



# Promising Program Models that Prevent and Respond to Crises in Family-Based Settings

It is critical to train and support foster and kinship families so they can provide stable and loving environments in which the children and youth in their care can heal and thrive. However, there are often times when foster or kinship parents need help with a child or youth whose behaviors they don't know how to manage. And when options are limited for responding to a crisis, it can seem the only solution is through removal from the home and placement in more restrictive settings.

Research supports jurisdictions implementing approaches that both prevent and respond to crisis. On the prevention side, foster parent training that develops specific parenting skills to address behavioral issues and foster parent networks that provide emotional and social support can improve placement stability.<sup>1</sup> Mechanisms for immediately responding to crises are also needed. Foster families have identified timely support during crisis as critical to their success and ability to continue to care for children.<sup>2</sup> In addition, broad-based crisis response approaches that have been applied in child welfare settings have stabilized family-based placements and helped reduce step-ups into residential care.<sup>3</sup> Crisis response approaches can also be an impetus for identifying and providing additional services or interventions to families that prevent further crises.

This document highlights three approaches to crisis prevention and intervention that show promise:

- ▶ **Broad-based, community crisis response**
- ▶ **Crisis response training for foster and kinship families**
- ▶ **Crisis response embedded within support models for foster, kinship and adoptive families**

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<sup>1</sup> Benesh, A.S. & Cui, M. (2017). Foster parent training programmes for foster youth: A content review. *Child and Family Social Work*, 22, 548–559; Crum, Wes. (2010) Foster Parent Parenting Characteristics That Lead to Increased Placement Stability or Disruption. *Child and Youth Services Review*, 32, 185–190.

<sup>2</sup> Hudson, P., & Levasseur, K. (2002). Supporting foster parents: Caring voices. *Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice, and Program*, 81(6), 853-877.

<sup>3</sup> New Jersey Department of Children and Families. (2017). *The role of mobile response in transforming children's behavioral health: The NJ experience*.

## Broad-Based Crisis Response Programs

Broad-based crisis interventions intend to prevent children and youth from coming into care or going into congregate care, and to stabilize those in family-based placements. They are designed to be part of a community-based continuum of care.

### New Jersey Mobile Rapid and Stabilization Services

The New Jersey MRSS program's goal is to provide intervention and support at the earliest moment families identify that help is needed and to minimize the likelihood of future crises. A behavioral health worker is available to any family in the state at any time, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Services offered include crisis de-escalation, assessment and planning, in-home counseling, behavioral assistance, caregiver therapeutic support, intensive community-based services, skill-building, and medication management. The services are available to all families: birth, kinship, foster, guardianship and adoption. Crisis is defined by the child or family.

Based on the success of MRSS, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families created a policy that expanded access to serve all children entering family-based placements. When a child is removed from their home, an MRSS worker is assigned and meets with the child at the relative or foster placement within the first 72 hours. The MRSS worker meets individually with the child to acknowledge the trauma the child is experiencing and discuss how they can work together to address any worries or challenges the child might have with sleeping, eating, schoolwork, etc., as a result of this trauma. The MRSS worker also meets with the caregiver and discusses similar issues and strategies so the caregivers can feel more equipped to respond to any potentially challenging behaviors at the outset. This initial visit also establishes a relationship between the caregiver and MRSS, so that the caregiver is more likely to ask for help before there is a crisis. This new approach was initiated in a single county (Mercer) in August 2015 and implemented statewide in April 2017.

During the period from 2014 to 2018, between 95 and 98 percent of children served have remained in their current living situations. While difficult to attribute to any one intervention, such as MRSS, the number of New Jersey youth in out-of-home treatment/residential settings decreased consistently over the same time period.

MRSS has been replicated in other jurisdictions including Connecticut; Delaware; Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Nevada; and Oklahoma. University of Maryland supports an affinity group that links jurisdictions that implement MRSS and has compiled resources. For more information go to: <https://theinstitute.umaryland.edu/our-work/national/network/cbps/resources/>.



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## Crisis Training for Foster and Kinship Families

Training for foster and kinship families can integrate information and skills that help families prevent, address and de-escalate crises that may arise when a child or youth is in their care.

### Therapeutic Crisis Intervention for Families (TCIF)

TCIF offers an intensive five-day, train-the-trainer certification course that provides agency trainers with the tools to teach crisis prevention strategies and crisis intervention techniques to adults who care for children in their homes. Trainers are prepared to coach learners during skill practice sessions, to use role playing, to facilitate small group discussions, and to handle resistance to training. TCIF stresses crisis prevention and crisis de-escalation in ways that help children learn to avoid losing control. Participants receive all the necessary materials to deliver the training. New York OCFS-sponsored trainings are open to employees of organizations affiliated with OCFS.

### CORE Teen

CORE Teen is a free curriculum for prospective and current foster, adoptive, kinship and guardianship parents who are or will be raising older children from foster care who have moderate to severe emotional and behavioral challenges. Developed by Spaulding for Children through a three-year cooperative agreement with the federal Children's Bureau, the trauma-informed and culturally responsive curriculum was created with the intention of enabling youth with higher needs to continue living in families, rather than restrictive settings. Its goal is to help resource parents develop specialized knowledge and skills in order to reduce the risk of placement disruptions and increase permanency options. This intermediate to advanced training is designed for prospective families of older children who have gone through preservice training and also for parents already raising older children with higher needs.

CORE Teen has three components: self-assessment, classroom instruction, and video-based "right time" training. The self-assessment is a learning tool for families, allowing them to identify areas of strength and challenges in parenting older youth. The classroom content, designed to be used by a training team comprised of an experienced parent and a professional staff or trainer, includes seven modules totaling around 17 hours of training. The "right time" training is video-based and is designed to be used in support groups, during caseworker home visits, or at times when the family is experiencing a challenging situation. Evaluation during the pilot phase of CORE Teen showed improvement in competencies, such as trauma-informed parenting and behavior management. Tools from CORE Teen, such as the videos, may be helpful in recruiting new resource parents.



## Crisis Support Embedded Within Broader Foster and Kinship Family Support Models

Many foster and kinship family support models intentionally incorporate practices that are intended to prevent crises and promote stability while also addressing crises when they inevitably arise.

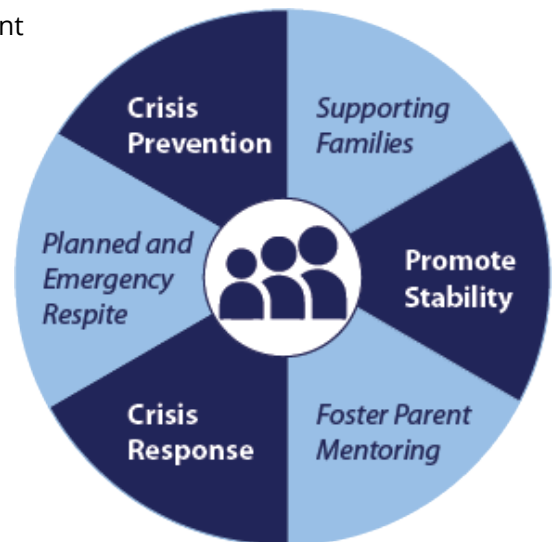
### Mockingbird Family Model/Hub Homes

The Mockingbird Family Model establishes a micro-community of six to ten foster and kinship family homes connected to a Hub Home (called a Constellation), ideally within a close geographic radius. The Hub Home is led by an experienced, certified foster family who creates a supportive community of cluster families, hosting monthly social events, and encouraging interaction to develop community among children and caregivers. The Hub Home parent keeps a bed open in the home, used for both planned and emergency respite to others in the cluster.

Evaluations have shown an increase in retention and placement stability. Primary cost is a stipend (for example, a minimum of \$10,000 per year) for each Hub Home to cover the cost of keeping a bed open (\$582-795 per month at the regular rate) and cost of events hosted in their home or community. Sheltering Arms in New York City uses this model.

### Anu Family Services Parent Coaches

Anu Family Services, based in Wisconsin, combines an on-call telephone crisis response system with their Parent Coaches. Foster, adoptive and kinship families can call the service at any time and get connected to the treatment foster care staff. If needed, the family is referred to a Parent Coach, who is the crux of their crisis response. Parent coaching is a short-term intervention that provides foster, adoptive and kinship parents and other caregivers with “hands-on, here-and-now tools” for bringing about rapid and dramatic improvement in their child’s behavior. If needed, Anu staff will convene a multidisciplinary team meeting to devise a full response, including referring to behavioral health clinicians from partnering agencies.



### Clark County, Nevada: Foster Parent Champions

The core philosophy of the Foster Parent Champions program is to “make caregivers lives easier.” Clark County employs ten part-time foster parent champions who work about 20 hours per week at \$20.00 per hour. Minimum qualifications include being a licensed foster parent for at least two years with no disruptions or investigations. Each champion has a unique set of skills, interests and experience, and so the program is able to support families with teens, infants, medically fragile children and sibling groups. The program was initially funded with a federal diligent recruitment grant. When the grant ended, the county Department of Family Services continued the program with its own funds after seeing the program’s results, which included a decrease in placement disruptions.

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Champions perform a wide variety of functions. A champion will call foster families within 24 hours of placement to ask if help or support is needed. Kin caregivers receive the same call, followed up with help with licensure and connection to a kinship service provider. Kin also receive a call at 30 days, since the county's experience is that while most relative placements are stable, disruptions that do occur are most likely to do so around 45 days after placement.

Champions are available to attend case staffing and court hearings, provide in-home assistance, and help with school issues, among other things. Champions intervene when a foster parent gives a 10-day notice to have the child removed. An intervention includes an assessment of the situation, identification of needed support, or in some cases a need to change the foster parent's placement preferences, such as age range.

The Champions program has received buy-in from the county system of care. Although caseworkers were initially concerned, they now support the program. Champions support caseworkers as well as foster parents because they handle some tasks that would otherwise fall to caseworkers.

*(from CHAMPS playbook – scroll down at: <https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org/policy-goal/provide-timely-access-to-trusted-dedicated-staff-and-peer-support/>)*

### Children's Home and Aid Foster Parent Mentors

Children's Home and Aid (CH&A), one of the largest statewide private providers of child welfare services in Illinois, created the foster parent mentoring program. The goals of the mentoring program are to improve retention of foster parents; increase placement stability; improve partnerships among workers, parents and foster parents; increase opportunities for shared parenting; and improve foster parent recruitment, among others.

The program has trained 223 volunteer mentors and between 160 and 170 are currently active. Volunteers are current or former licensed foster parents, and most are kinship caregivers, as are their mentees. Mentors receive seven hours of training over two days on topics such as licensing criteria and DCFS policy. A newly licensed foster parent is given the option to pair up with an appropriate mentor, who is then assigned to the foster parent for a minimum of six months and a maximum of 12 months. Mentors meet monthly with their mentees and maintain ongoing contact through emails, texts and phone calls. Mentors take on this role without compensation because they want to support other foster parents, be recognized as outstanding caregivers and receive support themselves.

Mentors focus on preventing crises and have achieved positive results. Ninety-three percent of 14-day notices submitted by foster parents have been retracted or extended after a mentor became involved. According to Ashley Akerman, CH&A Statewide Foster Parent Support Coordinator, such notices are almost never about the child; rather, they are about some service, training or support that is missing.

CH&A recently completed the TCIF Training of Trainers, mentioned above, and incorporated it into their training for foster and kinship families. Their peer support model, with TCIF, is being evaluated to become an evidence-based model. Early indicators are that TCIF is further improving stability and reducing step-ups to congregate care.

*(from CHAMPS playbook – scroll down at: <https://playbook.fosteringchamps.org/policy-goal/provide-timely-access-to-trusted-dedicated-staff-and-peer-support/>)*