



## *Child & Family Service Reviews (CFSRs) and Family Support Services*

With the creation of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), the outcomes of safety, permanency, and child and family well-being have come to the forefront of the child welfare system. As the work of state child welfare agencies increases and states have fewer resources to meet those needs, statewide networks—such as those directly supported by FRIENDS—and family support programs can play a critical role in helping states improve outcomes for children and their families.

### **FRIENDS and the CFSR Process**

The Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) process is a partnership between states and the U.S. Children's Bureau to improve the child welfare system's outcomes of safety, permanency, and child and family well-being. Yet, child welfare agencies cannot achieve these outcomes in isolation. Increasingly, they are recognizing the value of family support services in helping them meet these needs.

Through the CBFRS Statewide Child Abuse Prevention networks, agencies have the opportunity to learn from one another and become mutually accountable for successful child welfare outcomes. The CFSR process provides an opportunity for agencies to further engage with and build upon these networks, family support programs, and family-centered practices. By utilizing the infrastructure provided by CBFRS networks for the CFSR process, states can save valuable time building the relationships necessary for child welfare reform efforts.

With a long and successful history of working with states to improve outcomes for families and their children, the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Family Resource and Support (CBFRS) Programs is in a unique position to provide training, technical assistance, and consultation to States as they move through

the CFSR process. FRIENDS can help states identify family-centered and strengths-based approaches, tools, and practices that promote capacity-building and address CFSR's Child and Family Well-Being Outcomes, enabling states to more easily link prevention and safety programming and ultimately resulting in improved well-being.

**Data-Gathering Methods:** Organizing an appropriate data-gathering method is critical to the validity, completeness, and, perhaps most important, representativeness of the data collected. FRIENDS is available to provide training, technical assistance, and consultation to CBFRS lead agencies, in partnership with child welfare agencies, to help them work with existing stakeholder groups and design and implement data-gathering processes—such as interviews, focus groups, surveys, statewide service inventories, and other methods—to determine their conformity to and rate systemic factors in CFSR outcome areas.

**Program Improvement Plans:** Program Improvement Plans (PIPs) based on a state's statewide assessment and site review must involve stakeholders of the child welfare system if reform efforts are to effect meaningful change. Shared mutual accountability must go beyond the review and become embedded in the culture of child welfare. Once PIPs are approved by the U.S. Children's Bureau, state child welfare agencies—in full partnership with parents and other stakeholders—must incorporate them into their Child and Family Services Plans (CFSPs), also known as Title IV-B Plans. To fully realize the mandate of the CFSR process, agencies must implement and evaluate their programs and practices as outlined in the CFSP in ongoing partnership with parents, youth, and other stakeholders, and must continue to build shared accountability for improving the lives of children and their families.

**Engaging Parents:** Parent engagement and leadership within the state child welfare system is crucial if the culture of child welfare is to be inclusive and responsive to the individual family's capacities and needs. FRIENDS has a solid history of providing successful strategies and tools to work with parents, and can assist states in identifying successful practices for engaging parents in the CFSR process. The long-term success of the CFSR depends on strong consultation with parents, in order to create a framework to interpret the significance of identified outcomes in a manner that tightly links outcomes for families to specific service activities and practices within the program improvement process.

**Evaluating Outcomes:** It is important for family support programs to be accountable for the outcomes of the families and children they serve by evaluating their activities and demonstrating the extent to which desired outcomes are indeed occurring. Programs also need information about their outcomes in order to improve their services. The FRIENDS guidebook *Outcome Accountability for Family Support Programs* includes everything programs need to begin identifying, measuring, and reporting outcomes, and to make program improvements based on objective, quantifiable outcome data. FRIENDS staff are available to provide training and technical assistance in the use of this model.

**Utilizing Peer Review:** Peer-to-peer and peer review processes can help programs identify and address needed improvements. FRIENDS promotes the utilization of peer-to-peer and peer review processes as proven methods of achieving quality practice with local adaptation of standards and the full engagement of key participants. This method of mutual learning and support can be structured and re-tooled to support specific needs identified in the CFSRs and Program Improvement Plans.

**Community Child Protection:** With many states adopting dual track or differential response systems in child protection cases, family support programs have become critical. Often, when a state child welfare agency receives a child protec-

tion services (CPS) referral, the family referred may be at a lower risk of child maltreatment and not require a full investigation and judicial response. For these lower-risk situations, community- or neighborhood-based family support programs offer families the kinds of services that improve family functioning and keep them from entering the child welfare system, a prevention strategy that states are more often embracing as they strive to improve their child welfare systems. Community child protection is one model of shared mutual accountability for the lives of vulnerable children and their families on which FRIENDS can provide training, to help CBFRS programs achieve their tertiary prevention goal of preventing repeat maltreatment.

*FRIENDS' other areas of expertise and concentration include self-assessment, respite, working with diverse populations, supporting children with disabilities and their families, parent involvement and leadership, and promoting the importance of prevention. States can also request training and technical assistance on these topics as they undertake the Child and Family Services Review process.*

FRIENDS, a service of the Children's Bureau, is the National Resource Center for the Community Based Family Resource and Support (CBFRS) Programs, under a cooperative agreement between Family Support America and the Office on Child Abuse and Neglect, ACF, HHS. FRIENDS assists and supports the CBFRS state lead agencies by providing training, technical assistance, and information to promote the purposes of the CBFRS program. It offers a range of services designed to assist States, tribes and tribal organizations, migrant programs, and local programs in the development of community-based family resource and support programs and statewide prevention networks throughout the U.S.

FRIENDS has existed since 1995 and is a collaborative effort of organizations with many years of experience in delivering training and technical assistance. For more information, please visit the FRIENDS website, [www.friendsnrc.org](http://www.friendsnrc.org), or contact:

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