

[DSWD ORDER NO. 13, S. 1998, May 20, 1998]

GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE FOSTER CARE PROGRAM FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

I. RATIONALE

It is the right of every child to grow up and be nurtured by his/her family. Family life, coupled with the satisfactory relationships between parents and the child results into the wholesome personality development of the child. The right to a family is a basic right under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Philippine and Youth Welfare Code.

The biological family is responsible for providing family life to a child and for this reason should be fostered and nurtured whenever possible. There are instances, however, when this may not be possible. When problems of broken home, unwed motherhood, abandonment, illness, extreme poverty seriously disrupt the family to fulfill its primary function as a basic institution in rearing a child to adulthood, then substitute parental care becomes necessary. The child has to be cared for elsewhere temporarily before his/her biological family or to a more permanent placement.

While there are residential facilities available, a child grows best in a family where all his/her needs are met.

Foster family care is considered the best substitute parental arrangement for children in need of temporary care. As such, it is part of an over-all treatment plan for the child's permanent placement.

The Department's foster care program has only provided infants and younger abandoned and neglected children individualized family care. However, there are still other children with special needs who continue to linger in child caring agencies/institutions or rehabilitation centers or are with parents who are unable to care for them.

Fostering children with special needs requires love, patience and adequate parenting skills. It also requires an understanding of the particular needs of each child. It is for this reason that the foster care program is being expanded to provide family life and care to children with special needs. Guidelines follow the regular DSWD foster care program.

II. PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Foster Care Program is the provision of substitute parental care to children with special needs, such as: youth offenders sexually and physically abused children. Children with emotional difficulties, children whose parents are suffering from HIV/AIDS and street children.

Considering the challenges of caring children under this category, the regular foster care program was expanded to include the following to sustain the foster families' motivation and interest:

- > Capability building for foster parents to hone their knowledge, attitude and skills to care for children with special needs.
- > Provision of support services e.g. monthly subsidy to foster parents referral for legal, medical services for children, food and non food assistance, educational assistance, medical/dental needs and hospitalization, if indicated.
- > Provision of respite care to identified foster families who need to take temporary relief from fostering to avoid being burnout.
- > Strengthening partnership with child caring NGOs and GOs in the implementation of the program.

A. **General Specific** - The program aims to provide family life to children with special needs.

B. **Specific Objectives**

1. To afford children with special needs of their right to a family in the absence of their biological parents.
2. To develop a pool of foster families who will provide care to children with special needs.
3. To decongest child caring institutions/agencies and rehabilitation centers through placement of children with special needs in foster homes.
4. To imbibe special responsibility and train foster parents in understanding, caring and management of children with special needs.
5. To provide subsidies and other support services to foster parents.
6. To create public awareness to gain support in the implementation of the program.

III. COMPONENTS

1. *Advocacy and Social Mobilization*

1.1. Mobilization of other governmental agencies, non-governmental organizations, volunteers and support groups as partners in mobilizing people and the community to introduce and advocate amendments to existing laws, policies and procedures related to foster care.

1.2. Education, information and dissemination activities which are aimed at raising public awareness on foster care through the following:

- 1.2.1 Development and production of information, education and communication (IEC) materials such as brochures, poster, etc.
- 1.2.2 Conduct for a on foster care
- 1.2.3 Use of tri-media (radio/television/magazines, etc.)

1.3 To further strengthen partnership with GOs, NGOs and POs. Consultation/dialogues/meetings shall be conducted with agencies and groups involved in foster care as well as child welfare agencies and people's organizations and government agencies who can be mobilized for support to the program.

Key partners in advocacy and social mobilization activities are DSWD-NCR, KBF, NORFIL, Parenting foundation, Concordia Children's Services, CRIBS, Home of Joy and the Foster Care Association of the Philippines.

2. Development and Maintenance of Foster Families

2.1. Continuous recruitment, development, assessment and maintenance of foster families in order to have a ready pool of foster families for placement of children with special needs when the need arises.

2.2. Sustenance of foster families' motivation and interest through the provision of subsidies as well as support services to qualified foster families e.g. financial material assistance, legal or medical services, respite care to identified foster families who need to take temporary relief from fostering to avoid being burnout.

3. Training and Capability Building

3.1 Conduct of Trainer's Training on fostering children with special needs. This shall be attended by the Social Workers of DSWD-NCR and NGOs and the Regional Specialist.

3.2 Strengthening of qualified foster families through a capability building activity aimed at enhancing their knowledge, attitude and skills in understanding, caring and handling children with special needs.

4. Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1 The Bureau shall conduct quarterly and monthly monitoring with the Field Office staff/specialist and provide technical assistance to DSWD-NCR.

4.2. An evaluation shall be conducted by the Bureau in coordination with the Field Office and NGOs to determine the extent of the implementation of the project and to determine areas for technical assistance and modification of policies, procedures, enrichment of the program.

IV. GENERAL POLICIES

A. Policies

1. The placement of a child in a foster family shall only be considered when his/her continuing stay with biological family is inimical to his/her welfare.

2. The social worker shall exhaust all efforts to keep the child with his/her biological family.

3. A thorough study of families shall be undertaken before issuance of license to determine their motivation, capabilities and potentials for development as foster homes for particular types of children.
4. No child shall be placed in a foster family who has not yet been licensed, except on an emergency, but in which case, evaluation of the family should be done not later than one week after receiving the child. A license shall be issued immediately if the family has been found capable by the social worker.
5. Placement of a child in a particular licensed foster family shall be based on the judicious matching of the needs of the child and resources of the foster family.
6. No child of the foster family shall be at a disadvantage by the placement of a foster child. Only one (1) child with special needs shall be placed with a foster family at a time.
7. Periodic evaluation of the child's placement shall be undertaken. Foster care shall not be more than one year except when the situation so requires as assessed by the social workers especially in cases of children with special needs which may require long-term foster care.
8. Any transfer of a foster child shall be subjected to a case conference where the assessment of the transfer will redound to the child's best welfare and interest.
9. No child under foster care shall be alienated from his/her biological family hence the social worker shall facilitate visits of the biological parent/s to the child.
10. In case of death or any untoward incident that has happened to a foster child, such should be reported immediately to the DSWD Central Office within 24 hours after which an incidental report together with the medical and/or death certificate shall be forwarded within two (2) days after the child's death, accident or ailment.
11. Older children whose family or relatives could not be located and where no other permanent plan is applicable shall be provided with opportunities to prepare for independent living.

B. Eligibility Requirements

1. Children for Foster Placement
 - 1.1 Children 0-17 years of age
 - 1.2 Children who are either abandoned or orphaned
 - 1.3 Children whose parents are in crisis and temporarily unable to provide adequate care.
 - 1.4 Children who need special care and protection due to:
 - > sexual or physical abuse or in danger of further abuse or neglect by his/her parents or guardian
 - > emotional difficulties as a result of neglect, abuse or exploitation e.g. street child, victim of child labor
 - > developmental or physical disability
 - > parents suffering from HIV/AIDS and who is found negative from HIV
 - > committing a minor offense but has been released on

recognizance or on custody supervision but whose family or relatives are not capable of providing him/her care.

2. *Foster Parents*

2.1 Prospective Foster Parents

2.1.1 Applicants should not be over 60 years of age but not under 25 years old and should have a genuine interest in parenting a non-related child with special needs.

2.1.2 Applicants may either be legally married or single and should be able to provide a family life for the foster child. In cases where the applicant is either a widow or single, a male adult should be available in the home to provide a father figure in the family.

2.1.3 Family members should be mentally and physically fit and free from contagious and infectious diseases to cope with the added stress of caring for a child with special needs.

2.1.4 Applicants should have a healthy and harmonious relationship with each family member

2.1.5 Applicants must have good moral character and emotional maturity.

2.1.6 Applicants are willing to be trained to hone their knowledge, attitude and skills in caring for children with special needs.

2.2. Licensed Foster Parents

2.2.1 Licensed foster parents, who in consultation with their children, signify their willingness to care for children with special needs which require different degrees of time, attention, care, emotional strength/stability and patience.

2.2.2 Licensed foster parents who are willing to be trained to further hone their knowledge, attitude and skills in caring for children with special needs.

C. **Support Services** - Support services are provided to foster families caring for children with special needs to sufficiently meet the needs of the child. These may be in the form of any of the following:

1. *Foster Care Subsidy* - Any foster family caring for a child with special needs shall be given a monthly subsidy of one thousand pesos (P1,200) during the stay of a child in their home.

The subsidy is meant as an incentive and not as a means to augment their income but rather to further encourage them to continue caring for children with special needs.

2. *Supplies for Foster Children*

2.1. In addition to the subsidy, licensed foster families shall be given supplies and other assistance for the child under their care in the form of