance on a medical model of clinical diagnosis or related reimbursements to receive services.
- Honor family choice in determining who provides services and supports.

Parents, resource parents, extended family and kin are long-term resources:

- Starting with a prevention assessment that can be conducted from many community venues that helps the family to identify their immediate and long-term supports or services, so the wider system can deliver those services.
- The system sees parents as assets and invests in their immediate and future success.
- Support for parents can include peer mentors, just in time in-home resources, and other creative solutions to keep children and parents in home or in relationship.
- System supports children and youth to have permanent connections with family at the level of relationship that is possible, with parents, kin, adoptive and other relatives who are lifelong resources at varying levels based on ability.

Honoring children, youth and families we will build a multidisciplinary response that delivers services as needed within the children's service continuum and beyond:

- Teams can be developed to deliver services to the family as a system and/or serve unique individuals within the family as needed. The service teams are family-friendly, culturally specific and include the expertise needed to respond to root causes and underlying conditions.
- Service delivery includes well-planned transitions.

- Families will access services from multiple state, county, private agency providers and not even know it – coordination will be easily facilitated between diverse service providers with active engagement to best serve the child, youth and family.

Services must be agile, flexible and financially sustainable:

- Invest in serving in-home, including recognizing costs for travel, no-shows, and other requirements to build trust, capacity and skill to be present and serve in family homes.
- Equity in payment for workers throughout the system, including those with lived experience contributing as experts, peer supporters, or mentors.

System reforms will be integrated into the culture of all areas of the continuum, so children, youth and families experience a service system that:

- Includes and trusts people with lived experiences throughout the service system.
- Offers service that are based on the culture and values of the family accessing services.
- Offers family support that shifts from a “gotcha” system to a “walk along side” system.
- Understand that it takes as long as it takes – sometimes just showing up is progress.
- Is a system where a parent can call and ask for help without fear of losing their child.

Communities will experience a system that:

- Engages community with education on parenting, trauma, available resources.
- Promotes prevention services defined as prenatal through adolescent development.
- **Supports caregivers to access all needed supports so the caregiver is fully able to parent.** This includes housing, transportation, food, clothing, treatment services, medical care, financial assistance, and other supports that provide needed stability for loving parenting to occur.

Practical Application of FFPSA – once implemented, our system can incorporate new and enhanced services for families.

FFPSA creates great challenges and opportunities for the service system as it is designed today. As we enter into the phase of planning for implementation that will be years away, we pause to focus on services we know do and will make a great impact on the lives of Minnesota children, youth and families – inspiring our daily work as we pursue pathways to make these possibilities become realities.

Children, youth and families can benefit from new models of service, including:

- In-home family care – parent and child(ren) move in with another family.
- Active support for (newly) defined kin caregiver – informal and formal.
- Kinship engagement that includes community-based approaches and needed short and long-term support to actively parent kin and meet unique child/youth/family needs.
- Safety planning that allows children/youth to remain with their parents with greater support than the current family observation model while assuring child/youth wellbeing and preventing removal.
- Foster and kinship support parents are valued as part of the family journey instead of viewed as a punitive response to family crisis.

Minnesota should include priorities to support practices that are of value to unique cultural communities.

Research should be supported for practice models to become identified as Well Supported Models as defined the Federal FFPSA clearinghouse - including current models are working and could have greater impacts by enhancing capacity:

- Quality Parenting Initiative-Minnesota
- Signs of Safety
- Family Group Decision-Making
- Peer support models
- Early childhood: TICPP, ABC, Play Therapy
- Incorporating trauma response within service delivery models by including reimbursement for T (Trauma) codes
- Homebuilders
- Mockingbird Family Model
- Boys Town model

When Minnesota successfully incorporates the values, system reform and practical prevention elements suggested by the arrival of FFPSA, we will see new outcomes – including:

- Active interest and support for the role of culture in healthy family structures.
- Children are supported in their families and fewer children are in foster care.
- Effectively engaged diverse communities are becoming the next workforce and system leaders.
- Families are equipped and supported to be highly functioning.
- Service providers, counties, state leaders and community members are collaborating, engaging across silos and actively supporting and celebrating families across the state of Minnesota.

Families and children are all unique and merit investment, support and opportunity.

If FFPSA is true to its call in Minnesota, our reformed systems will be driven to meet unique needs and implement supports that seek to maintain long-term family relationships and well-being.