

**NEWS from the North Dakota Department of Human Services and the North Dakota Supreme Court
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Media contacts: LuWanna Lawrence at 701-328-1892 or Heather Steffl at 701-328-4933

North Dakota launches Dual Status Youth Initiative to better serve those in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems

BISMARCK, N.D. – On Jan. 1, North Dakota launched the statewide Dual Status Youth Initiative to improve services for children and families who are served by both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems (dual status) by improving collaboration among the agencies that serve them. Dual status youth are among the most vulnerable and challenging to serve, as many have complex needs associated with trauma and maltreatment.

“A group of stakeholders in North Dakota began collaborating several years ago and recognized the need to make this population of young people a priority. Stakeholders wanted to find new ways to change a child’s course and prevent them from entering or becoming further involved in the juvenile justice system,” said Lauren Sauer, acting director of the North Dakota Department of Human Services’ Children and Family Services Division.

In July 2017, stakeholders including the North Dakota Supreme Court, the North Dakota Department of Human Services’ (DHS) Children and Family Services Division, the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation’s (DOCR) Division of Juvenile Services, and the North Dakota Juvenile Justice State Advisory Group agreed to partner on dual status system improvements efforts. The group then contacted the Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice to assist in developing a plan to better serve children and families in those systems.

This past fall, the plan was finalized. In preparation for the statewide launch of the initiative, over 130 county and juvenile court case managers and supervisors participated in four training sessions held in Bismarck, Fargo, Grand Forks and Minot. Additional trainings will be offered in 2019, and an online training is under development.

One of the keys to improving services to families in both systems was the development of a memorandum of understanding between the North Dakota Supreme Court and DHS to create technology infrastructure that allows secure data and information sharing.

“System reform can be difficult, especially at a statewide level. It took the ability of stakeholders to collaborate on issues such as definitions, data sharing, policies and practice in order to move toward a shared vision,” said Cory Pederson, chair of the Dual Status Youth Executive Committee.

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Another key to the Dual Status Youth Initiative involves the use of a multi-disciplinary team that brings together a variety of people who have a relationship with a child to make decisions with the child's family to improve child outcomes. This mirrors the newly launched Family Centered Engagement Model, which is available to families in Burleigh, Grand Forks, Mercer, McLean, Oliver, Sheridan and Stutsman counties. The model provides a highly trained, neutral facilitator to assist team members in the creation of joint plan for families.

Pedersen said additional funding will be needed to expand the Family Centered Engagement Model statewide, and it is a critical element to the Dual Status Youth Initiative.

"The Family Centered Engagement Model engages families faster to divert children from being placed in foster care by keeping them safely at home or with relatives whenever possible," said Tracy Miller, DHS' child maltreatment prevention and family preservation services administrator.

North Dakota is the only state to implement this type of multi-systems work statewide with families involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Other states have focused their efforts on a select county or region. An evaluation of the initiative will be conducted by Greacen Associates in order to ensure the plan is successfully implemented, to measure outcomes and make improvements where necessary.

"I commend the group for recognizing that if children and families are going to have the best long-term outcomes, system reforms are imperative, though challenging at times. The evaluation of the initiative will be critical to continuing our work to improve practices," said Lisa Bjergaard, DOCR's director of the Division of Juvenile Services.

For more information on the Dual Status Youth Initiative, contact Cory Pedersen at 701-222-6682, ext. 110 or DHS' Children and Family Services Division at 701-328-2316, toll-free 800-245-3736 or tramiller@nd.gov.

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