

WAFCA Pilot Project

Centralized Resource Connection for Children At-Risk of Out-of-State Placement

Description & Procedure

Background: Our state has experienced a loss in bed capacity and an increase in utilization of out-of-state placements for children with complex needs. From 2014-2020, RCC capacity in our state declined 32%, and placement data shows that the number of youths with complex needs placed out-of-state grew from 44 in 2016 to 119 in 2020. During this five-year time span, a total of 250 youths from 46 different counties were placed out-of-state for services. The pandemic has exacerbated the placement crisis and it is now having a destabilizing effect on our workforce. At the end of 2021, WAFCA member agencies alone reported 363 vacant positions, with 265 (73%) of those vacant positions being direct care staff.

In the fall of 2016, the Wisconsin County Human Services Association (WCHSA) and Wisconsin Association of Family & Children's Agencies (WAFCA) collaborated to form a workgroup comprised of state, county, provider, and other stakeholders. The purpose of this group was to identify the root causes of the increasing number of youth being placed in residential facilities outside of Wisconsin and to propose program and/or system solutions to better serve youth with complex care needs.

One of the solutions identified by the workgroup addressed the potential value of a centralized referral process (See ["Recommendations"](#) Pg 7). Action on this recommendation has not moved forward; however, centralized referral has re-emerged in recent discussions regarding placing youth with complex needs. Through recent discussions, WAFCA determined that a portion of this recommendation might be able to be lifted as a pilot to seek solutions for children at risk of leaving our state for treatment. Specifically, the recommendation envisioned a process that:

- Focused on youth with complex needs.
- Provided a universal format for submission of child information.
- Engaged system consultant expertise and representation from providers across the continuum of care.

Purpose: This pilot project will serve as an opportunity to put the above recommendations into practice with the goal to locate in-state treatment and services. A centralized process should narrow the placing agency's search to those who have capacity to serve the child and/or family. It should also produce as many viable options as possible, so that if one option does not work out, others can be tried, or so that a combination of services can be tried if residential services are unavailable.

Structure: The centralized resource connection process will be streamlined, with a singular contact for requesting a resource connection session, and a virtual platform for presenting the child's case so all providers receive the same information at the same time. This will prevent placing agencies from having to complete several different referral forms for various providers and allow providers to ask questions of placing agencies in real time.

Confidentiality: Information shared electronically should not include identifying information. Presentations conducted virtually will not be performed on HIPAA compliant platforms; therefore, placing agencies are encouraged to refrain from utilizing the child's name and/or other personally identifiable information during the session.

Participants: To be successful, we will need to draw on the full continuum of providers – from those serving children and families in home, to those licensing foster homes, to those operating group homes, and/or residential care centers. Multiple members from the placing agency, such as the child’s primary caseworker, a supervisor/manager, the county CCS worker/supervisor, and/or the foster care coordinator, will be needed as well, to ensure options explored can continue to be discussed amongst decision-makers following the session.

Goal: The goal of each session will be to have all possible treatment options identified for the child, and to equip the placing agency with contact information for the identified options so they can follow-up with those agencies specifically to coordinate the child’s care.

PROCESS

Resource connection sessions will be held on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday mornings from 8am-8:45am via Zoom. One child will be presented each session.

Placing agencies and provider agencies wishing to participate in the resource connection process must review and agree to the terms outlined in the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU).

- **Providers** should email this form along with agency contacts (those who will attend the connection sessions) to connect@wafca.org to be added to the provider list serv.
- **Placing agencies** requesting a connection session must submit the MOU to connect@wafca.org and complete the [Request Form](#) for the session to be scheduled.

Following receipt of the information **from a provider**, WAFCA staff will add the agency’s contact(s) to the provider list serv and begin including the contacts in connection session announcements.

Following receipt of the information **from a placing agency**, WAFCA staff will review the information for completeness.

- If complete, WAFCA will schedule the child for the next available session (unless the placing agency notes a specific day will not work for them), notify all placing agency staff of the day/time identified, and provide the Zoom link and Presentation Outline.
- If incomplete, WAFCA will request the missing information from the sender.

Announcements and reminders regarding upcoming sessions will be sent via email to the provider list serv.

Announcements will contain the information provided by the placing agency [*County/tribe seeking placement; Child specific information: Age, gender (how he/she/they identify), case type (CHIPS, JIPS, Delinquency), current residence (home, relative, foster home, group home, shelter, residential care center, etc.), and relevant diagnostic, cognitive/developmental functioning, and/or significant medical needs; a description of the child/youth’s support system*] so that individual providers can make an informed decision regarding their participation in the session.

During the session: WAFCA staff will review the ground rules for the session. Placing agencies will then utilize the Presentation Outline to share information about the child.

- Provider agencies will be allowed to ask questions and share how they may be able to support the child and/or family.
- ALL POTENTIAL SERVICE OPTIONS SHOULD BE PROVIDED PRIOR TO THE END OF THE SESSION. A combination of services is better than no in-state option. For example, if the child wants to stay with a relative and there is a resource but a lack of supports, agencies may share how they could support this placement.
 - Agency A – “Our agency could provide mentoring.”
 - Agency B – “Our agency can offer respite in a foster home.”
 - Agency C – “Our agency can provide weekly in-home family counseling.”

- Contact information for all options identified will be provided in the chat so that placing agencies can follow up.
- If a provider is unsure if they have options available, they may request the worker's contact information for follow-up.

NOTE: WAFCA is serving as a convener and connector only. All referrals for service must go through the provider agency directly.

Following the session: The placing agency will take the option(s) and contact information from the meeting, discuss next steps, and strategize funding solutions (if needed).

- If the agency decides to refer the child for services to one or more agencies who stepped forward as a resource, they will need to reach out to that agency directly to begin the process.
- The placing agency must also notify WAFCA of the outcome of the session (the child was/was not successfully served by an agency as a result of the connection session). This information can also be sent to connect@wafca.org.
- If services are tried and do not work out, a placing agency may request an additional connection session.

**This is a 6-month pilot. Feedback and suggestions for improvement are encouraged. Please send all to connect@wafca.org.