

**JOINT COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT  
BETWEEN  
The Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS)  
AND  
ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES (DCFS)**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this agreement is to enhance working relationships and foster collaborative strategies in order to improve program performance and outcomes for children, families, and communities in the service area of Chicago, Illinois. The “parties” to this agreement are the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services, herein referred to as DCFS or the “Department” and the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS).

Applicable definitions for this agreement include:

- Foster Parent/Caregiver: Refers to persons designated by DCFS to be responsible for the day-to-day care of children and youth for whom the Department is legally responsible
- Caseworker: Refers to the person(s) responsible for providing direct service services to children for whom the Department is involved. These services include specialized areas (i.e. adoptions, resources, licensing, service coordination, purchase of service, liaison to courts) and as general casework (i.e. working with families, children and, if need be, courts to effect placement of children and maintain protection of the children and families and their rights).
- Purchase of Service (POS) Agencies: Refers to child welfare agencies that contract with DCFS to provide casework services to children and families.
- Family Partnership Agreement: Refers to the agreement that Head Start/Early Head Start programs offer all enrolled parents in which they set goals for the family.
- DCFS Service Plan: Refers to a written plan that is established between the worker and the children/family served, and any involved service providers. Its purpose is to formulate goals for the child based on their needs for health, safety and well being that were identified during the assessment process, what actions need to be taken; and identify what interventions and service will be provided to meet the child/family’s needs.

The cooperative agreement will consist of the following goals and objectives:

**I. Participation of Child Welfare-Involved Children and Families in Head Start and Early Head Start Programs**

*Goal: To enroll and sustain the participation of eligible children and families involved with the child welfare system--wards of the state that are in substitute care, children of wards, and children in intact families--in Head Start and Early Head Start programs.*

## A. Recruitment, Enrollment, and Information Sharing

1. DCFS will identify children who are or will be three years of age by September 1 for Head Start programs and children who are under age 3 for Early Head Start programs and their families in need of services in order to refer them to Head Start or Early Head Start. Caseworkers will give parents and foster parents information on Head Start/Early Head Start. DCFS will provide DFSS with lists of child welfare-involved children and children of wards who are of the appropriate ages on a quarterly basis. To the extent permissible by DCFS confidentiality rules and other applicable laws, information will include: name and birthday of the child, contact information on child's caseworker and supervisor, child welfare status of child (ward, child of ward, or intact family), address and phone number of child and with whom he or she is residing (i.e., biological parents, foster parents, home of relative), and the name of any non-custodial parent. In the case of children of wards or those residing in intact families, Head Start/Early Head Start will need to determine eligibility based on family income. In the case of wards, who are all eligible for Head Start/Early Head Start, in addition to the above information, DCFS will provide information about the child's health status and special needs, current or past early education experience, if known, and names of birth parents, to the extent permissible by DCFS confidentiality rules and other applicable laws. Lists will be compiled by zip code.

Early Head Start can be a good support for many young children and their families if utilized appropriately. Children benefit the most when they have the opportunity to maintain and establish healthy attachments to their primary caregivers. Children for whom the Department has a legal responsibility who have already experienced loss and separation, they are at risk for not only developing unhealthy attachments but also falling behind their peers in meeting milestones. For children, 0-2 years old, there is a consistent need for nurturing a care giving relationship. Therefore, IDCFS has developed an Early Head Start referral process.

### **IDCFS Early Head Start referral process for 0-2 will be as follows:**

- a. If the child is a ward in the custody of DCFS, the referral for Early Head Start will be driven by the Integrated Assessment (IA), Early Childhood Screening (ECS), Child and Youth Investment Team (CAYIT) recommendations, or other intervention. The results of the assessment or staffing shall support the need for Early Head Start programming. The early childhood specialist will provide the child's information to the caseworker or designee to make the appropriate referral.
- b. If the child is involved in the Intact Family and/or teen parenting programs, the process should proceed as outlined in section A(1) of the joint collaborative agreement. *(The distinction being made between wards, children served through Intact and a teen parent program is that the latter groups consist of children who remain in the care of their biological parents and have not had the adverse experience of losing that relationship. Wards who are newly placed in care are in a more vulnerable stage and the main goal should be for them to establish healthy relationships with their foster family.)*
- c. If a child who has been seen through IA and or ECS does not receive a recommendation for EHS after the completion of the assessment, the caseworker in consultation with ECS should revisit the idea of making a referral after there has been an indication that developmental and social emotional stability has been achieved.
- d. Caseworker may by- pass the referral step mentioned in step 1, when a foster parent is in need of day care- related services for their child. However, efforts shall be made to ensure that the Early Head Start provider is aware of the child's history and is able to alert the caseworker of any concerns they observe while caring for the child.

2. DCFS will provide parents/caregivers, foster parents and caseworkers for both wards and intact families with information on Head Start/Early Head Start programs on an ongoing basis. Enrollment may be initiated by either the caseworker or the caregiver.
3. DFSS will actively recruit children and families referred by DCFS--whenever open slots are available-- and will welcome children and families involved with the Department and prioritize their enrollment via the agency's selection criteria.
4. Annually, DFSS, in conjunction with the Head Start State Collaboration Office, will make a directory of Head Start/Early Head Start programs, including number of slots and program options, available to child welfare agency staff from both DCFS and POS agencies as well as to caregivers.
5. At the time of enrollment, caregivers or caseworkers will share information directly with Head Start/Early Head Start staff related to the child's educational needs, their performance, strengths, and needed supports.
6. Head Start/Early Head Start will share appropriate information with DCFS staff about the child. Head Start/Early Head Start will follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards to meet the needs of child and family by utilizing collaborative partners, including DCFS. DCFS and Head Start/Early Head Start will collaborate on resources to the maximum extent feasible when family needs are identified and community resources are not available.

#### **B. Educational Stability for Wards**

1. When issues arise, such as inadequate attendance, or behavioral, physical, or medical challenges, that may threaten a child's continued enrollment in the program, Head Start/Early Head Start will contact both the caseworker and the caregiver and will include both in the resolution of the issue.
- 2.. When contacted by a Head Start/Early Head Start program, caseworkers will respond proactively to all concerns, i.e., by convening a family meeting.
- 3.. If the child should move, efforts for the child to remain in the Head Start/Early Head Start program through the end of the program year will be explored and employed, as warranted.

#### **C. Transition Procedures**

1. If it is determined that a child should transition to another program upon a placement move, Head Start/Early Head Start staff, caseworkers and caregivers will work together to develop and implement an appropriate transition for the child, which may include: opportunity for the child to say goodbye to Head Start/Early Head Start staff and other children, as appropriate; collection of art work and other educational materials; and necessary paperwork for transition to another Head Start/Early Head Start program.

2. When a Head Start child moves to kindergarten, or an Early Head Start child moves to preschool, the caseworker will collaborate with Head Start/Early Head Start to help the caregiver select a preschool setting or kindergarten and to effect an appropriate transition for the child.

## **II. Service Provision**

*Goal: To encourage and enhance collaboration among the parties in order to improve service delivery to target families.*

### **A. Case Conferences**

Within 10 days of enrollment and prior to each six-month Administrative Case Review (ACR) and on an as-needed basis, the caseworker will confer with Head Start/Early Head Start program personnel regarding the child's educational services and will provide information on visitation, permanency planning, and service provision/case plan.

### **B. Operationalization of Joint Cooperative Agreement**

1. The DCFS child welfare specialist may list the name and mailing address of the appropriate Head Start/Early Head Start staff person on the case review mailing request (CRMR) notification (form CFS-ACM15) of any child enrolled in the Head Start/Early Head Start program. When possible, the designated Head Start/Early Head Start staff will attend the ACR during the portion regarding the child's education, as determined by DCFS.
2. Head Start/Early Head Start will follow the Head Start Program Performance Standards for the provision of services and provide information to the caseworker and the caregiver regarding progress, outcomes, and results, as appropriate. Head Start/Early Head Start will work with the DCFS caseworker, the child, and family members, as appropriate, to support the case plan, including the permanency plan.
3. The DCFS team supervisor or designated staff may meet with a designated Head Start/Early Head Start staff person at least quarterly during the program year to discuss new referrals from intact families being served by the Department. It will be the responsibility of DCFS to have discussed the program with the parents and to obtain an appropriate release, as determined by DCFS.

At this meeting, numbers of possible referrals can be discussed, but no specific family will be discussed without above mentioned signed release.

4. DCFS will consider Head Start/Early Head Start program staff as potential participants in the child and family team and will invite them to child and family team meetings as well as ACRs, as needed.
5. In order to share information regarding the goals and services established by the program, the child's progress, their relationship with foster and birth parents, and the child's health and well-being issues, Head Start/Early Head Start will invite DCFS caseworkers of wards in substitute care or children of wards to participate in parent

conferences or Family Partnership Agreement reviews, as appropriate and needed. Head Start/Early Head Start staff will participate in DCFS team/case planning meetings, as feasible. Both the Department and the Head Start/Early Head Start agency will adhere to all applicable confidentiality rules and laws, as specified in Section VI of this agreement, related to sharing information at these meetings.

### **III. Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect**

*Goal: Head Start/Early Head Start programs will play a conscious and active role in preventing child abuse and neglect.*

- A. DCFS will provide training and technical assistance for Head Start/Early Head Start program staff and parents on child abuse and neglect prevention, including protective factors that keep families safe and recognizing and responding to signs of family stress.
- B. Head Start/Early Head Start programs will adhere to the Head Start Program Performance Standards that support family strengthening and child abuse prevention.
- C. Head Start/Early Head Start programs will conduct the self-assessment used by Strengthening Families through Early Care and Education Illinois or integrate the tool into their annual program self-assessment process, as feasible.

### **IV. Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect**

*Goal: Ensure the safety of children participating in Head Start/Early Head Start programs.*

- A. Head Start/Early Head Start program staff will report all cases of suspected abuse or neglect via the hotline. In the case of reports made on child-welfare-involved children and families, where there is an existing relationship between Head Start/Early Head Start program staff and the caseworker, staff will also inform the caseworker of the report.
- B. Child protection investigative staff are responsible for the completion of the investigation. Once an investigator is assigned, he or she will work with the Head Start/Early Head Start program to ensure that an appropriate safety plan and supports are available to the child and the caregiver.
- C. All Head Start/Early Head Start program staff will cooperate with DCFS investigators during child protection (abuse and neglect) and licensing investigations.

### **V. Training**

*Goal: All DCFS and POS caseworkers and their supervisors and all Head Start/Early Head Start program staff have the information they need to fully collaborate with each other to benefit child-welfare involved children and their families.*

- A. DCFS and Head Start/Early Head Start will coordinate and provide cross-training on policies, procedures, and services that inform or are included in this collaborative

