



# Network Provider Manual for Community-Based Care



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	5
Belong Organizational Structure	7
<b>Definitions</b>	7
<b>Recruitment and Region 8a and 8b Capacity</b>	8
Legacy Transfers	8
Ethical Family Transfer Process	8
<b>Assessing, Conducting and Managing Placement</b>	9
Referrals and Placements	9
Placement Process	10
Foster Home Profiles	11
<b>Child Placed in Same Home as Child in DFPS Legacy System</b>	11
Family/Tribal Affiliation	12
Diligent Search for Relatives/Fictive Kin	12
Pre-Placement Staffing	12
Initial Coordination Meeting	13
Visitation and Communication	14
Visitation Planning	14
Placement Stability/Disruption	14
Discharge Planning	15
Placing Children Who Have Habilitative or Primary Medical Needs	15
Placing a Child/Youth with a Verified Kinship Caregiver	16
Access to Children and Youth	16
<b>Service Planning</b>	17
Overview	17
Service Planning Meeting Process	17
Child and Family Assessments (CANS)	20
Youth for Tomorrow	21
Foster Daycare Services	21
Medical/Dental/Vision and Behavioral Healthcare Services	22
3 in 30	23
Research Studies	24
Psychotropic Medications	24
Consenting to Psychotropic Medications	24
Approval to Travel & Visits	25
<b>Education</b>	25
Enrollment	25
Early Childhood Intervention (ECI)	26
Verification of Enrollment	26
Education Portfolio	27

Special Education	27
Monitoring Educational Progress	27
Withdrawal from School	28
Post-Secondary Educational and Vocational Activities	28
<b>Behavior Management</b>	28
<b>Court Requirements</b>	29
Overview	29
Court Hearings	29
Court Reports	30
<b>Transitional Living Services</b>	30
Transition Plan Development	31
Circles of Support (COS)	31
Preparation for Adult Living (PAL)	32
Supervised Independent Living (SIL)	33
Extended Foster Care	34
Return to Care	35
National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)	36
Aftercare and Follow-Up	36
<b>Adoption</b>	37
Recruitment	37
Home Studies	37
Adoption Inquiries	37
Home Selection and Staffing	38
Presentation Staffing	38
Placement of the Child	38
Adoption Services	38
<b>Solution-Based Communication</b>	38
Case Conflicts and Appeals	38
Client Grievances, Complaints, and Concerns	39
<b>Media and/or Situations Requiring Immediate Notification to Belong</b>	42
<b>Training</b>	43
<b>Performance Measures/Quality Indicators</b>	44
Foster Care Litigation	49
<b>Risk Management &amp; Reporting</b>	49
Overview	49
Serious Incident Reporting	49
Disaster and Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan	51
<b>Quality Improvement &amp; Contract Management</b>	54
Overview of Managing/Oversight of Providers	54
Case Review	55
Quality Management	55
On-Site Visit Overview	57
Performance Quality Improvement Process	59
<b>Information Technology</b>	64

Technical Contact	64
Required Data	64
Methods of Data Submission	65
Texas Provider Gateway	65
Logins Texas Provider Gateway	65
Scheduled Automated Upload	65
Confidentiality and Secure Communication	66
<b>Finance and Billing Procedures</b>	66
Initial Payment for Foster Care Services	66
Payment Terms	66
Foster Care Service Payments	67
Adoption Service Payments	67
Requirements for Voluntary Extended Foster Care or Return to Foster Care Payments	69
Requirements for Psychiatric Hospitalization Payments	69
Network Provider Monitoring-Minimum Pass-Through Rate Compliance	69
Network Provider Monitoring- Financial Viability	69
Disputed Service Reconciliation	70
Return of Funds	71
<b>Provider Manual Revisions</b>	71
<b>Appendix A</b>	72

## Introduction

This Provider Manual provides policies and procedures for required actions and expectations of the Provider Network for the South Central and Hill Country (8b) and Bexar County (8a) regions.

Community-Based Care (CBC) is a new way of providing foster care and case management services. It is a community-based approach to meeting the individual and unique needs of children, youth, and families. Within a geographic catchment area, a single contractor (officially a Single Source Continuum Contractor or SSCC) is responsible for finding foster homes or other living arrangements for children or youth in state care and providing them with a full continuum of services.

CBC is intended to allow an SSCC and the community more flexibility to innovate to meet the unique needs of the children, youth, and families in each designated service area. This increased flexibility comes with greater responsibility and accountability for overall safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes.

On April 1, 2021, CPS awarded the SSCC for the South Central and Hill Country Region to Belong. The South Central and Hill Country region is made up of the following counties: Atascosa, Bandera, Calhoun, Comal, DeWitt, Dimmit, Edwards, Frio, Gillespie, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Jackson, Karnes, Kendall, Kerr, Kinney, La Salle, Lavaca, Maverick, Medina, Real, Uvalde, Val Verde, Victoria, Wilson, and Zavala. On April 1, 2025, CPS awarded the SSCC for Bexar County to Belong.

As the SSCC, Belong will be responsible for:

- Developing foster care capacity
- Building a network of providers
- Engaging the community to help
- Foster care placement services
- Coordinating and delivering services to children and youth in foster care and their families

As CBC takes shape statewide, CPS focus will shift to ensuring quality oversight of foster care and services for children, youth, and families. The SSCC will be responsible for case management and services that move children and youth from foster care or kinship care into a permanent home or reunified with their families.

**Community-Based Care Quality Indicators:**

Goal	#	Performance Measure
Safety in Paid Foster Care	1	Children/youth placed in paid foster care are safe from abuse and neglect.
Paid Placement Stability	2	Children/youth have stability in their paid foster care placements. Non-paid placements are not included in this measure.
Home Setting	3	Children/youth are placed in a home setting placement.
Maintaining Connections	4	Children/youth are placed within 50 miles of their home communities.
(Proximity, Siblings)	5	Children/youth are placed with their siblings in paid foster care.
Preparation for Adulthood	6	Youth age 16 and older obtain a driver's license or Texas identification card.
(ID / Driver's License, PAL at 18 years old)	7	Youth turning 18 complete Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) training.
Timely Exits to Permanency*	8a	Children exit to permanency within 12 months of entering DFPS conservatorship.
	8b	Children exit to permanency within 18 months of entering conservatorship.
	8c	Children exit to permanency within 2 years of entering conservatorship.
	8d	Children exit to permanency within 3 years of entering conservatorship.
Timely Exits to Reunification	9a	Children exit to reunification within 12 months of entering conservatorship.
	9b	Children exit to reunification within 18 months of entering conservatorship.
	9c	Children exit to reunification within 2 years of entering conservatorship.
	9d	Children exit to reunification within 3 years of entering conservatorship.
Placement with Kin	10	Children/youth are placed with kin on the 60 <sup>th</sup> day after removal. *

\* The Kinship, CPS Reinvolvement, Time to Permanency, and Time to Reunification performance measures are added in Stage II CBC.

## Belong Organizational Structure

As the SSCC, Belong has built an effective and efficient administrative structure, which maximizes available resources to deliver services to children and families. In addition, our administrative design supports region-specific oversight and support of services and programs in support of Community-Based Care. The executive team has extensive experience in child welfare service delivery and is committed to meeting the safety, wellbeing and permanency needs of the children and youth of the region. Our teams working in Quality Assurance and Contracting, Community Engagement, and Intake and Placement will work closely with our provider network to meet the needs of the children, youth, and families from 8a and 8b who are in need of services.

Belong believes taking a Trauma-Informed Care approach can significantly improve the outcomes of a child/youth. Network Providers will be encouraged to leverage this framework in every aspect of their environment, which emphasizes the core values of safety, trustworthiness, consumer choice, cultural competency, collaboration, and empowerment in every facet of program activities, physical settings, and relationships.

## Definitions

**Emergency Placement:** An emergency placement is appropriate when DFPS makes a referral to Belong for a child or youth who is in immediate need for paid foster care placement and services and is not currently served by Belong. This process, therefore, will be used for all emergency removals, as well as any child requiring immediate paid foster care placement and services.

**Non-Emergency Placement:** A non-emergency placement is appropriate when DFPS makes a referral to Belong for a child or youth already in DFPS conservatorship who is moving to a paid foster care placement in Belong 's Network Provider (one example is a child who needs to move from a fictive kin placement to paid foster care).

**Placement Change:** Placement changes will take place with children/youth that are placed in a paid foster care setting within the Belong Network and require a new foster care placement within the Belong Network. A placement change can be either an emergency moves such as a disruption stemming from a safety concern, or a non-emergency move such as a move to place siblings together or place a child closer to home.

**Solution-Based Communication:** Goal-oriented communication which focuses on the solution rather than the problem. It emphasizes strengths and resources and how these can be utilized to achieve a positive outcome.

**Council on Accreditation:** The Council on Accreditation (COA) partners with human service organizations worldwide to improve service delivery outcomes by developing, applying, and promoting accreditation standards.

**88F:** The Adoptive Placement Code (88F) is paid at the time of adoptive placement for all straight adopt placements.

**88G:** The Adoptive Post Placement Code (88G) is paid at the time of all adoption consummations for straight adopt and/or foster to adopt placements.

**MEPA:** The Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA) was enacted in 1994 with a goal to promote the best interests of children by ensuring that they have permanent, safe, and stable families and homes. MEPA prohibited the use of a child's or a prospective parent's race, color, or national origin to delay or deny the child's placement and required diligent efforts to expand the number of racially and ethnically diverse foster and adoptive parents.

**IEPA:** The Interethnic Placement Act is the principal federal law that addresses the use of race, color, and national origin in making decisions about foster **care** and adoptive placements.

**ICWA:** The Indian Child Welfare Act is Federal law that governs the removal and out-of-home placement of American Indian children.

## Recruitment and South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions Capacity

### Legacy Transfers

Legacy Placements is the term used for children who have not been referred to Belong. Belong recognizes that a percentage of children in the legacy system are in SSCC placements outside the catchment area. Through data gathered from the Provider Network and DFPS, Belong has established the number of children and youth from the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County regions who are outside the SSCC boundaries in foster care and kinship placement. Belong has developed a transfer plan for this population that included contracting with providers outside of the catchment area for continued care, if the provider or caregiver is in good standing, the continued placement provides stability and is in the child's best interest.

These legacy placements have or will transition in Stage I by computer-generated batch processes monthly. This transfer of Legacy children/youth into the Provider Network is simply an administrative change in the record and not a physical placement change for the youth.

### Ethical Family Transfer Process

During the term of the contract with the SSCC, and up to one (1) year after the contract ends, no verified family of the Network Provider will be contacted by staff, volunteers, subcontractors, or affiliated entities of another Network Provider for the purpose of recruitment or transfer to that Network Provider agency. This standard holds even when one organization is planning to close its operations or is placed on placement hold by Residential Child-Care Licensing (RCCL) and wishes to release its homes to other agencies. In these situations, the organization may request that Belong send a list of Network Providers with contact information to the affected foster parents, for them to make their own contacts and decision about transferring verification.

If a verified family contacts another agency for information about a potential transfer, or makes an application to change verification, the agency contacted shall inform the family of this *Ethical Family Transfer Process* and direct the family to discuss their concerns with the agency that developed their verification. The contacted agency must also inform the original verifying Network Provider's recruitment staff or Program Director by phone and by email, within five business days of contact, regarding the date of the family's

contact for a request to transfer.

The contacted agency may have no further contact with the family for at least 30 days, or until they have received a release and closing summary from the previous verifying Network Provider, whichever is sooner, to allow enough time for that Network Provider to meet with the family to resolve any outstanding issues that may be present.

If the family still wishes to make a transfer, the originating Network Provider shall transfer verification information to the Network Provider with whom the family wishes to transfer, with a closing summary/release form signed by an administrator of the agency, no later than 30 days after having received notification.

Foster families and Network Providers are encouraged to contact the Belong Director of Consumer Affairs if families are solicited directly or indirectly *in an unethical manner* to make a transfer to another Network Provider.

The Quality Assurance and Contracts team will review all Network Providers' recruitment plans and patterns during annual reviews.

Belong has several remedies it may consider, when necessary, including termination of an agency's Provider Services Agreement and notification of appropriate licensing boards regarding a pattern of unethical practice by Child Placing Agency Administrators and Licensed Social Workers. Belong wants to emphasize and encourage the development of new foster family resources for children in our catchment area, and to develop a sense of trust and cooperation between and among Providers within the Provider Network.

## Assessing, Conducting, and Managing Placements

### Referrals and Placements

Belong and the Network Provider will operate under the philosophy; "A child's first placement should be the best placement." We will have a joint understanding of the negative impacts of placement disruption for children in substitute care and will seek to continue to implement best practices to support effective placements in the most appropriate/least-restrictive environment possible. When threats of placement stability are identified, Belong and Network Providers will utilize a wraparound approach of organizational responsiveness and oversight with increased intervals of supervision to ensure placements remain most appropriate and are stabilized. Belong includes an Intake and Placement Department responsible for accepting, assigning, managing, and tracking incoming referrals from Belong staff and the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). The Director of Intake and Placement will oversee the staffing and scheduling of our Intake Department. The Intake and Placement Department will provide the capacity to accept referrals for residential child-care 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year (24/7/365). Belong's policy is to accept all referrals (No Reject) made by DFPS and continue to meet the individual needs of the children referred (No Eject) until DFPS determines the individual no longer requires Belong services.

Belong and the Network Providers will continue to prioritize building capacity for youth who require a higher level of care and/or have specialized needs to prevent children from being unable to be placed in a licensed facility. All efforts will be made to work with the Network Providers to ensure due diligence in placement

searches for children in need.

### **Placement Process**

For all referrals Belong will utilize CareMatch™ to determine the best placement option for child/youth. For all placement requests, the Belong Intake Specialist will contact a Network Provider if one of their families and/or their agency is identified as a potential best match placement option for the child. The Network Provider will need to ensure the Belong Intake Department has updated contact information for staff that are responsible for making placements during business hours as well as after-hours and weekends. The Network Provider is responsible for being available for placement and intake calls 24/7/365. The availability and timely responsiveness of the Network Provider will be considered by Belong during its annual renewal and Network Provider evaluation process. Network Providers that do not admit emergency placements may have a more restricted admission process.

Upon notification from Belong to the Network Provider that a family and/or agency has been identified as a potential best match placement, the Network Provider must respond back to the Belong Intake Specialist with the family's and/or agency's acceptance or non-acceptance of the placement within the following timeframes:

- For emergency placements, **within one (1) hour** of notification of placement need.
- For non-emergency placements, **within two (2) business days** of notification of placement need.

Belong may be contacting several agencies at one time due to the timeframes involved in making placements so an initial contact does not guarantee placement will be made with your family and/or agency. The best match identified within the above timeframes will be considered in Belong's final decision of placement recommendation.

The goal will be to place the child/youth within 50 miles of their home of origin or home where they will be living when they are discharged from care. The Intake Specialist will gather information about placement options, review the placement option with Network Providers, and assess their current capacity and dynamics. Each child in a sibling group will be assessed for their individual needs, but also the needs of the sibling group so siblings can remain in care together when possible. If their needs differ greatly and require different types of specialized services, maintaining sibling connections will be prioritized as placement decisions are considered.

**Note:** Separation of siblings in care requires Belong Permanency Director approval, documented reason for separation and a visitation plan/schedule for separated siblings.

Once approval has been completed, Belong's Intake Specialist will work together with the Network Provider case manager and the family/agency to determine placement date/time and transportation arrangements. The Belong staff, Network Provider case manager, and caregiver must be present to receive the child at the time of placement.

At the time of placement, the Belong Intake Specialist will ensure that the Placement Authorization form (Form 2085FC), Medical Consenter (Form 2085B), and the Education Decision-Maker (Form 2085E) are all completed and signed. The Placement Summary (Form 2279) and Child Sexual History Report (Attachment A) will be completed for each placement. In addition, Belong will assist in ensuring that the required placement documents that need signatures are completed as well.

Belong will provide the Network Provider case manager with additional placement documents as soon as they are received to assist with the daily care of the child.

### **Foster Home Profiles**

Belong will require our Network Providers to keep information up to date in the Texas Provider Gateway (TPG). The standard home profile used for matching purposes will be utilized for all homes where a Belong child is to be placed. This profile has information regarding the family such as location of the home, demographics of the parents, type of family (basic, therapeutic, etc.), capacity (openings and placements), parent preferences of age range and sex, quality indicators for the family (utilizes trauma-informed principles, structured home environment, one parent stays at home, advocates for education, facilitate transportation or visits, etc.), and behaviors the family feels comfortable working with/preferred (home accepts LGBTQIA+ youth, etc.). When changes occur within a foster home or residential placement, it is imperative that the TPG is updated as soon as possible. Utilizing a "live" system that accurately identifies available placement options throughout the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County regions will allow the Intake Specialists to make placement decisions, which reflect the best interests of the child. By utilizing real time placement information and the Belong Initial Referral Form, Belong will identify the most appropriate placement early in the process, so the best match can be made.

Belong will gather information about the child(ren) already in the home from the Network Provider and the child(ren) to be placed in the home from the Belong Permanency Specialist and any previous Providers. Information about the child(ren) will guide the placement decision (such as safety concerns, sexualized behaviors, aggression, Primary Medical Needs, disabilities, age difference among placements, self-harm, runaway behaviors, homicidal ideations, etc.)

Belong will continually review the appropriateness of the child's placement and make efforts to work with the Provider to preserve the current placement. Our joint goal will be to minimize placement disruptions of children in care. To that end, no child's placement will be disrupted solely due to the SSCC transition of legacy children.

All foster homes will be expected to operate within their licensed capacity. However, when Belong and the Network Provider assess a foster family and determine they can temporarily handle increased capacity, a plan including RCCL and DFPS will be developed to allow a variance to accommodate siblings to be placed in the same home even if it results in the home being over the licensed capacity.

Placing siblings together reduces stress and behavioral issues in most cases and reduces the trauma for children of being removed from their families. This variance will allow these children to remain together. Not all cases will support this concept, and each case must be individually evaluated to determine the capability of the home and foster parents as well as the needs of the children.

### **Child Placed in Same Home as Child in DFPS Legacy System**

Belong understands the importance of continuity of placement and service provision for every child and youth in the system of care, regardless of their point of entry into foster, relative, or kinship care and whether they are new placements or legacy children managed by DFPS. Concomitantly, Belong recognizes the possibility a new placement may enter a home where there is a legacy child and the impact this may create for the child, youth, and family.

As a result, placement and ongoing placement supervision will carefully consider each child's assessed needs and Service Plan, along with existing data in CareMatch™ and the caregiver's Home Study. The Home Study documents household/caregiver information such as location of the home, demographics of

the parents, type of family (basic, therapeutic, etc.), capacity (openings and placements), parent preferences of age range and sex, quality indicators for the family utilizing Trust-Based Relational Intervention (TBRI), structured home environment, employment status, capacity to advocate for education, facilitate transportation or visits, behaviors the family feel comfortable working with/preferred, whether the home accepts LGBTQIA+ youth, etc.

The Belong Intake Specialist will discuss any concerns or questions with the prospective Provider and will conclude that there are no issues that preclude placement prior to recommending placement. Belong and Network Provider will jointly develop a placement plan that the caregivers will follow to address any concerns and support placement (that may include modifications to the structure of the home, schedules, etc.). In some cases, it may be determined that the caregivers cannot provide the necessary environment and parenting capacity.

If the child cannot be placed in the home, this shall not be construed as a reason to discontinue placement of legacy children, and the home shall be considered for other children. This is in recognition of the fact that placements will always be in the best interest of children and meet individual care needs. All decisions will be documented in the case record.

When children are placed into a home in the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County region by a different SSCC, another in-state organization, or through Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), Belong will take steps to ensure there is collaboration between Service Providers engaged with the caregiver and children to ensure all children and youth receive exceptional care.

### **Family/Tribal Affiliation**

If a child is an enrolled or enrollable member of a federally recognized Tribe, then required contact and notification procedures, as well as possible Tribal intervention as a party to legal proceedings for the dependency case, are to be initiated timely in accordance with ICWA. For Native American children not addressed by ICWA, case management services should recognize tribal relationships and culture as appropriate. If a Belong employee becomes aware of a tribal affiliation, the employee should consult their supervisor and legal representative for necessary procedures.

If DFPS or Belong have not already identified tribal affiliation and the Network Provider is made aware, this must be communicated to Belong in writing within one (1) business day of when they become aware. Belong will immediately notify the Regional or Assistant District Attorney in writing upon learning a child or a family member may possibly have a tribal affiliation to ensure the spirit and legal intent of the Federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) is followed regarding placement and notification so that all potential Native American children, regardless of tribal affiliation, will be provided appropriate case planning and services.

### **Diligent Search for Relatives/Fictive Kin**

Belong will utilize information obtained through diligent search efforts for relatives and fictive kin to expand placement opportunities. Network Providers will be encouraged to develop strong community support through schools, extracurricular activities, childcare, churches, and other identified groups. Network Providers should notify Belong with any information they receive that could lead to a potential relative or fictive kin connection for a child placed in one of their homes.

### **Pre-Placement Staffing**

A Pre-Placement Staffing may occur for non-emergency moves and placement changes to ensure all interested parties to the child have an opportunity to share and discuss relevant child information in

support of Belong's search for the best possible placement option. The pre-placement staffing seeks to share all relevant information about a child or youth who requires a non-emergency placement or placement change. The pre-placement staffing will be coordinated and facilitated by Belong. The Network Provider case manager and current caregiver will be invited and will be expected to attend either in person or by phone as well as representatives from DFPS and Belong. Former caregivers may be invited, if it is determined they have information critical to decisions to be made. The Network Provider is responsible for transportation of the child/youth to all pre-placement staffing.

In addition, the child/youth over the age of 10 will be invited and is expected to attend a pre-placement staffing unless it is therapeutically contraindicated. If they cannot or choose not to attend, their voice in the decision making and planning should be represented by either the Network Provider case manager, the caregiver(s) or Belong.

Belong, DFPS and the Network Provider case manager will share, and exchange copies of all external documentation gathered thus far related to the child or youth's needs, including but not limited to birth certificates, social security cards, medical/dental reports or records, school records, assessments, evaluations, and all other relevant documentation.

### **Initial Coordination Meeting**

The Initial Coordination Meeting (ICM) is a collaborative process that focuses on the unique, individualized needs of the child and outlines services to address those needs. The ICM process seeks to share all relevant information about a child in DFPS conservatorship who was recently removed and placed within Belong's Network. Relevant information includes assessments, evaluations, medical reports, recommended services, and all other information pertaining to the child's individual needs. The ICM takes the place of the traditional removal staffing.

Within seven (7) business days of a new referral to Belong, the Belong Family Engagement Specialist will coordinate, host, and participate in the ICM. Extensions to an ICM must be approved by the Belong Vice President of Permanency.

Belong will provide two (2) business day notice to participants. Participation can occur in person at an identified office, by phone, or by video conference. At a minimum, the following participants will be notified of the upcoming ICM:

- Belong Case Care Specialist; DFPS removal worker and supervisor; Belong Permanency Specialist and Supervisor; Network Provider case manager; and other DFPS staff or subject matter experts as needed.
- The Network Provider case manager will be invited by Belong. The Network Provider case manager will invite the caregivers, as appropriate.

Belong, DFPS staff and the Network Provider case manager will share and exchange copies of all external documentation gathered thus far related to the child's needs, including but not limited to removal affidavit, immunization records, birth records, birth certificates, social security cards, medical/dental reports or records, school records, assessments, evaluations, etc.

The initial service planning meeting date will be identified by the Network Provider case manager prior to ending the ICM.

## **Visitation & Communication**

Prompt visitation between children and their parents is critical to ensuring more timely permanency occurs. The Network Provider will respect the right of both children and their parents to have visitation. It is the Network Provider's responsibility to transport the child(ren) to the first visit after removal from parental custody. The first visit should take place within five (5) calendar days of removal.

### **Visitation Planning:**

Belong, in collaboration Network Providers, will identify a visitation plan with family members and siblings also in care if placed separately. The Network Provider will arrange and provide transportation as needed.

Whenever siblings are placed in different foster homes or facilities, Belong will attempt to place the siblings near to one another in order to facilitate more sibling contact. We will also work to maintain connections when siblings are not placed together by utilizing the same therapist and to set up respite between the families. The Network Provider case manager must ensure sibling contact is maintained at a frequency that is in the best interest of the children and within DFPS guidelines and requirements.

Contact is required at a minimum face-to-face weekly if the siblings in care are placed within 100 miles of each other, unless it is determined that face-to-face contact is not in the best interest of the child/youth. If the siblings in care are placed more than 100 miles apart, contact between the siblings occurs via phone, Zoom, or other electronic means at least weekly.

In addition, Belong and the Network Provider will work to maintain connections for youth in care who have a family member, **other than siblings or parents**, identified by their Permanency Specialist as a significant family contact.

## **Placement Stability/Disruption**

Through policy and in practice, Belong and Network Providers will integrate best practice, evidence-based models of care such as wraparound and trauma-informed interventions to maintain and preserve placements in the least restrictive settings. Belong's Intake Department will track all placement changes, while Case Care Specialists will review a child's response to services and assist in authorizing services to support stability.

Belong understands the importance of on-going placement management to prevent placement disruption. In most cases, Belong and the Network Providers will be able to identify potential disruptions at the supervisory level and implement interventions, training, and other supports as necessary to enhance placement stability.

All Network Providers will be required to submit a "Disruption Mitigation Plan" to review and evaluate alternatives to potential disruptions. All crisis situations will be promptly responded to 24/7/365 by the Network Provider. Network Providers will be expected to have a crisis response plan to quickly de-escalate the crisis and advance to an action plan to ensure the stability of the placement. These plans will be evaluated by the Belong Quality Assurance & Contracts team. The Network Provider case manager will also consult with the Belong Case Care Specialist assigned to the child to provide additional support for placement stability.

If a child is dysregulated, is a danger to his or herself or others, and cannot be helped through additional supervision and support in their current placement, a request for placement change can be made through the Intake and Placement Department.

- Prior to requesting the removal of a child, the Network Provider case manager will be required to provide documentation defining efforts to maintain placement over the last 30 days as well as participate in the development and implementation of a transition plan appropriate to the child's best interests. Exceptions will be made for emergency removals as defined by DFPS.
- The Network Providers will be expected to deliver foster parent support services to minimize placement disruptions, including contact (with child and caregiver) within one (1) business day and not to exceed 72- hours of placement.
- The Network Provider will be expected to provide on-going crisis support 24/7/365.
- Children will not be placed in an enhanced substitute care setting without the approval of the Belong Case Care team.
- The Network Provider case manager will complete the DFPS Residential Child Care Discharge Notice form and will forward it to the Belong discharge email box [dischargebelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:dischargebelong@sjrctexas.org) and to the DFPS caseworker.

Any decisions regarding placement are made by the Belong Permanency Specialist and their supervisor.

Belong may remove a child whenever Belong determines it is in the best interest of the child due to allegations of neglect or abuse in the current placement. Belong will be in contact with DFPS or HHSC for any recommendations in the event there is an open investigation.

Timeframes for discharge are detailed on the DFPS Residential Child Care Discharge Notice Form.

**Note:** 24-hour discharge requests, submitted after a youth is admitted to a psychiatric hospital must be submitted within 24 hours of hospital admission.

### **Discharge Planning**

Discharge planning will begin for every child on the day of placement. Positive permanency is always the goal and may occur as family reunification, PMC to family, adoption, and as a last resort, youth may age out of care. The Network Provider, foster care parents, and when appropriate the child, will identify any "unmet" needs the child has and develop goals to facilitate a smooth transition into permanency prior to the child being discharged from services. The Network Provider will provide information to the Belong Case Care Specialist and Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist about the child's discharge plan and any aftercare needs. The Network Provider will ensure that the child/youth is able to discharge from care with all their own belongings.

### **Placing Children Who Have Habilitative or Primary Medical Needs**

After a placement has been recommended and approved, Belong will coordinate a staffing with the chosen caregivers, the Network Provider case manager, medical staff (if applicable), DFPS Well-Being Specialist, and Regional DFPS Nurse and STAR Health staff to:

- Discuss the specific needs of the child or youth
- Discuss the expectations of placement
- Develop a plan to move the child or youth and establish services in the new placement

The DFPS Education Specialist should be included in the staffing as appropriate. If possible, the staffing should occur prior to the child or youth arriving in his or her new placement, but no later than two (2) business days after the child or youth's placement. It will be the responsibility of the Network Provider case manager to ensure the services for the child are implemented timely as outlined in the plan.

In the event the child requires institutional placement, DFPS and Belong will work together when considering and requesting placement of a child/youth to the following:

- DFPS-Licensed Institutions for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities
- State Supported Living Centers
- State Hospitals
- Home and Community-Based Services (HCS) Residential Placements
- Nursing Facilities
- Intermediate Care Facilities for Intellectual Disabilities/Related Conditions (ICF/IID-RC)

The current Network Provider case manager and caregiver(s) should work collaboratively with Belong and DFPS as we are carefully assessing the child or youth's specific needs and attempting to exhaust all the least restrictive placement options before recommending the child or youth's placement in one of these institutions. Placing a child or youth in a certain institution should only take place when no other less restrictive placement is available that can meet the child or youth's needs. The Network Provider case manager and caregiver(s) will have important information about the child or youth to assist in this assessment. In addition, the Network Provider case manager should ensure the child or youth is informed and prepared for this transition.

### **Placing a Child/Youth with a Verified Kinship Caregiver**

When Belong identifies a kinship caregiver to be licensed for paid foster care or for adoption of a South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County region child, the Belong Kinship Specialist or designee will provide a list of Network Providers for the kinship caregiver to choose from. Once the Network Provider has completed the verification process with the kinship caregiver, and upon submission to CLASS, the agency should notify the Director of Intake and Placement and Permanency/Adoption Supervisor. Once the kinship caregiver is approved in DFPS CLASS (can take more than 48 hours), the Network Provider should notify Belong immediately by emailing the Permanency/Adoption Supervisor so that the placement of the child can be entered as the same date as the home's approval date if already residing in the kinship home. If the child does not already reside in the kinship home, then Belong will determine an official start date for the child's placement in the foster home and follow the relevant placement process. Foster care maintenance payments to a verified kinship caregiver (foster home) begin once Belong has completed the relevant placement process.

### **Access to Children and Youth**

The Network Provider will permit access to all Children and Youth ("Child" or "Children") referred to by the SSCC; to DFPS, its employees, its designees, Foster Care Ombudsman, and properly identified individuals appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction (Volunteer or Court Appointed Special Advocates ("CASA"), guardians ad litem, and attorney ad litem).

All parties will exercise their right of access in a reasonable manner and attempt to plan and coordinate all necessary visits with children in cooperation with the Network Provider and in a manner that minimizes disruption of the care of the children placed with the Network Provider.

This section will not be construed as prohibiting Belong, the Department or its designees from making unannounced visits to the Network Provider's facilities or to a foster home verified by a Child Placing Agency (CPA) or a residential facility. To determine whether an individual is appropriately appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction, a Network Provider or Caregiver should:

- Review for a valid court order if such individual is an employee of the CASA; and
- Review for a valid court order and a notification letter of volunteer assignment and acceptance clarifies the individual's appointment to the Child if such individual is a CASA volunteer; or
- Review to ensure the individual is named on the Child's Contact List as part of the child's placement paperwork.

If Network Provider or Caregiver cannot readily determine the identity or authority of an individual appointed by a court of competent jurisdiction, then Network Provider or Caregiver should obtain approval from the child's case worker or chain of command prior to granting the individual access to the Child.

## Service Planning

### Overview

Child and youth service planning is a collaborative and inclusive process between Belong, the Network Provider, the child/youth and the family that focuses on developing and reviewing plans to meet the individualized and unique needs of the child/youth. Under Community-Based Care, service planning with children and youth will occur with all:

- Children/youth placed within the Belong network upon removal, and
- Children/youth currently placed in foster care who require a placement change into the Belong network
- Children/youth who have transitioned into the Belong network via model implementation activities

Upon placement with Belong, children/youth are identified as receiving:

- Child Care Services; or
- Therapeutic (treatment) Services

Upon designating the type of service, the child/youth will receive, Belong determines the frequency by which the child's service plan will be reviewed.

### Service Planning Meeting Process

Belong and the Network Provider will share responsibility for scheduling and conducting service planning meetings in accordance with the following Child Service Plan timeframes. Child Service Plan timeframes are intentionally aligned with the timelines of the parent service plan so that these meetings may, when appropriate, occur together in back-to-back meetings.

**All Initial Child Service Plan meetings will be held by the 30<sup>th</sup> day after placement.**

### Initial Child Service Plan Process – New Removals

For new removals, Belong Family Engagement staff will coordinate and facilitate the Initial Service Plan meeting. Family Engagement staff will contact the family to determine their availability for the Child Service Plan meeting to be held by the 30th day after removal. Family Engagement will provide all Child Service Planning participants with 14 days' prior notice of the service plan meeting. However, the provider is ultimately responsible for providing the 14-day notice in the event that Family Engagement does not send it in order for them to be in compliance with Minimum Standards.

Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist completes the first seven sections in the Child Service Plan in IMPACT, and the provider completes the Single Child Plan of Service. Both plans together equal the complete

child service plan. The Belong Supervisor will approve the complete service plan by the 45th day after removal.



**Initial Child Service Plan Process – All Other Placements**

If a child is a new placement to a provider, but not a new removal, the provider is responsible for coordinating and facilitating the Initial Service Plan meeting within 30 days of placement to include sending out the 14-day notice of the meeting. The provider will complete any updates to the child’s Single Child Plan of Service to make sure it is current.

**Service Plan Reviews**

The Child Plan of Service will be **reviewed** at the following intervals:

<b>Legal Status</b>	<b>Services Needed</b>	<b>Review</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Coordination &amp; Facilitation Responsibility</b>
<b>TMC</b>	Basic Care	1 <sup>st</sup> Review	5 <sup>th</sup> Month Permanency Conference/FGC Re-conference	Belong Family Engagement staff
<b>TMC</b>	Basic Care	2 <sup>nd</sup> Review	9 <sup>th</sup> Month from removal and every 120 days thereafter	Network Provider/Belong
<b>TMC</b>	Therapeutic	1 <sup>st</sup> Review	5 <sup>th</sup> Month Permanency Conference/FGC Re-conference	Belong Family Engagement Staff
<b>TMC</b>	Therapeutic	2 <sup>nd</sup> Review	9 <sup>th</sup> Month from removal and every 90 days thereafter	Network Provider/Belong
<b>TMC</b>	Therapeutic	All future reviews	Every 90 days	Network Provider/Belong
<b>PMC</b>	Basic Care	All reviews	Within 30days of PMC and every 180 days thereafter	Network Provider/Belong
<b>PMC</b>	Therapeutic	All reviews	Within 30 days of PMC and every 90 days thereafter	Network Provider/Belong

Child service plans will be updated or reviewed more frequently when a child/youth’s circumstances change, or significant events occur that dramatically alter the child/youth’s needs or the Network

Provider's accreditation requires a more frequent review,

### **Coordination:**

**Belong Family Engagement staff or the Network Provider will** (depending on who is responsible based on the chart above) ensure the coordination of all service planning meeting logistics, including:

- Scheduling with participants a meeting date and time
- Reserving a conference room and scan call line or a virtual meeting
- All relevant participants are invited to the meeting
- Coordination with the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist to ensure barriers to parent and/or family member participation are mitigated (i.e., transportation needs)
- Notice is provided to all participants of the service planning meeting:
  - Will ensure that invitations for scheduled service planning meetings are sent via email to all required parties and other relevant professionals
  - Will ensure that participants receive 14 days' notice of service planning meetings
  - Will ensure parents, family members, and other participants (who may not have access to email) receive timely notice of service planning meetings by phone, mail or FTF

**Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will** ensure the Network Provider knows how to contact the parents and other family members.

\*All service planning meetings will be hosted in a venue that allows for maximum participation either in-person or through conference call or virtual meeting.

### **Participants**

Service planning meeting participants will generally include, at a minimum:

- Child or youth's parents and the parents' attorney, who must be invited when the parents have been invited (bio parents must be on child's approved contact list)
- Child(ren) or youth
- Family members (family members must be on child's approved contact list)
- Current caregiver
- Network Provider
- Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist and Supervisor
- Belong Case Care Specialist at [casecarebelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:casecarebelong@sjrctexas.org)
- Belong Child Safety Specialist (if assigned)
- Belong Kinship Worker (if assigned)
- Legal representatives (CASA, ad litem, etc.)
- Relevant subject matter experts (i.e., Developmental Disability Specialist, Nurse, Education Specialist, Well-Being Specialist, Belong Clinical Coordinator as needed)
- Other relevant professionals
- Other persons identified in the case who can contribute to service planning with the child/youth
- Network Provider case manager

## **Documentation:**

### **Within 5 business days of the Child's Service Plan meeting, Network Provider will:**

- Document their respective sections of the Child's Service Plan
- Ensure all participants sign the Child's Service Plan
- Send via email to the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist and Belong Case Care Specialist a copy of the completed and signed Child's Service Plan

### **Within 5 days after approval of the service plan, Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will:**

- Send a final, approved, and signed copy of the IMPACT Child Service Plan or Child Service Plan Review to all meeting participants, including participants who were unable to attend the meeting
- Document the service planning meeting and participants in IMPACT on the contact detail page

If a service planning meeting is held in conjunction with a Belong Permanency Conference (PC), the Family Engagement Staff are responsible for documenting the service planning meeting in each child/youth's Permanency Planning Meeting (PPM) detail page in IMPACT.

## **Child and Family Assessments**

Belong will hold itself and Network Providers responsible for completing assessments using an inclusive model of care that is child and family-focused, strength-based, trauma-informed, and considers the unique culture, experiences, and beliefs of the child and their family. As indicated by research, children, and families' active participation in every aspect of the treatment planning process is central to placement stability and permanency. Belong values individual uniqueness and firmly believes families know what they need better than anyone. Rather than relying solely on case history, Belong recognizes children and families are the experts on their lives, and this will be communicated throughout the assessment process. Belong and its Network Providers will draw from children and families' account of their own histories to develop a culturally and linguistically competent understanding of needs and strengths. Assessments will drive service plan development and inform the appropriateness of placement and permanency goals.

## **Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment**

CANS Assessments are required to be used in the development of Child Service Plans. Within 30 days of entering DFPS care, children (ages 3-17) must receive a CANS assessment. The CANS is a comprehensive trauma-informed behavioral health evaluation. It gathers information about the strengths and needs of the child/youth and helps in planning services that will help the child/youth and family reach their goals.

Belong will ensure that CANS Assessments have been completed and results are available to be used during service planning for all children/youth requiring them. The frequency requirement is based on the type of plan/review, the age of the child and the service needs of the child. If the CANS Assessment is not received by the time of the service planning meeting, it will be re-evaluated, and the Child Plan of Service can be updated. A CPOS desk review can be completed to include all legal parties that require notification.

Assessments will be completed in a timely manner and updated as appropriate for determination of services needed to support the foster child, biological parents, extended family members, friends, significant others, and foster parents.

Network Providers will be accountable for conducting assessments within the following timeframes:

- The initial assessment will be conducted within 30 days of removal, and this must be conducted by a STAR health provider with a Masters' degree and CANS certification.
- The annual assessment must be conducted by a STAR health provider with a Masters' degree and CANS certification or if T3C credentialed by a Belong CANS Assessor.
- Youth with therapeutic foster care services must have a CANS every 90 days. Staff with a Bachelor's degree and CANS certification may complete the 90-day assessments for children in therapeutic foster care (receiving treatment services).

The CANS must be reviewed and approved by the Network Provider's Treatment Director or Supervisor. Belong will ensure Network Providers staff must complete the online CANS training and pass a test demonstrating competency to be certified to administer the CANS Assessment tool. To maintain the CANS certification, Network Provider's staff must retrain and retest annually. It is the Network Provider's responsibility to ensure staff who administer the CANS Assessment maintain their certification annually. This will be monitored by the Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist. Assessments will drive service plan development and inform the appropriateness of placement and permanency goals.

Once a provider is credentialed for Texas Child Centered Care (T3C) the CANS assessment completions and approvals will be the responsibility of the Belong CANS Assessors and their supervisor. The Network Provider will submit these CANS requests to [BelongCANSrequests@sjrctexas.org](mailto:BelongCANSrequests@sjrctexas.org).

### **Youth for Tomorrow (YFT)**

Belong will utilize Youth for Tomorrow (YFT) to assess levels of care for all youth in the Belong network that are not placed in a T3C credentialed placement. The Network Provider will submit required documentation to [yftbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:yftbelong@sjrctexas.org) when requesting an initial service level authorization or a reauthorization for a level of care. Required documentation includes for the last 30 days:

- IMPACT LOC Authorization Request Form (must include PID number)
- Common Application/Application for Placement (Form 2087)
- Emotionally Disturbed Children: Psychological or psychiatric evaluation completed within 14 months
- Medically Needy Children: An evaluation by a Physician (MD) describing medical conditions and disabilities
- Information describing any extenuating circumstances, incident reports, progress logs, case notes, school reports, medication notes, etc.

If the Network Provider disagrees with a decision made by YFT on a level review, they may request an Appeal Review from YFT within five (5) business days from YFT review service. If after YFT completes the Appeal Review the Network Provider continues to be dissatisfied with the decision, they can reach out to Belong for assistance.

### **Foster Daycare Services**

Foster child daycare is available for children in a Foster Home when:

- The child does not turn 6 by September 1
- All caregivers are employed and work at least 32 hours per week (daycare is available for children up to age 13 for school summer breaks).

### **Caregiver Daycare Verification**

When foster daycare services are needed for a child who is legally from the South Central and Hill Country Region or Bexar County and placed within Belong provider network, the Network Provider will:

- Submit the Foster/Relative & Other Designated Caregiver Daycare Verification (form 1809) for each foster parent household each time application for daycare services is requested to [daycarebelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:daycarebelong@sjrctexas.org). This form is required for both initial requests and renewals.

**Note:** Foster parent e-signatures are acceptable (completed/signed/scanned copy of the 1809 or on-line completion of the 1809 with foster parent approval in return email).

The Belong Daycare Coordinator will need to verify caregiver employment. Acceptable verification includes:

- Copies of the caregivers' last 3 paystubs
- Statement from the employer attesting to being employed for a minimum of 32 hours a week; or in the case of self-employment, a completed Form 1806 Caregiver Statement of Self-Employment Income
- Waivers if applicable

All Caregivers must be informed by the Network Provider that:

- Only DFPS can authorize DFPS-funded day care services.
- DFPS and Belong are not responsible for the payment of the day care services that eligible children may receive until after Belong returns the approved IMPACT Form 2054 Service Authorization to the childcare services agency authorizing day care services.
- If a child receives day care services before the childcare services agency receives the approved Form 2054, DFPS will not pay for those days of service.

### **Exception:**

For the initial daycare authorization, the requirement for the foster parent to complete the form may be waived if it is determined the verification would prevent an emergency placement in the child's best interest. Such an emergency placement would be one where the placement cannot be sustained or is unlikely to be sustained if the person requesting daycare were required to verify the unavailability of community resources. The required waiver must be approved by the Belong Daycare Coordinator and Program Director. The waiver should only be utilized where the foster parent has exercised reasonable diligence but has been unable to verify community resource unavailability. If such a waiver is approved, the foster parent will be required to verify the unavailability of community resources at the time of the first daycare renewal.

### **Medical/Dental/Vision and Behavioral Healthcare Services**

A person consenting to medical care for a child/youth must participate in each appointment set for the child/youth with the healthcare provider. Healthcare providers may have varying requirements for participation. Medical consenters and residential providers must discuss with healthcare providers their expectations for participation. Participation must be in person or, if it is appropriate and acceptable to the provider virtually or via telephone. The level of participation depends on the nature of the medical care the child/youth is receiving.

When a child/youth is placed with Belong, Belong will ensure substitute care Network Providers receive the DFPS Medical/Dental/Vision Examination (form 2403) with Instruction Document for the caregiver (usually the medical consentor) and doctor to complete the form at a child/youth's medical, dental, or vision appointments. The form is filled out jointly by the person taking the child/youth to the appointment usually the caregiver) and doctor/dentist.

**Within 4 days** from the date of the child/youth's appointment, the Network Provider will send a copy of the completed DFPS Medical/Dental/Vision Examination (form 2403) to the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist. The Network Provider and Belong will ensure that youth ages 16 to 22 are advised of their right to request to become their own Medical Consenter.

### **3 in 30**

3 in 30 combines three separate, yet critical, tools for assessing the medical, behavioral, and developmental strengths and needs of children and youth entering DFPS conservatorship. Texas statute requires each component and together the three assessments chart the path for services of children and youth from the beginning of their time in care.

#### 3-Day Medical Exam:

Within 3 business days, some children entering DFPS care must see a medical provider to be checked for injuries or illnesses and get any needed treatments. Children who meet one of six criteria at the time of removal should receive a 3-day exam.

These criteria are:

- Removal due to physical abuse
- Removal due to sexual abuse
- Obvious physical injury
- Chronic medical condition
- Complex medical condition
- Diagnosed mental illness

Belong will ensure the 3-Day medical exam has been completed by the caregiver and the caregiver will notify the Belong Permanency Specialist within 24 hours of the appointment occurring.

#### Texas Health Steps Checkup:

- Within 30 days of entering DFPS care, children/youth must see a doctor for a complete check-up with lab work. This ensures that we address medical issues early.
- Kids are growing and developing as expected.
- Caregivers know how to support strong growth and development.

#### Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment:

Within 30 days of entering DFPS care, children (ages 3-17) must receive a CANS Assessment. The CANS is a comprehensive trauma-informed behavioral health evaluation. It gathers information about the strengths and needs of the child/youth and helps in planning services that will help the child/youth and family reach their goals. All children/youth will require an annual follow-up CANS Assessment. In addition, a child/youth receiving therapeutic (treatment services) services will require a follow-up CANS assessment every 90 days.

Belong Permanency Specialist or Case Care Specialist will call the caregiver by the 14<sup>th</sup> day to ensure the CANS assessment has been scheduled.

Children and youth who come to live with you must have the Texas Health Steps Medical Checkup and the CANS Assessment within 30 days of coming into the legal custody of DFPS.

#### Personal and Hygiene Products

All youth must be provided with appropriate and sufficient personal and hygiene products by providers.

Providers must document inventory at admission, quarterly and at discharge. The inventory checks should show this is being done for each child and documentation should be maintained in the child's record. Full inventory does not need to be done every quarter but should include new or deleted items. Inventory of appropriate and sufficient hygiene products must be completed monthly.

### **Research/Studies**

Children and families referred to Belong or the Provider Network for services will not participate in research and/or studies without the prior written approval of DFPS. In the case of a child being approved for participation/inclusion in a clinical research study or trial, Belong will be provided proof the study or trial has Institutional Review Board approval from a recognized entity.

### **Psychotropic Medications**

Belong will ensure that all substitute care providers and employees who serve as medical consenters for a child/youth who is prescribed psychotropic medications facilitate an office visit with the prescribing physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice nurse in the STAR Health Network at least once every 90 days to allow the practitioner to:

- Appropriately monitor the side effects of the drug
- Determine whether the drug is helping the child/youth achieve the treatment goals
- Determine whether continued use of the drug is appropriate

For all children/youth receiving psychotropic medication, Belong must assess the extent to which the child/youth:

- Has been provided appropriate psychosocial therapies, behavior strategies, and other non-pharmacological interventions; and
- Has been seen by the prescribing physician, physician assistant, or advanced practice nurse in the STAR Health Network at least once every 90 days.

If a Belong staff is designated as the medical concenter for a child/youth, the Belong staff member must attend in person or virtually attend, if offered by the physician, any appointments where psychotropic medication may be prescribed and all medication review appointments.

### **Consenting to Psychotropic Medication**

When a healthcare provider initially prescribes psychotropic medication, the caregiver will ensure that all substitute care providers and employees who serve as medical consenters for a child/youth:

- Notify the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist in writing of any initial psychotropic medications and subsequent dosage changes by the next business day.
- Complete and sign the Psychotropic Medication Treatment Consent (form 4526) with the healthcare provider; and
- Provide a copy of the form to the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist within 4 business days. Form 4526 is not required for changes in decreasing the dosage or for refills of the same medication.
- The child will not start a new psychotropic medication or an increase in the dosage of a medication without Belong's consent.
- Notifications to all child advocates assigned will be provided by Belong.
- Medication refusals by child/youth will be discussed with the prescribing physician to discuss a

plan of action.

- Medical consenters can request PMURs through the DFPS Nurse Consultant, well-being specialists, or Superior Star Health Hotline.
- Follow the same notification process as any medical appointments.

The Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will file a copy of form 4526 in the child's section of the case record. The Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will notify a child/youth's parents of the initial prescription of a psychotropic medication and any change in dosage of the psychotropic medication at the first scheduled meeting between the parents and the child/youth's worker after the date the psychotropic medication is prescribed, or the dosage is changed.

### **Approval for Travel & Visits**

If a Network Provider requires/desires to take a child outside of the state or country or for overnight travel/visits, the Network Provider must follow policies and procedures including the completion of the Caregiver Declaration Regarding Out-of-Country Travel (Form 2069). The Network Provider will submit required information to the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist to obtain the necessary approval no less than 30 calendar days before the scheduled trip.

Written approval for travel and visits is not required when:

- The Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist arranges for the child to visit with members of the child's family
- The Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist authorizes the child to travel in specified circumstances (usually routine trips or visits)

Network Provider shall provide or arrange all travel to ensure the Child's access to while out of area:

- Behavioral Health, Medical, Dental, Vision, and Pharmacy services
- It is the Network Provider's responsibility to ensure all medical/pharmaceutical costs are covered by STAR Health. If services are obtained that are not, it may be the responsibility of the Network Provider or caregiver to cover these expenses
- Any other services necessary to fulfill the tasks on a Child's Plan of Service

## **Education**

### **Enrollment**

Network Providers will ensure each school-aged child is enrolled in and attends an accredited Texas public school within two (2) school days of placement, unless an exception has been granted in writing by the child's Belong Permanency Specialist (e.g., for private schooling, homeschooling, or temporary school absence due to physical or mental condition). Educational stability will be a critical factor when identifying foster care placements.

When a child over the age of three is placed in a residential facility, rather than a home, the Network Provider must provide written notice to the school district within the 3<sup>rd</sup> calendar day from when the child is placed and enroll the child in pre-k programming.

Children between three (3) and five (5) years of age will attend a pre-kindergarten program offered through the local public-school district, or an early childhood education program offered through Head

Start unless an exception has been granted from the child's DFPS caseworker. If such a program is not available and an exception has been granted by the Belong Permanency Specialist, the Permanency Specialist will assist the Network Provider in locating a program.

### **Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) Program**

Network Providers also will ensure preschool age children will be provided access to appropriate early childhood education programs. For each child who is younger than three years of age the Network Provider must provide written notice to the local ECI Program no later than the third calendar day after the date a child is placed.

For this written notice, the Network Provider should reference the Texas Education Code §29.012 and include the following minimum information:

- Name and date of birth of child
- Name of CPA and Foster Family or GRO Address of location where child resides
- Contact information for the representative of the CPA or GRO who is submitting such notice

Network Provider will:

- Notify the Belong Permanency Specialist and Primary Care Physician (PCP) if the Network Provider has a concern regarding the physical or mental development of a child under the age of three
- Ensure a referral to ECI is made if the Belong Permanency Specialist or PCP has determined a referral is necessary; Facilitate the continuation of ECI services to each child who was receiving ECI services prior to placement
- Ensure the Caregiver fully participates in the child's ECI evaluation and process for developing an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) for ECI services
- Ensure the Caregiver performs the following duties related to the child's participation in the ECI Program:
  - To the extent the Caregiver consents to the child's recommended and additional ECI Program services, the Caregiver fully participates in and supports such services.
  - To the extent the Caregiver declines to consent to any of the child's recommended and additional ECI Program services, the Network Provider must immediately submit a detailed written report to the Belong Permanency Specialist explaining why such declined services are not in the best interest of the child.
  - To the extent the Caregiver disagrees or has a concern with any matter related to the identification, evaluation, placement, or provision of ECI services, the Caregiver may exercise the Caregiver's rights under the ECI program of the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, which can be found at: <https://hhs.texas.gov/services/disability/early-childhood-intervention-services/eci-how-file-a-complaint>
- Ensure the Caregiver provides written consent for:
  - The child's ECI information to be entered into the Child's Health Passport
  - The Belong Permanency Specialist and Permanency Specialist's Chain of Command to directly access ECI records from the ECI program if necessary

### **Verification of Enrollment**

Within five (5) calendar days of the child's enrollment into an accredited Texas public school or a ECI program, the Network Provider will provide verification of the child's enrollment to the Belong Permanency Specialist and Belong Case Care Specialist, and documentation of such notification will be recorded in the child's record. In compliance with the Texas Education Code §29.012, the Network Provider will notify the school district in which the school is located for all children three (3) years of age or older.

## **Education Portfolio**

A current/accurate Education Portfolio is essential to monitor a smooth transfer if the child must move from one school to another which includes proper educational placement and services, and ongoing monitoring of a child's academic progress.

The Belong Permanency Specialist must ensure the Network Providers maintain and update the Education Portfolio for each school-age child in their care. Network Providers must keep the Education Portfolio where the child resides while in paid foster care.

The contents of the Education Portfolio must include:

- School enrollment documentation: Birth certificate, Social Security number, Immunizations, and withdrawal notice from the last school
- Special education documentation: Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) team meeting notes, Individual Education Plan (IEP), documents related to Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 regarding reasonable accommodations, Full Individual Evaluations and/or other diagnostic assessments
- Report cards, progress reports, and/or IEP progress reports, Transcripts, Standardized test results, Referrals, notices, or correspondences
- School pictures

The Belong Permanency Specialist will ensure Network Providers keep the Education Portfolio readily available for review for each school-age child or otherwise, if requested by Belong.

The Belong Permanency Specialist will ensure Network Providers document that the report card and progress reports are discussed with each school-aged child.

Network Providers will be expected to provide the Child's Education Portfolio to the Belong Permanency Specialist at the time a school-age child is discharged from the Network Provider's care.

For each school-aged child, the Network Provider must ensure:

- The most current educational documents and records are in the child's Education Portfolio
- The Child's Education Portfolio includes the child's current school withdrawal paperwork, if applicable

## **Special Education**

For children receiving special education or Section 504 services, additional documentation will be maintained (e.g., ARD meetings, results of FIE, IEP updated annually, current IFSP, documentation of services provided under Section 504, and Individual Transition Plan or Summary of Performance (9<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade). Network Provider case managers will coordinate with the Belong Permanency Specialist to ensure copies of needed documents are submitted to the child's school within 30 days of enrollment (if a change in school occurs). The Education Portfolio will be updated quarterly and discussed during reviews with the caregiver.

## **Monitoring Educational Progress**

Belong understands the Network Provider case manager serves a critical role in ensuring the educational stability and success of children and youth in foster care. The Network Provider case manager is responsible for monitoring and documenting each child's educational progress and stability. The Network

Provider case manager, in collaboration with the regional educational specialist, is also responsible for facilitating the coordination of educational services on behalf of the child and addressing issues impeding the provision of appropriate education-related services. The education service plan for each child will identify the child's educational needs and any additional support services necessary to meet those needs. For children requiring special education or Section 504 services, the Network Provider case manager will consult with the regional Educational Specialist and the DD Specialist to ensure needs are met. The Network Provider should ensure disruptions to education are minimal by scheduling therapy and other appointments outside of school hours, whenever possible. The Belong Permanency Specialist will ensure Network Providers provide necessary support to achieve educational goals, including but not limited to, tutoring, help with homework and obtaining necessary school supplies. The Belong Permanency Specialist will ensure Network Provider's caregiver participates in all child/youth ARD meeting(s) and parent/teacher conferences either in person or by telephone.

**Withdrawal from School/Placement Change** If a child must withdraw from a public school that results in the child being discharged, the Discharging Provider must notify the public school within three (3) school days of this discharge, unless an exception has been granted in writing by the Child's Belong Permanency Specialist or Permanency Specialist's Chain of Command.

### **Post-Secondary Educational and Vocational Activities**

Network Provider will facilitate access to post-secondary education, vocational or technical training, support services and activities. These services and activities include job readiness, skills training, and internship program opportunities that are required by the Child's Plan of Service and transition Plan at 14 years of age and include youth with disabilities, ensuring information is developmentally appropriate, so, each child:

- Has access to appropriate community vocational and technical training programs and volunteer opportunities, including services provided by the local Texas Workforce Solutions offices (if available in the area)
- Has access to Transition Centers (where available), and if applicable, vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities provided by the local Health and Human Services Agency (if available in the area, and post-secondary education programs
- Receives the assistance needed to maximize the benefit of these activities

Network Provider will guide and assist the child in accessing and completing documents when required for the State-Paid Tuition Fee Waiver and Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program if there is a need by the Child.

## **Behavior Management**

Belong recognizes effective behavior support and management practices center around preemptive interventions, such as identifying problem behaviors and working with each child and their support systems to create practical solutions to minimize the need for restrictive interventions to the greatest extent possible. A culture that promotes respect, healing, positive behavior, and provides all children with the support they need to manage their own behaviors, can help prevent crisis situations and the need for restrictive interventions. Involving the child and appropriate family members or support systems early on in identifying triggers creates a collaborative approach to behavior support and management as well as helps provide personnel and the child with early insight into aggressive, harassing, or self-injurious behaviors. Training prevents injuries and deaths in crisis situations, including those that warrant the use of restrictive interventions as a last resort. Network Providers that maintain a process for reviewing

incidents when they occur can make changes in their practices to support the safest environment and further reduce restrictive interventions. Network Providers are encouraged to communicate with Belong early on when a youth demonstrates behavioral challenges so that Belong can be a support to the provider, as well as help problem-solve and work towards strategies that promote placement stabilization. Belong refers to this practice as “raising the yellow flag”.

The Network Provider will ensure its staff and caregivers follow HHSC minimum standards. The purpose of a behavior intervention approach is to develop and maintain an environment that supports positive and constructive behaviors of children in care, use containments or restraints safely, appropriately, effectively, and eliminate or reduce physical injuries and any other negative side effects on the children’s behavior or emotional development resulting from the containment or restraint.

Network Providers will examine the frequency, patterns, and effectiveness of the containments or restraints used for children, and specific strategies to reduce the need for use of containments or restraints for all children in care. Physical discipline or punishment is prohibited, and Network Providers must ensure children’s possessions are free of unreasonable searches or unreasonable removal of personal items.

## **Court Requirements**

### **Overview**

The Network Provider will comply with all court orders regarding the provision of paid foster care and/or purchased services for children, youth, and families served by the Network Provider.

Belong and the Network Provider will review services that are ordered by the court and fall outside the purchase of service criteria of this Agreement on a case-by-case basis to determine rate of payment and parameters of services to be provided by the Network Provider.

Belong understands it is important not only for staff to understand all court orders/requirements, but also for foster families and the Network Provider case manager to have a clear understanding of the judicial process. As necessary, foster parents and the Network Provider case manager will attend court hearings and provide youth with the opportunity to attend court hearings related to his/her individual case. At Belong, we believe the youth's voice should be heard by the court systems.

Court orders will be reviewed and documented in the following: Intake Assessments, Child Plan of Service, Monthly Contact Notes, Permanency Planning Documentation, and Foster Parent Progress notes when appropriate. There will be continued monitoring of court requirements, such as visitation, permanency goals addressed in the Child Plan of Service, and continued contact with Belong to monitor the Network Provider and foster family are meeting all court requirements.

### **Court Hearings**

Belong or DFPS will notify the Network Provider case manager of all upcoming court hearings. The Network Provider case manager must ensure children attend court hearings, unless excused by the presiding judge prior to the court hearing. Refer to jurisdictional expectations for information regarding which courts require attendance (if available) and under what circumstances. The child or youth may attend court by way of video conference and/or teleconference when appropriate and approved by the court. Attendance at Adversary Hearings (14-day hearings) is generally not expected unless the child's

attorney ad litem requests the child's attendance. If the child/youth is expected to attend, the Network Provider is responsible for transportation to all court hearings.

The Network Provider must identify and ensure attendance of the most appropriate staff (i.e., Network Provider case manager) with personal knowledge of the case at all court hearings unless excused by the presiding judge. The Network Provider must also attend all other court preparation meetings as requested by Belong, CASA, attorney ad litem, or other members of the judiciary.

The Network Provider case manager must notify the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist who will be attending court within two (2) business days of notification of court hearing. If an emergency court hearing is scheduled, then the Network Provider will share the attendee list as soon as possible.

If the date and time of a court hearing are announced during court, this is considered formal notice to Belong and the Network Provider. Therefore, whoever is present (the Network Provider case manager, the caregiver or Belong staff) must notify the other parties by the next business day.

If an emergency court hearing is scheduled, then the Network Provider and Belong will determine the attendee list as soon as possible and Belong will send appropriate notifications. The Network Provider case manager will also notify Belong immediately of any service of legal process (i.e., subpoena, summons, discovery notices) delivered to the Network Provider agency, employees, caregiver, or child/youth related to the child's court case by emailing [courtbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:courtbelong@sjrctexas.org)

Network Providers are expected to comply with all judicial orders and/or subpoenas directed to them by competent legal authority.

### **Court Reports**

As the SSCC, Belong holds ultimate responsibility and ownership of all information contained in court reports submitted to the court. However, the Network Provider will be providing the information for completion of the sections of court reports that are relevant to the child.

As necessary, the Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will collaborate with The Network Provider to gather all necessary information to accurately complete the required court report. If additional information for the Court Report Template is requested by Belong, the Network Provider case manager will provide the requested information within 24 hours.

The Network Provider will need to immediately provide supplemental information to Belong via email for inclusion in the court report or hearing when significant events occur prior to the scheduled hearing. The Network Provider must maintain a copy of the most up-to-date court report in the client record.

## **Transitional Living Services**

Belong and the Network Provider will work together to prepare older youth in DFPS conservatorship who are transitioning from substitute care to adulthood.

Belong understands youth must be prepared for adulthood. Belong will serve and support foster youth as they begin their journey to independence by developing life skills and creating community connections capable of supporting youth as they transition from care to independence. Belong will utilize a multidisciplinary approach involving the youth, the family, Network Providers, and natural supports

including biological families, churches, and community partnerships.

### **Transition Plan Development**

Beginning when the youth turns 14, the transition plan is created and enhanced over time until the youth leaves substitute care or ages out of care. The plan must address the issues that are important for the youth as he or she leaves care and enters the adult world. Belong and the Network Provider will work together to initiate the discussion and development of the youth's transition plan.

At the first service plan meeting following the youth's 14<sup>th</sup> birthday the Transitioning to Successful Adulthood section will be addressed. The youth will have the opportunity to invite anyone in their support system who are not the youth's foster parent or Belong Permanency Specialist, to all Circles of Support and service planning meetings.

#### **Belong and the Network Provider will:**

- Ensure Transitioning to Successful Adulthood section of the Child Plan of Service is discussed and developed with the youth during their service plan meeting
- Inform the youth that a Belong Independent Living Specialist will be assigned to the youth's support team and discuss more on the Circle of Support in the future
- Inform the youth that a Family Engagement Specialist will further discuss Circle of Support with them when he or she turns 14

#### **Belong Permanency Supervisor will:**

Approve and sign the youth's Child Plan of Service each time the plan is developed, reviewed, and updated at subsequent service planning meetings or Circles of Support (COS)

#### **The Belong Permanency Specialist and Network Provider will:**

Continue to discuss and document the Transitioning to Successful Adulthood section of the Child Plan of Service and progress with the youth over time during face-to-face visits, subsequent service planning meetings, and Circle of Support (COS)

#### **Circles of Support (COS)**

Circles of Support (COS) will be generally coordinated and facilitated according to current DFPS policy after a youth turns 14 years old. Some exceptions apply and are noted within the chart below. If the youth declines a COS, a subsequent service planning meeting will be scheduled instead.

#### **Belong Independent Living Specialist will:**

- Work with the Belong Family Engagement Specialist to prepare and schedule the COS with the youth
- Participate in the COS or subsequent service planning meetings

#### **Belong Family Engagement Specialist (FES) will:**

- Coordinate and facilitate the COS per policy 6252 Permanency Planning Meetings for Youth 14 and Older (If the youth declines a COS, the FES staff member will notify the Permanency/Adoption Specialist and Independent Living Specialist)
- Ensure documentation of COS in IMPACT per DFPS policy and Care Match

#### **Belong Permanency Specialist will:**

- Ensure the youth can attend the COS
- Notify the Network Provider to schedule a subsequent service planning meeting if a youth declines a COS

- Work jointly with Family Engagement Specialist to engage youth, family, and other caring adults in the COS or subsequent service planning meetings
- Work with the youth, caregivers, and other significant individuals to identify caring adults and other lifelong connections that can be sustained once a youth transitions to adulthood
- Participate in the COS or subsequent service planning meeting

**Belong Permanency Supervisor will:**

Approve and sign the Child Plan of Service each time the plan is reviewed and updated at subsequent service planning meetings or COS

**Belong and Network Provider will:**

Continue to discuss and document the Transitioning to Successful Adulthood section of the Child Plan of Service and progress with the youth over time during face-to-face visits, subsequent service planning meetings, and Circle of Support (COS)

**Preparation for Adult Living (PAL)**

Belong will ensure the development and delivery of PAL Life Skills Training utilizing the curriculum topics established by DFPS policy. As part of the delivery of PAL training, within 30 days of new placements and/or when the youth turns 14 and or a child comes into care that meets this age criteria, the Network Provider case manager will ensure youth and caregiver complete the free Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessments (ACLSA). The ACLSA interpretation will be shared and discussed with the youth and caregiver. The ACLSA will identify the youth's strengths, needs, and goals, which will be documented in the youth's child plan of service.

The ACLSA can be accessed at <https://caseylifeskills.secure.force.com/>.

**Once the ACLSA is completed by both the youth and the caregiver, the results should be sent to PALbelong@sjrctexas.org**

Belong will identify youth for PAL services within 30 days of new placements and no later than their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday and then send the referral to the PAL Service Provider. Belong will then work with the Network Provider to schedule youth for services. If the Network Provider has a youth that is eligible for PAL services that has not been identified, the Network Provider must let Belong know as soon as possible to ensure that there is no further lapse in services being delivered.

The Network Provider case manager must work with the caregiver, Belong and Belong's PAL Service Provider to ensure youth are made available and have transportation to participate in PAL services including the following:

- Completion of PAL training
- Provision of identified services to youth to assist with their transition to adulthood Assistance with applying for and securing services to aid in their transition to adulthood

To remove any barriers for completion of classes, Network Providers should notify Belong immediately upon learning a youth has missed a scheduled PAL Life Skills class.

The Network Provider case manager will also document youth's progress and status of PAL Life Skills Training as well as experiential life skills learning in the child's plan of service. The Network Provider is responsible for transportation of the youth to all life skills and experiential training/activities.

Network Providers must ensure caregivers for all children/youth:

- Provide instruction on basic living and social skills
- Maximize opportunities for learning using Experiential Life Skills Activities
- Provide access to Experiential Life Skills Activities provided by community resources
- Promote the ability to appropriately care for themselves and function in the community
- Assist youth ages 14 or older who have a source of income to establish a savings plan and, if available, a savings account to manage independently
- Assist youth ages 18 up to 22 years of age who have a source of income to obtain a savings or checking account with a Financial Institution (in accordance with Texas Finance Code §201.101)
- Provide access to age-appropriate Normalcy activities, which are suitable for the child's level of maturity and age including activities not listed in the Child's Plan of Service (Network Providers must train caregivers and use a "Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standard" to decide whether a child/youth may participate in an unsupervised activity)

Network Providers must ensure the following are made available to youth to facilitate driver license fee waiver-residency affidavit requirements:

- DFPS Foster Youth Driver License Fee Waiver Letter
- A Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS) Texas Residency Affidavit (Form DL-5), which is completed and signed by the child and a representative
- For children under age 18, a representative to accompany the child to the DPS driverlicense office to provide acceptable proof of residency
- Inform children who have applied for a driver's license of the need to notify DPS of a new address change within 30 days of a change in placement

### **Supervised Independent Living (SIL)**

Supervised Independent Living (SIL) placement settings are living arrangements offered through the Extended Foster Care Program that allow young adults to reside in a less restrictive, non-traditional foster care setting while continuing to receive casework and support services to become independent and self-sufficient.

Within 90 days of youth's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, the Network Provider will provide information about the youth to the Belong Independent Living Specialist. Belong will coordinate a meeting with the Network Provider case manager and the young adult to provide information to the youth about their SIL options. Network Provider will coordinate with the Belong Permanency and Independent Living Specialists to assist the youth in completing the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement (Form 2540) and submit the completed form to Belong Independent Living Specialist who will coordinate with Belong Permanency Specialist on submitting via email. The Voluntary Extended Foster Care Form is sent to DFPS Eligibility staff for processing.

To be eligible for SIL, young adults must be able to live independently in a setting with minimal to no supervision. Through conversations with the young adult and the initial assessment, the young adult will be placed in the setting which best meets his or her needs. To maintain placement in the SIL program, young adults must comply with the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement (Form 2540). Young adults can move through the settings offered based on behaviors, enhancement of skills, or overall progress made in the young adult's current setting. Belong will maintain documentation of the young adult's progress in case notes as well as in the subsequent service planning meetings, which will be filed in the young adult's record.

If the youth chooses SIL services either in the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County Regions, the SIL request is sent to Belong by emailing the signed Voluntary Extended Care Form, SIL Application and a copy of the young adult's Application for Placement to [palbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:palbelong@sjrctexas.org). The Belong staff will review the application for appropriateness for the young adult to be eligible to be placed in a SIL setting and will make the necessary referrals to Network Providers that will be able to meet the young adult's needs. The Belong Independent Living Specialist contacts the Belong Permanency Specialists with the decision to refer the young adult to a Supervised Independent Living placement and the Network Provider's decision on accepting or denying the youth's request for placement.

When Belong receives SIL approval from the Network Provider, the Network Provider and Belong will coordinate the transfer of youth to a SIL placement. If a youth from the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County Regions or outside the Regions requests to move into a SIL program located in the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County Region, the request will come through Belong for approval of placement.

### **Extended Foster Care**

Belong and the Network Provider will work together to identify youth whose legal region is the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County Region for either Extended Care or Return to Extended Care programs. The Network Provider case manager will ensure compliance with and successful participation in the Extended Care or Return to Extended Care programs. These will be discussed and planned with the youth during regularly scheduled service planning meetings, during the youth's Circle of Support or Transition Plan Meeting, or upon the youth's request.

If the youth chooses to stay in Extended Care, the Belong Permanency Specialist or Network Provider case manager will assist the youth in completing the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement (Form 2540). This is required within 30 days prior to the youth's 18th birthday and when this is not possible, no later than the 30<sup>th</sup> day after the youth's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and provide the completed form to the Belong Independent Living Specialist.

The Belong Independent Living Specialist will provide the information to DFPS for the approval process. DFPS will determine eligibility according to current Extended Care Guidelines. Once approved or denied, Belong will notify the Network Provider case manager. The Network Provider case manager will notify the caregiver and the youth of the approval/denial.

If approved, the Network Provider case manager will ensure the youth is assisted in maintaining necessary documentation for the Extended Care program.

If a caregiver or Network Provider becomes aware of a youth who is interested and eligible for Return to Extended Care, the same process will be followed.

The Network Provider will maintain documentation such as school transcripts or pay stubs to demonstrate that any such youth 18 to 22 years of age is qualified to remain in Extended Foster Care or Return to Care. Network Provider must notify Belong if a youth no longer meets eligibility criteria for Extended Foster Care or Return to Care.

**Note:** Young Adults who desire to return to Extended Foster Care **during** their 6 or 12 months (determined by court order) Trial Independence period (Trial Independence begins once they leave paid foster care) are in Extended Foster Care. Young Adults who desire to return to Extended Foster Care **after** their Trial Independence period are considered Young Adults in Return to Extended Foster Care.

## **Return to Care**

If a youth has left care and chooses to return to care, the youth must contact the Belong Case Care Supervisor to start the process to return to care, and the Supervisor will assign an Independent Living Specialist to the young adult returning to care. The Belong Independent Living Specialists will assist the youth in completing the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement (Form 2540) and the Application for Placement.

## **Planned & Unplanned Discharge from Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care**

As a voluntary program, discharge from Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care can occur:

- When the young adult completes Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care goals
- When the young adult loses Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care eligibility
- At the request of Belong, the caregiver, the Network Provider, or the young adult

All discharges are expected to be planned.

## **Within 90 days before planned discharge**

### **Belong Network Provider will:**

- Schedule a service planning meeting or Circle of Support with the young adult and other important adults (The Belong Family Engagement Specialist will document the meeting in IMPACT and Care Match)

## **Upon discharge Belong will work with Network Provider to ensure the young adult has received all personal records and documents including:**

- Birth certificate
- Social Security card
- Texas Identification card or driver's license
- Savings account information
- Medicaid card
- Education records and transition portfolio
- Personal pictures or keepsakes
- Printed medical records from Health Passport

## **Unplanned Discharge**

An unplanned discharge from Extended Foster Care or Return to Extended Foster Care occurs when:

- Young adult's behavior or noncompliance with Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care eligibility results in the foster caregiver or Network Provider submitting a discharge notice and another foster care placement cannot be found
- Young adult leaves the placement before the planned end date

Belong and the Network Provider will work together to prevent and address unplanned discharges from Extended and Return to Extended Foster Care.

**\*Note:** If Belong receives a discharge notice from a Network Provider for a young adult in Extended Foster Care, Belong will follow the Placement Change Process before implementing the unplanned discharge process.

### **Actions to Prevent Unplanned Discharge**

The following process outlines Belong's responsibilities when an unplanned discharge is identified for a young adult in Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care.

#### **Belong will:**

When possible, schedule and convene a discharge staffing within one (1) day of learning about the unplanned discharge, with:

- Young adult's current caregiver
- Belong Permanency Specialist and supervisor Belong Independent Living Specialist and supervisor Belong Case Care Specialist and supervisor
- Attorney Ad Litem, if assigned
- CASA, if assigned
- Other individuals who are interested and important to the young adult

#### **During the staffing:**

- Review the reasons for the unplanned discharge
- Review Extended and Return to Extended Foster Care eligibility requirements
- Discuss the benefits of and parameters of remaining in current placement
- Discuss the implications of leaving foster care or continued non-compliance with the Voluntary Extended Foster Care Agreement
- Identify short-term and long-term goals and tasks
- Based on the young adult's current eligibility status and commitment to abide by placement parameters, develop a recommendation regarding the young adult's discharge from Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care
- If applicable, discuss the discharge process and schedule a discharge date
- If applicable, set the next staffing date to follow up on the young adult's progress to meeting the requirements of Extended or Return to Extended Foster Care
- Document the notes from the staffing and encourage the young adult's signature, if possible
- Continue to search for placement (paid and non-paid) for the young adult for 30 days after initial discharge staffing

### **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)**

The Belong Independent Living Specialist will take the lead on identifying youth (ages 17, 19, and 21) who will participate in surveys for the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD). Belong will inform the Provider of the youth who will participate in NYTD surveys via email with subject line of "NYTD Survey Participant" if assistance is needed to complete the survey.

Youth must be allowed to take the NYTD survey on their own without assistance from others. Belong will maintain current contact information for youth placed within their provider network and i update information as it becomes available.

Youth will need to have an active e-mail account. The SSCC can assist the Network Provider in meeting this requirement.

### **Aftercare and Follow Up**

Belong and the Network Provider value the importance of seeing our youth not just age out of the foster

care system and age into a new community full of opportunities and life as a young adult. Before the youth discharges from foster care, an Aftercare plan will be developed by the Network Provider case manager along with the Belong Permanency and Independent Living Specialist focusing on the youth's preferences and independent living needs. The Aftercare Plan will include a termination of service evaluation and assessment of "unmet" needs. Together, the Belong facilitated support system and youth will devise goals and objectives meeting the "unmet" needs to monitor an on-going structure for a smooth discharge and transition into adulthood. The Network Provider will send a copy of the completed Aftercare Plan to Belong.

## Adoption

Belong will take the primary lead on all adoption activities for children under the Belong Network in the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions. The Belong Permanency/Adoption Specialist will continue to be responsible for participating in all legal and court activities, including the termination of parental rights and giving or withholding consent to adoption, waiving service to adoption hearings, authorization for and authorization of post-adoption subsidies and services.

### Recruitment

Belong will conduct general and child-specific recruitment activities for adoption-motivated homes for children from the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions.

Belong and the Network Provider will work together on general and child-specific recruitment by:

- Collaborating with and facilitating access to various adoption recruitment tools, such as Texas Adoption, Portal, Heart Gallery, Wendy's Wonderful Kids Program through the Dave Thomas Foundation, Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE), Adopt US Kids, and others deemed appropriate.
- Collaborating on the development of child-specific profiles
- Providing notice to any adoption events hosted by Belong
- Providing general or child-specific adoption inquiries as they are received

Belong will manage and refer all inquiries to the SJRC Texas website list of Network Providers. This will allow them to choose the agency which best meets their needs.

### Home Studies

Belong will ensure home studies on all potential adoptive homes (including kinship) within the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions are conducted and reviewed for approval in a timely manner.

If a potential adoptive family is referred to Belong for an adoption home study, Belong will search for Network Providers in the family's geographical area that have expressed interest in completing adoption home studies and will provide these options to the family.

### Adoption Inquiries

Belong will receive and manage all foster to adopt inquiries for families interested in foster care or adoption in the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions.

Belong staff will respond to all inquiries within three (3) business days with the following responses:

- Belong staff obtain the necessary information from the caller to assess their needs by using the fostering community website to determine the agencies that came up in the rotation.

- Belong staff will refer the inquirer to the list of Network Providers by service and county.

### **Home Selection and Staffing**

The Belong Adoption Specialist will take the lead to review available home studies for a child. If potential adoptive homes are found, the Adoption Specialist will obtain approval from their supervisor. Within 7 business days of approval, the Adoption Specialist will coordinate and host a selection staffing with CASA, ad litem, and guardian ad litem. After the staffing, all parties will discuss and identify the most appropriate home for the child or children.

By the next business day after the staffing, Belong will send official notification to the Network Provider via email of:

- Recommended adoptive home
- No adoptive home is recommended

Once an adoptive home is approved and the home has agreed to proceed with the adoption process, Belong will request the redacted case file, which is required to be completed within 15 days of the request, and Belong will provide it to the prospective family (i.e., psychological evaluation, service plans, HSEGH, etc.) within 2 business days of receipt. When a prospective adoptive home decides not to pursue adoption, Belong will continue the recruitment of adoptive homes to find a match for the child.

### **Presentation Staffing**

After the prospective family has reviewed the child's case record, Belong will ensure a Presentation Staffing is held with the prospective family, current caregiver, CASA, ad litem, guardian ad litem, Network Provider case manager, and any additional appropriate identified individuals (i.e., Clinician). A Presentation Staffing is an opportunity for the prospective family to ask questions, for the current family to discuss the child's daily care, and for the attendees to collectively develop an appropriate transition plan. The transition plan will include adoption preparation activities, pre-placement visits and transportation, among other tasks. If the prospective family elects not to accept a child, the Network Provider must notify Belong by the next business day of the Presentation Staffing.

### **Placement of the Child**

When placement of the child with the adoptive family is determined, Belong will work together with the Network Provider and the adoptive family to facilitate no less than three (3) pre-placement visits and the placement of the child/youth in the home.

### **Adoption Services**

To ensure placement stability, Belong will be collaborating with the Network Provider to deliver services to children placed with adoptive families prior to consummation of the adoption. The Network Provider is responsible for managing all services (including but not limited to monthly post-placement supervision) to prepare and support adoptive placements. The Network Provider will provide documentation of these services to the Belong Adoption Specialist. The Network Provider will send monthly reports to the Belong Adoption Specialist.

## **Solution-Based Communication**

### **A. Case Conflicts and Appeals Process**

There may be times when a Network Provider may not agree on a case decision or what should

happen with a child and/or family. Solution-based communication will be used in these situations.

At these times, Belong and the Provider will need to work together and communicate via email, phone calls, in person, or virtually to ensure the best interest of child(ren) and youth takes precedence, and any relevant court orders are followed.

The safety and best interest of the child should always be paramount in making case decisions and finding solutions to any case barriers or disagreements.

The following section outlines the protocol to resolve case disagreements between Belong and Network Providers. This does not include case disagreements related to court orders or services provided in the context of the legal case.

The below process contains suggested timeframes, but these timeframes may be shortened based on time sensitivity of the case.

### **Step 1: Initial Case Conflict**

- Belong staff and the Network Provider (all which are closest to the issue) will work together to resolve case specific issues informally. This will be done through an objective, solution-driven discussion, or meeting (i.e., phone call or virtual meeting).
- If a mutually agreeable solution is not achieved in **three** business days, those involved will notify the other individuals of the plan to involve their chain of command. The disputed issue will be escalated to the next level of Belong Leadership, and the Network Provider's Leadership for possible resolution. The disputed issues will be elevated in writing.
- A meeting will be scheduled by either Belong, or the Network Provider to discuss the issue and come to an agreed upon solution. If an agreeable solution is not achieved during the meeting, it will be elevated to Step 2.
- Disputes proceeding to Step 2 will be elevated to Belong's VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts.
- Belong must ensure continuity of services, as defined by DFPS, to the child or family affected while seeking to resolve case-specific disputes.

### **Step 2: Escalation**

- The escalating party will send an email with supporting documentation to Belong's VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts with a subject line of "Solution-Based Communication".

### **Step 3: Resolution**

- Once a dispute is escalated (appeal), the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts will provide a written decision to the appeal within **five** business days. The written decision will be emailed to Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs and all escalated parties with the subject line of - "Solution-Based Communication Appeal Decision."
- If any of the escalated parties choose to appeal the decision, they will have **three** business days from receipt of the notification from the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts to appeal to Belong's Chief Operating Officer (COO). The COO will have **five** business days to uphold or deny the solution-based appeal decision and communicate that decision to all escalated parties.

## **B. Complaints, Concerns and Client Grievances**

Belong has developed a complaints process through its Office of Consumer Affairs by which a Stakeholder or

Client can file a complaint. A Stakeholder can be a Provider, Biological Parent/Family Member, Foster Parent, Attorney Ad litem, CASA, etc. Complaints can be submitted to Belong in the following ways: completing the complaints form on the SJRC Texas | Belong website at <https://sjrcbelong.org/complaint/>, sending an e-mail to our Belong Complaints Mailbox at [consumeraffairsbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:consumeraffairsbelong@sjrctexas.org) or Belong Info Mailbox: [belong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:belong@sjrctexas.org). Once the complaint is submitted, it will be received by Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs. Within one business day of receiving the complaint, the Director of Consumer Affairs will e-mail the complainant acknowledging receipt of the complaint and ask any questions, if needed. After reviewing the complaint, it will either be closed out or move onto the next steps of the complaints process.

Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will send an e-mail to the appropriate Belong Department to review and address the complaint. Once the complaint response and relevant documentation is submitted back to the Director of Consumer Affairs, it will be reviewed to ensure the complaint is addressed. Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will approve the complaint response and then submit it to Belong's General Counsel for final review and approval. Once approved, Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will send the final response to the Complainant. If the Complainant does not agree with Belong's final response to their complaint, they can file an appeal. Please refer to Belong's Appeals Process Section.

Belong will ensure all children and youth ages 18 years or younger in foster care understand their rights. They include living in a safe home, being treated fairly and not being treated differently because they asked for help. A copy of the most recent Ombudsman Poster must be posted in all placements where it is always visible to youth. Youth may contact the Ombudsman hotline anytime.

The Foster Care Ombudsman can answer questions to help resolve a complaint for youth in foster care. The Ombudsman will help foster care youth understand their rights, answer questions, and assist with resources. There are four ways youth can contact the Ombudsman:

1. **Phone:** (844) 286-0769, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. If you have a hearing or speech disability, call the toll-free Relay Texas Service at 7-1-1 or (800) 735-2989.
2. **Online:** Submit your question or complaint on the Texas Health and Human Services website at <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/services/your-rights/hhs-office-ombudsman>
3. **Mail:** Texas Health and Human Services Commission: Foster Care Ombudsman, P.O. Box 13247 Austin, TX 78711-3247
4. **Fax:** (888) 780-8099

### **Appeals Process**

Belong has developed an appeals process through its Office of Consumer Affairs by which a Stakeholder or Client can file an appeal if they do not agree with the final complaint resolution. (This appeals process is not for complaints submitted through DFPS' Office of Consumer Affairs/Office of Internal Affairs or HHSC's Ombudsman Office).

The Complainant will complete the Belong Appeals Form and e-mail the form to the Consumer Affairs Mailbox at [consumeraffairsbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:consumeraffairsbelong@sjrctexas.org) within 30 business days of receiving notification of the written resolution. Once the Appeals Form is received, Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will review the form within 3 business days and e-mail the Complainant noting receipt of the form and asking any questions, as needed. Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will summarize the complaint and send the summary and Appeals Form to Belong's General Counsel for review. Belong's General Counsel will have three business days to review and approve the complaint summary and Appeals Form. Once approved, Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will e-mail the complaint summary and Appeals Form to Belong's Chief Executive Officer for review and final decision. There may be cases where a Delegate is selected to review the appeal instead of Belong's Chief Executive Officer. If this occurs, Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will send the

Delegate recommendation to Belong's Chief Executive Officer. Within three business days of receiving the complaint summary and Appeals Form, Belong's Chief Executive Officer, or Delegate, will review all documentation and make the final decision on upholding or reversing the complaint. They will e-mail the final decision to Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs and Belong's General Counsel. If a Delegate makes the final decision, they will also cc Belong's Chief Executive Officer on the response. Within one business day of receiving the final decision, Belong's Director of Consumer Affairs will e-mail the Complainant and cc Belong's General Counsel. The decision rendered by Belong's Chief Executive Officer, or Delegate, is the final decision within the grievance procedure of Belong.

<https://hhsportal.hhs.state.tx.us/heartwebextr/public/hhscFco>

## **Conflicts of Interest in Contracting and Case Management**

### Contracting Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when a Network Provider or a Network Provider employee's private interest conflicts or interferes with their ability to perform their duties.

Examples of a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using or attempting to use their position for an advantage in a personal matter
- Accepting a gift, a service, or a job, or doing a professional activity, that may appear to influence job performance or to disclose confidential information

In all contracting processes, there is potential for conflicts of interest. This may be a real or perceived conflict of interest that is uncovered during the contracting process or may occur during the life of a contract. Belong requires Network Providers to have an internal conflict of interest policy that they will recommit to annually through training. All Belong employees are also required to comply with the internal conflict of interest policy and recommit to annually through training.

The contracting process will include a determination that there are no real or perceived conflicts of interest as a result of a Network Provider entering into a contract with Belong.

Network Provider and Belong employees must disclose, in writing, any potential or actual conflict of interest concerning any contract or procurement in which they are, or may become, engaged.

If a potential contracting conflict of interest arises, Belong will attempt to mitigate the risk of perceived or actual conflict of interest. If the potential conflict cannot be mitigated, Belong will notify DFPS describing the potential conflict in addition to methods of mitigation. Belong understands that DFPS reserves the right to make a final determination regarding any potential conflict of interest. The Belong Director of Consumer Affairs is responsible for tracking all Contracting Conflicts of Interest through final determination.

### Case Management Conflicts of Interest

A conflict of interest exists when a Network Provider, a Network Provider employee or Belong employee's private interest conflicts or interferes with their ability to perform their duties.

Examples of a conflict of interest include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Using or attempting to use their position for an advantage in a personal matter

- Doing a professional activity that would access or disclose confidential information
- Employees are not to accept gifts, meals, gratuities, free trips, personal property or other items of value from clients, families of clients or any individual as an inducement to influence services provided.
- Failing to disclose a personal relationship with a client being served by Belong

Network Provider or Belong employees in a case management role must disclose, in writing, any potential or actual case management conflict of interest concerning any client on their assigned caseload to their supervisor to determine the resolution. The Belong Director of Consumer Affairs is responsible for tracking all Case Management conflicts of Interest through final determination.

## **Media and/or Situations Requiring Immediate Notification to Belong**

Any time the media is involved with a child placed within the Belong Network; the Network Provider or Belong employee must inform the SJRC Texas | Belong VP of Communications and Marketing to ensure supported communication efforts.

If a Belong employee or Network Provider is contacted by media, they will respond only by immediately forwarding the inquiry to the SJRC Texas | Belong VP of Communications and Marketing.

There are situations that can result in a crisis communication situation and therefore require immediate notification. These situations include:

- When a child, who is referred or placed within Belong Network, is in a life-threatening situation
- Any time the media is involved with a child placed within Belong Network regarding potentially controversial or non-positive scenarios

If a situation occurs requiring immediate notification to Belong, the following procedures will apply:

- Network Provider or Belong employee will contact and inform the SJRC Texas | Belong VP of Communications and Marketing of the situation.
- The SJRC Texas | Belong VP of Communications and Marketing will work with Belong and/or the Network Provider to develop a crisis communication plan.
- All staff from Belong and the Network Provider will follow the agreed upon plan in all media interactions and other communication efforts.

## Training

### Goal Statement

To model the organization's Mission, Vision, and Values by providing quality training, professional development opportunities and customer service to internal and external stakeholders, via continuous improvement, collaboration, assessment of needs and evaluation through a Trauma-Informed Care approach (in accordance with SJRC, DFPS, HHSC minimum standards, federal and grant regulations, and COA accreditation requirements).

### Purpose

Belong believes staff development is core to organizational advancement and success. Our training department provides essential skills training opportunities to employees in all roles/disciplines, to foster parents, to the communities within the 27 counties it serves, and to Network Providers.

The Belong Training Department utilizes an annual training plan to guide professional development across the organization and works to implement best practices and to address retention/competency training as appropriate. The Belong Training Department will regularly define and develop new training strategies to serve the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County regions and meet the needs of all its children and families, as well as enhance the continuum of service.

While each contract provider has the right to design their own training plan, Belong QA and Contracts Department will monitor and support each Network Provider to ensure they have trainings required by the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), Health and Human Services (HHSC) Minimum Standards and/national accreditation (if applicable) to perform all duties as expected in the SSCC Contract, the Network Provider Services Agreement and the Network Provider's Manual. Belong will further support each Network Provider with non-mandatory training at no cost to help ensure commitment to best practices, philosophy, and to the mission of Community-Based Care within the South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions.

Belong seeks to aggressively integrate best practices and new evidence-based practices within the Provider Network. Belong expects that each Provider will ensure that their staff and caregivers/foster parents have the minimum training required for HHSC minimum standards, DFPS, and national accreditation (if applicable) to perform all duties as expected in the Provider Services Agreement and this Provider Manual and the Belong Training Matrix.

Programs will encourage cultural competency, innovative program development, evidence-based service delivery, and improve effectiveness working with individuals and families with diverse backgrounds and needs.

Belong training opportunities will be sent out to providers when scheduled.

## Performance Measures/Quality Indicators

Belong views the Community-Based Care Initiative as an opportunity to significantly improve outcomes for our South Central and Hill Country and Bexar County Regions' children and their families so we are engaging in partnerships to build a community-based system of care. DFPS will monitor the performance, services, and deliverables of the SSCC. Belong will monitor the Network Providers on all services and deliverables within the SSCC contract.

The Network Providers will work in partnership with Belong to improve outcomes and overall well-being for children as it relates to the Federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), HHSC and DFPS outcomes as outlined below:

Goal	#	Performance Measure
Safety in Paid Foster Care	1	Children/youth placed in paid foster care are safe from abuse and neglect.
Paid Placement Stability	2	Children/youth have stability in their paid foster care placements. Non-paid placements are not included in this measure.
Home Setting	3	Children/youth are placed in a home setting placement.
Maintaining Connections	4	Children/youth are placed within 50 miles of their home communities.
(Proximity, Siblings)	5	Children/youth are placed with their siblings in paid foster care.
Preparation for Adulthood	6	Youth aged 16 and older obtain a driver's license or Texas identification card.
PAL at 18 years old	7	Youth turning 18 complete Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) training.
Timely Exits to Permanency*	8a	Children exit to permanency within 12 months of entering DFPS conservatorship.
	8b	Children exit to permanency within 18 months of entering conservatorship.
	8c	Children exit to permanency within 2 years of entering conservatorship.
	8d	Children exit to permanency within 3 years of entering conservatorship.
Timely Exits to Reunification	9a	Children exit to reunification within 12 months of entering conservatorship.
	9b	Children exit to reunification within 18 months of entering conservatorship.
	9c	Children exit to reunification within 2 years of entering conservatorship.
	9d	Children exit to reunification within 3 years of entering conservatorship.
Placement with Kin	10	Children/youth are placed with kin on the 60 <sup>th</sup> day after removal.*

\* The Kinship, CPS Reinvolvement, Time to Permanency, and Time to Reunification performance measures are added in Stage II CBC.

Belong Performance Quality Improvement Process includes monitoring the following regarding the Network Providers:

- Acceptable levels of performance by Belong and the Network Providers on contract outcomes outlined above
- Regular and timely submission of extensive data and information for each child served as well as data on foster homes or facilities within the Network. This includes placement vacancies, data entry related to Performance Management Evaluation Tool (PMET) or reporting of outcomes quarterly, daily reporting of specific data elements to the utilized Texas Gateway and CareMatch™ systems, and any other data as needed by Belong
- Compliance with applicable HHSC minimum standards for each service type provided by the Network Providers. Deficiencies/Technical Assistance issued by HHSC/DFPS Licensing/Contracts and Belong QA and contracts teams (All documents received by the Network Provider will be reviewed by Belong as part of the SSCC Performance Quality Improvement process. Action plans for Network Providers will be created based on the type of deficiency received.)
- Acceptable performance on stakeholder and client surveys administered by Belong

### **Children are Safe from Abuse and Neglect**

The safety of children, youth and families are a primary consideration of Belong. To support these efforts, Belong will utilize risk assessment tools, computerized algorithms to identify strength and outcome trends in the Network, and frequent case manager visitations to further evaluate safety in the various placement settings within the continuum of care.

### **Children are Placed in their Home Communities**

Belong understands the critical importance of geographically appropriate placements. Strong emphasis will be made to support local placements, to ensure continuity of each child's living context, to include schools, religious affiliation, recreational participation, extended family, employment, and other support systems. Belong will work with members of the Provider Network as well as new Network Providers to expand capacity placement options within the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County regions.

Placement in the most appropriate/least-restrictive environment within a child's home community provides a sense of continuity and retains connections with family, peers, schools, religious practitioners, and medical providers. Providing required services in the home community is essential to supporting a community-based system of care.

Leveraging technology, Belong staff will always search for a home close to the child's home community. Belong clearly understands proximity to the child's home as one of our priority placements factors. In addition, Belong will work with the Network Providers to develop a geographically and ethnically diverse group of foster homes using DFPS removal data as well as focus on rural counties as part of our recruitment strategy.

### **Children are Appropriately Served in the Least Restrictive Environment**

Belong and our Network Providers understand children are best served in least restrictive placements and support minimal moves for the child. Utilizing an innovative algorithm-based placement tool (CareMatch™) as the Network Administrator, Belong seeks to make the first placement the best placement for every child and youth. In addition, Belong and the Network Provider will utilize innovative 'wraparound' efforts to support children and youth with behavioral or mental health needs, so they receive the support and treatment needed to experience success in less restrictive settings. When more intensive or restrictive environments are warranted, innovation drives short-term stabilization, rather than long-term placement in that setting. During that phase of care, supportive services are provided to both the youth

and the caregiver, with the goal of returning the youth to their less restrictive environment as soon as possible.

Belong and the Network Providers will implement enhanced searches for permanent placement opportunities within or near the child's home community. Belong and Network Providers will increase training and oversight to improve capacity for existing foster parents to accept an increased variety of placements in essential communities. This SSCC contract requires a detailed recruitment plan for foster families, adoptive families, and alternate care providers from Network Providers, including specific strategies to utilize faith-based and other targeted group programs.

### **Connections to Family and Others Important to the Child are Maintained**

Belong encourages all people with an interest in the well-being of a child to be involved in a comprehensive treatment plan for the child and family.

Belong will ensure service planning actively engages families, relatives, CASA volunteers, DFPS caseworkers and other significant people in the child's life. In addition to previously stated adults, the involvement of teachers, coaches, ministers of faith and others with whom the child has developed an attachment, is welcomed. Belong understands the importance of strong and meaningful connections for our children and youth and works to support and nurture essential and supportive relationships. Belong is committed to ensuring children maintain and grow the crucial natural supports that will help them long after permanency is achieved.

Belong's approach for strengthening family and other connections includes the following strategies:

- Increasing local placement options in as many communities as possible
- Developing procedures to ensure frequent and meaningful family and sibling visits occur
- Improving the birth parent - foster parent relationship
- Monitoring Plans of Service for all children/youth regarding implementing or maintaining engagement with activities and supportive members of their local community (e.g., Little League Team and Coach or youth group and Minister at their church)
- Integrating family centered, strength-based case practice

### **Children are Placed with Siblings**

Belong makes every effort to ensure siblings are placed together when possible. In many cases, placement with siblings in one foster home/agency can reduce stressors on the children and foster families/staff as well as ease transitions into care and facilitate reunification. Placing all siblings together improves the efficacy of service planning, developing, and carrying out permanency plans and increases communication between foster families, birth parents, Belong Permanency Specialists and Officers of the Court.

Whenever siblings are placed in separate foster homes or agencies, Belong will attempt to place the siblings near one another to facilitate more sibling contact. We will also work to maintain connections when siblings are not placed together by utilizing the same therapist and to set-up Respite between the families if in separate foster homes. The Network Provider Case Manager must ensure sibling contact is maintained at a frequency that is in the best interest of the children and within DFPS master contract guidelines and requirements.

Unless it is determined face-to-face contact is not in the best interest of the child/youth and, provided the sibling is residing within a 100-mile radius, contact is face-to-face at least monthly. If the sibling is outside of the designated radius, contact between the siblings occurs via phone contact, FaceTime, Zoom or other

electronic means at least two times per month.

In addition, Belong and the Network Provider will work to maintain connections for youth in care who have a family member, **other than siblings or parents**, identified by their Belong Permanency Specialist as a significant family contact.

Understanding that placing siblings together can be significant to their sense of safety and well-being, foster parents will also be trained to understand this significant dynamic. This understanding helps motivate foster parents to care for entire sibling groups if possible. When necessary, Belong and the Network Provider will request variances to allow greater capacity in a home, so children can be placed with siblings.

Belong also takes a proactive stance when there is an opportunity to move siblings together if they are initially separated at placement. If an opening arises in the home of one of the siblings that can accommodate another sibling, we will inform the Network Provider case manager of the child and that there may be an opportunity to place siblings together. The Network Provider should discuss this with the caregiver and ensure they understand the benefits of placing the siblings together.

### **Services Respect the Child's Culture**

Delivering services to all children, youth and their families in a culturally competent manner is a primary objective of Belong. Network Providers must ensure their staff complete training on cultural competency annually to include specific insight and skills for working with the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Network Provider will make and document good faith efforts, in the child's plan of service, to ensure children are able to preserve desired and appropriate connections to the child's own cultural identity and community. This includes religious/spiritual, family members, school, and organizations through on-site or off-site means, and other people or groups to which a child is bonded, and which help the child maintain normalcy.

Belong provides services to people with various cultures, races, ethnic backgrounds, and religions in a manner that recognizes values, affirms, and respects the worth of the individuals, and protects and preserves their dignity. Belong does not discriminate in any way in the way it provides services to its client population. Belong will exhibit a clear understanding of the cultural beliefs of children and families in the distinct communities and population hubs within the designated catchment area. Belong will ensure that the Network Provider adheres to all state and federal laws and regulations governing race, ethnicity, and culture in placement and services to children and families. Federal regulations include MEPA, IEPA, and ICWA.

It is essential for culturally appropriate service providers to establish a foundation of respect, trust, and empowerment, as families and children are more successful and responsive to interventions when they feel respected.

Belong will provide ongoing education in the form of resources and research or community provided training, workshops, and other educational opportunities to help staff, caregivers, and Network Providers understand the impact race, culture, and ethnic identity have on them and others and how they impact services to children and families.

Belong will ensure that caregivers and Network Providers understand the impact of disproportionality and disparities in the child welfare system. Disproportionality is the overrepresentation of a particular race or cultural group in a program or system and is an issue that Belong remains committed to addressing.

Belong will:

- Analyze catchment area specific statistics/data on race and ethnicity and ensure they are included as a part of the procurement library, which can be found on the [ESBD website](http://www.txsmartbuy.com/sp) - <http://www.txsmartbuy.com/sp>
- Coordinate and deliver services in a manner that is relevant to the culture of children and families served in the distinct communities and population hubs within the designated catchment area
- Develop and implement a plan to ensure the composition of the SSCC workforce reflects the race, ethnicity, and culture of the client population
- Verify that Network Provider's staff and caregivers/foster parents receive Cultural Competency training on an annual basis (3 hours)
- Support the foster family if a need in this area arises by facilitating community connections and activities
- Ensure Network Providers coordinate and deliver services in a manner that is relevant to the culture of children and families served in the distinct communities and population hubs within the South Central and Hill Country of Bexar County Regions

**Network Providers will:**

- Deliver services in a manner that is relevant to the culture of children and families served
- Be required to attend training that addresses cultural competencies
- Ensure when foster children are placed in a foster home, the cultural dynamics of the home are taken into consideration prior to the placement
- Ensure the initial and ongoing child plans of service for all clients will reflect their cultural competencies and the steps taken to implement the client's culture into the daily activities and operations of the Network Provider
- Provide services in the client's primary language, either directly by provider or Belong staff, or by a translator

To be fully prepared for successful adulthood, Belong and the Network Providers will provide children and youth with normalcy including opportunities, experiences, and activities like those experienced by their non-foster care peers. We will work to give all youth in care, opportunities to enjoy the experiences and activities available to their peers (youth not in the foster care system).

Youth in all foster homes and residential facilities participate in activities in the community. These include dining out, going to a movie, shopping at malls, activities at bowling alleys, theme parks and, for some, part-time employment. Youth should attend public school and are encouraged to participate in extracurricular sports, arts and culture or academic programming.

**Children and Youth are Provided Opportunities to Participate in Decisions that Impact their Lives**

At every opportunity, Belong and the Network Provider engage children and youth to participate in the decisions affecting their lives. The empowerment of children and youth to work collaboratively with Belong staff and the Network Provider Case Manager to plan for their future is a strong value of our system, and the benefits of this approach are easily apparent. Youth are much more invested in their service plans when they feel ownership of the plan. All programs subscribe to the strength-focused principle that clients are the experts on their own circumstances and needs. Staff should bring skills, experience, and best practices and through a partnership relationship help children reach decisions that are most meaningful and represent a realistic likelihood of being successful. Whenever possible, and, as appropriate for the child's chronological or developmental age or ability, the Network Provider Case Manager will have children participate in person, by phone or by electronic means, in legal and Belong's permanency processes such as required court hearings, staffing and other service planning events.

Formal and informal goal setting is seen as a collaborative effort. The Network Provider case manager will ensure children and youth participate in and sign their service plans when age and ability are appropriate. Children are also encouraged to express their needs and preferences for things such as choosing if they are interested in attending religious services and of what denomination, what extracurricular activities they pursue, and goals for their permanency plans.

### **Foster Care Litigation**

Belong will monitor Network Providers to ensure compliance with Foster Care Litigation including but not limited to those listed below:

- **ROA7/A8:** Continuous 24-hour wake supervision
- **RO4:** Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Aggression Training (CSA) completion
- **RO20:** Contract monitoring findings, complaints contract violations required quarterly; Notification of child abuse/neglect deficiencies
- **RO22:** Reporting serious incidents
- **RO25/27/31:** Caregiver Certification on Notification of Sexual Aggression/Victimization History (Form B909-1034 CSA)

In addition, Belong will ensure DFPS is aware of any noncompliance with remedial orders outlined in the Foster Care Litigation requirements. Belong will track trends and patterns from each Network Provider to provide additional support in needed areas to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in care.

## **Risk Management and Reporting**

### **Overview**

Immediately, but no later than 24 hours after knowledge of serious incidents (as defined by Network Provider Services Agreement), licensing investigations, licensure board reports and investigations, suspected fraud or fraud investigations and violations that occur within Network Provider's business, the Network Provider must submit to Belong a written incident report. For these circumstances, and always in general, the Network Provider must have operational procedures and mechanisms in place to ensure staff are knowledgeable and respond immediately to conditions or situations that may pose a threat to child safety.

**Network Providers and staff are mandatory reporters.** Network Providers are to immediately report knowledge of or suspicion of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child to Belong and directly to the Texas Abuse Hotline at (800) 252-5400 or online at <http://www.txabusehotline.org>.

Belong will promptly report any suspected case of abuse, neglect, or exploitation to the appropriate authority as required by the Texas Family Code, Chapter 261. All reports must be made within twenty-four (24) hours of the discovery of abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

Belong Chief Administrative Officer will provide an annual report of the internal assessment of overall risk to SJRC Texas Board of Directors and Council on Accreditation.

### **Serious Incident Reporting**

Serious Incident Response:

- Network Providers and Belong staff are mandatory reporters (those working with vulnerable people

including children and are therefore legally required to ensure a report is made when abuse is observed or suspected). Any incident that fits the criteria for mandatory reporting will be reported to Belong within the timeframes set by RCCL.

- Upon receiving notification of an incident regarding a child/youth the Network Provider will decide as to whether the incident demands mandatory reporting to authorities other than Belong.
- Serious incidents are to be handled as opportunities for enhancing the growth and development of clients, not as justification for terminating the placement if appropriate.
- When possible, serious incidents are to be managed to preserve the placement, assure continuity of care, and provide a learning experience for the child/youth and foster parent and/or placement entity.

### **Serious Incident Chart – APPENDIX A**

All serious incidents as outlined in the Serious Incident Chart in Appendix A are reportable to the Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline, as well as to Belong. In addition to these reportable serious incidents, Belong reserves the right to request any additional Incident Reports or documentation as needed for Discharge Planning, YFT review, Safety Concerns for the children or any other determined reason. Some of these additional incidents that Belong may request documentation for may include, but are not limited to:

- Suicidal ideations or gestures
- Homicidal ideations, gestures, or attempts
- Physical assaults between two or more children that do not result in substantial bodily harm
- Use of physical containment or restraint on a child
- Any medication that is given inappropriately or lapsed doses of medication
- Unexpected health problems including but not limited to offsite emergency medical treatment

Network Providers will follow Minimum Standards when reporting incidents to Belong. At a minimum, providers will submit a written incident report to Belong at [incidentsbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:incidentsbelong@sjrctexas.org) within 24 hours of the incident. Providers may also submit their Incident Reports through the TPG portal.

A Serious Incident Report should be completed for each contact made in the case of a presumed emergency or crisis. This report must include the following:

- Name of child/youth involved in the incident or crisis
- Developmental and chronological age of child(ren)/youth involved in the incident
- Date and time of the incident or crisis
- Date, time, and method of notification made to Belong placement authority, supervisor, and licensing
- Nature of the incident or crisis
- Actions taken by Belong and Network Provider
- Date report was completed
- Date report was submitted to DFPS and Belong
- Notation as to whether mandatory reporting is required

Upon receiving the immediate notification of an incident, Belong (Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist and/or Case Care Specialist and/or Permanency, appropriately) will contact the Network Provider to review the course of action taken by the Network Provider and will determine as a team if further interventions are needed. This would include, but is not limited to, Technical Assistance (TA), a

Corrective Action Plan (CAP), additional wraparound support services, and training.

All incident reports will be available to Belong and DFPS for their review. Belong will work in partnership with RCCL on any investigation that results from a Network Provider's incident report.

Belong will identify trends by network providers and the network as a whole. If a trend is identified in a specific area, Belong will assist with the formation of a workgroup to address improvement in that specific area. This workgroup may be network provider-focused or network-focused.

Belong network providers must refer to **HHSC Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies/General Residential Operations, Subchapter D, Reporting Serious Incidents and Other Responsibilities of Network Providers.**

A Network Provider is only authorized to act as the SSCC's Agent if appointed in writing by the SSCC and only for the specific purpose and scope identified by the written contract. All responsibilities are covered in the Network Provider Services Agreement and Belong Network Provider Manual.

Below is a list of responsibilities including but not limited to the following based on facility and service type:

- Maintaining good standing with RCCL and the Comptroller's office
- Licensing foster homes and registering them within Child Care Licensing Automated Support System – CLASS
- Updating the placement availability through the Texas Provider Gateway as needed
- Reviewing and Receiving Referrals
- Accepting Placements
- Abiding by the Belong Network Provider Services Agreement and the Belong Network Provider Manual
- Communicating with Belong in a timely manner via established protocol
- Working with Belong regarding discrepancies, disputes regarding case information, and or days of care reimbursements
- Providing Belong with the any required data as requested
- Recruitment of Foster Homes
- Recruitment of Adoptive Families
- Managing the direct service delivery of subcontractors
- Managing provision of their own services
- Working with Belong to provide services to Birth Families
- Managing a Disaster and Emergency Preparedness Plan to ensure the plan is current
- Providing quality services as evidenced by maintaining children/youth safety in the least restrictive environment and promoting placement stability

#### **Network Provider Committees and Meetings**

Belong will have several committees and established meetings to ensure there is collaboration between Belong and the Provider Network.

#### **Disaster and Emergency Response Preparedness Plan (DERPP)**

To maintain the physical safety of staff and clients, Belong and all Network Providers will require a DERPP that includes clear steps to address safety and services, to include impact of COVID 19, for children and youth in foster care, caregiver families, and staff.

All employees and contractors within the system of care are required to undergo annual training regarding disaster recovery procedures and demonstrate their role in ensuring Network Provider continuity and safety for children and caregivers. The Belong DERPP will also address a response in situations when our staff and Network providers' employees may also be affected by the disaster.

The information held within the DERPP lays out a plan of action and lists responsibilities and tasks for Belong personnel in the event of a disaster striking the South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County region, the state, portions of it or anywhere in the United States where any South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County region child, youth or young adult is placed. Belong personnel will follow the SJRC Texas Policy and Procedures for Disaster and Emergency Response Preparedness Plan.

Belong will ensure that all licensed kinship/fictive kinship placements, licensed foster/adoptive homes, and all general residential operations have a current DERPP for each 8b child placed in the Belong network.

### **Licensed Foster/Adoptive placements (CPA and GRO)**

The DERPP will be completed for all licensed foster/adoptive placements and at a minimum include all the elements of Form 2288 Disaster Plan for DFPS Foster and Adoptive Homes. In addition, the DERPP should include the following:

- Mandatory evacuation if directed by local officials
- Emergency evacuation
- Emergency response
- Disaster planning training for all staff and Caregivers
- Preserving all child records
- Contact information for the assigned DFPS Caseworker and supervisor for each child is available
- Process that the Network Provider will use to track each child and their location
- Provision of services during and after the emergency or disaster
- Maintaining communication between DFPS, Belong, and Network Provider
- Post emergency and disaster plan
- Arrangements for adequate provision of:
  - Staffing
  - Shelter Food
  - Transportation Education Supplies
  - Emergency Equipment Emergency Services
  - Medically necessary equipment, medications and supplies, or access to these items for the child(ren) during an emergency

The Case Care Specialist will ensure that there are at least two current emergency contacts for all children, families, and placements in the event of an emergency or disaster. This information will be documented in the Child Face Sheet in CareMatch™ Internal and External Emergencies or Disasters include, but are not limited to:

- Acts of nature (such as flood, hurricane, snow, ice, fires, and tornados)
- Chemical or hazardous material spills

- Critical equipment failures
- Weapons of mass destruction events
- Acts of terrorism
- Quarantine

The DERPP will be reviewed at least every two years or when changes to administration, physical location, or emergency contacts occur.

The Network Provider must ensure that Belong has their current agency Emergency and Disaster contact information.

The Network Provider must contact the Belong VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts in the event of an emergency or disaster.

### **VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts**

[gabelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:gabelong@sjrctexas.org)  
(210) 876-6958

Once Belong is contacted by a Network Provider regarding an Emergency or Disaster, the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts will generate the active placement and provider reports from CareMatch™. These reports will be used to identify and track current child location and well-being. The tracking will continue until Post Emergency and Disaster plans are in place.

The Quality and Assurance and Contracts specialists will periodically audit CareMatch™ to ensure that children placed have at least two emergency contacts. Any missing data will be reported to the Case Care management team for correction.

An information systems plan for disaster and recovery is a requirement for all Network Providers during an emergency or disaster event.

### **Back-up and Disaster Recovery**

DFPS and Belong require backups of data and applications to enable the recovery of data in the event of loss or damage due to natural disasters. The following are requirements to ensure back-up and disaster recovery:

- Backups must be of sufficient frequency and extent to support documented business continuity and disaster recovery plans (Frequency and extent may vary, depending on data classification and owner requirements).
- Physical access controls in use at any offsite storage location must meet or exceed the physical access controls defined for the source systems.
- Media used in the provision of backup storage must be protected by the highest level of sensitivity of information being stored.
- A successful verification process must be implemented for all electronic information backups.
- Electronic information backups must be periodically tested to assure recoverability.
- At a minimum, stored data must include clearly identifiable labels or coding systems such as:
  - System name
  - Creation date
  - Sensitivity classification (based on applicable record retention regulations)

- Contact information
- Offsite storage facilities must be geographically located away from the primary physical location of the information resource so that a single disaster will not destroy the data at both sites.
- Confidential DFPS and or child information material transmitted over external network connections must be encrypted or otherwise protected as required by rule or law.
- Backup systems to prevent data and information loss require a redundant power source such as battery backups or generators.

## Quality Improvement and Contract Management

Belong's approach to managing services is outcome-driven, data-informed, and performance-based. As the SSCC, Belong will implement a network-wide service management and outcomes measurement system that will allow us to evaluate case progress and service program effectiveness at both the case and system levels. Our process will allow Belong management to hold ourselves and those we partner with accountable for financial, quality, and outcome measures that promote child safety, well-being, and permanency.

### Overview of Managing / Oversight of Network Providers

Belong will provide leadership and manage the Provider Network, and does not intend to provide direct services, nor to compete with its service partners. Belong will be the point of communication for the SSCC with DFPS. Network Provider performance will be evaluated and monitored regularly. Support will be made available to Network Providers to assist them in meeting performance standards. Support may be provided through training, referral for resources, or conflict resolution.

Network Providers who deliver more than one service may have separate contracts for each service to ensure compliance with applicable state and federal laws, regulations, and rules, and to allow for more accountability for outcomes. Enrollment for a Network Provider occurs when the provider has been approved by DFPS and entered the Belong Provider Network in IMPACT.

Interactions between Belong and Network Provider include but are not limited to the following:

- At least 80% of the Child Placing Agency Network Providers will have an on-site visit within the first year of enrollment.
- At least 70% of Emergency Shelter/General Residential Operation/ Residential Treatment Center Network Providers will have an on-site visit within the first year of enrollment if serving more than ten South Central and Hill Country clients.
- Network Providers that have not had an on-site visit will have a desk review within the first year of enrollment. The Quality Assurance and Contract Specialist will conduct case reviews on an ongoing basis to monitor service delivery.

After the initial monitoring visit, there will be annual site visits with possibly more frequent visits (based on identified risk factors) and staff interviews to monitor quality management. Network Providers will also be engaged in regular and on-going training, and evaluation of appropriateness of placements made through the regular submission of data for performance outcomes.

### Belong's role of ensuring compliance of Network Providers within the Network

Our approach to quality management is Performance Quality Improvement. At the center of every discussion is how process improvement will impact our children and families.

## **Case Review**

Belong is responsible for ensuring children/youth receive a full continuum of service. On a periodic basis, cases will be reviewed to ensure compliance. Belong maintains the confidentiality of case records while providing persons served or their designated legal representative access to their case records in accordance with state and federal privacy laws.

## **Case Review Process**

- These reviews will focus on specific needs within our community, and consumers serving the population, which will be determined through the required case reviews. We have also developed risk factors regarding case reviews, a process that initiates a case review when certain risk factors are present. For Belong those risk factors that will generate case reviews include:
  - Separated Siblings
  - Multiple moves
  - Incident reports
  - Length of stay in care relative to the age of the child
  - Child/youth not placed within 50 miles radius
- The sample to review will be determined by the number of cases active for at least 3 months with risk factors identified. Every quarter, at least 10% of those identified cases will undergo a case review completed by a Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist.
- Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialists will complete case review on an ongoing basis, as they will be monitoring the Service Delivery during Network Provider on-site and desk reviews.

## **Quality Management**

It is the expectation of Belong that all persons being served by its Network Providers shall receive the most effective and beneficial services in accordance with laws, administrative rules, policies, and directives included in the system of care. In addition, Belong is committed to identifying and replicating excellence in service delivery that results in enhanced safety, permanency, and well-being for the people it serves.

## **Quality Management Strategies**

Belong's parent organization, SJRC Texas, is a COA accredited organization. Belong is committed to ensuring provision of the highest quality services to the Clients served under the SSCC. Because accreditation is generally accepted nationwide as a clear indicator of quality services, achievement of measurable results, level of commitment to the health, safety, and rights of clients, supports staff and ensures sustainability and promotes growth, Belong intends to achieve Network Provider Standard accreditation through COA. It is highly recommended that Network Providers attain national accreditation by a national accreditation body and maintain that accreditation in good standing for the life of this contract.

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will focus on organizational systems of Network Provider members' performance and will seek to continuously improve the quality of services provided. Belong has established a quality management program that provides for the meaningful involvement of Belong staff members, Network Providers, individuals served, DFPS and other internal/external stakeholders. The program includes, but is not limited to the following elements:

- Establishing quality improvement goals and objectives related to operations, management, program results and outcome
- Developing reliable and valid performance measures
- Performance outcomes are established at the federal and state levels

- Making continuous and progressive improvements and measuring the impacts
- Reviewing performance in relation to utilization management targets
- Reviewing the results of quality assurance reviews, serious incident reports, the numbers and kinds of grievances and appeals, and using this information to initiate system improvements
- Identifying service problems and improvement opportunities
- Measuring satisfaction of individuals served and Network Providers
- Developing quantitative indicators, outcomes and outputs that can be used by Belong and the DFPS to objectively measure the Network Provider's performance and used by Belong and Network Provider's to improve services
- Providing training and technical assistance to Network Providers
- Providing needed information and feedback from case reviews to the Network Provider for them to have the necessary information and support to provide safety, permanency, and well-being effectively and efficiently for dependent children and their families
- Hiring a qualified Quality Assurance and Contracts Department that focuses on the children, families, and system readiness
- Monitoring Network Provider's compliance with contract standards and regulating entities
- Assuring Network Provider implements a defined process to complete and review background checks, and to verify staff education levels and professional licenses

Belong has created a Quality Assurance and Contracts Team to oversee all activities and tasks needed to maintain the desired level of performance by Belong and Network Providers. This includes a series of management techniques and processes used to assess and improve internal operations and Network services. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Team consists of the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts, and Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialists.

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department is responsible for:

- Ensuring quality targets are defined for each performance measure
- Ensuring all local, state, and federal requirements are being met per the SSCC contract
- Implementing quality improvement techniques to assure the quality of the performance measures
- Auditing and recording the level of quality achieved; and reporting the quality status to the Belong Network
- Performance Quality Improvement Process

Belong will actively engage Network Providers in the PQI process and develop contract-monitoring policies, procedures, and tools to guide the process. Network Providers will be held accountable through performance-based agreements, which detail the scope, requirements, and parameters of the Network Provider Services Agreement. Additionally, because Belong will encourage Network Providers to be nationally accredited and support them in their efforts to achieve this milestone, each Network Provider will be required to develop and implement internal quality management processes and participate in Belong's monitoring processes. Through the PQI process, Belong will work closely with Network Providers to ensure accountability and provide the necessary oversight and training support to ensure that the Network Providers meet the conditions of their Network Provider Services Agreement. Belong will strongly encourage participation in the PQI Process-Based Review of Contracts, Real-Time Review of Performance Data, and Accountability to Performance and Outcome Requirements.

As needed, the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will assist Network Providers in the development of Quality Improvement Plans that promote the ongoing evaluation of the Network Provider's activities. The plan will provide a systematic approach to monitoring efficiency and

effectiveness. The plan sets forth the purpose and scope of quality improvement activities and includes strategies for planning, monitoring, reporting and resolution of issues.

### **Deliverable Monitoring Process Overview**

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will participate in Belong Team Meetings to review performance measures, identify and discuss programmatic issues, and identify any trend for improvement. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will coordinate with Data on the monthly management report that tracks compliance with contract performance measures.

Reports will be distributed quarterly to Belong staff, Network Providers, and other identified stakeholders via the website. When data is received from Network Providers, or through automated systems, Belong will review and analyze the data to determine its accuracy and validity. If errors are found, Belong will work with the Network Provider to determine what is needed to correct the data. Network Providers will be required to provide a corrective action plan if errors are consistently found. Satisfaction surveys will be regularly provided to clients, employees, Network Providers, and foster parents to determine their experiences with Belong and the Network Providers. Results from the surveys are used to improve service delivery, identify service gaps, and improve outcomes for dependent children and their families.

Contract performance monitoring is conducted in conjunction with the Quality Assurance and Contracts Team. The monitoring will include child, personnel and foster parent file reviews, facility tours and interviews with Network Providers, foster parents, and personnel staff as needed to determine the quality and effectiveness of the services being offered.

### **Quality Assurance Reporting & Tracking**

The Consumer Affairs Department will review all complaints, grievances, appeals, and serious incident reports. Quality Assurance and Contracts will work with Consumer Affairs to analyze trends and provide an annual report on the status. If corrective action plans are required, the Network Provider responsible will provide a plan within 30 days of the request and will provide regular updates as needed to correct the issue. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will maintain and evaluate a centralized issue system designed to capture issues raised during reviews. After assessment and evaluation of the issues raised, the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will ensure that the outcomes are published and that resolutions to the issues are implemented. As a support to management, the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will provide documentation to management about the issues reviewed and analyzed. Management is then responsible for prioritizing action and either developing or approving strategies to resolve the issues. This information will be provided as needed to improve placement stability, safety, permanency, and well-being. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will coordinate policy and procedure development and updating.

### **On-Site Visit Overview**

Belong is responsible for upholding all requirements within the SSCC contract with DFPS. As a result, Belong has the authority to monitor, inspect, assess, and review the fiscal, contractual, or program performance of the Provider Network, including all information related to any services provided.

### **On-Site Visit Process**

The On-Site Review process may include, depending upon the review determined by the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department, a review of the following components:

- Records: Child, Family, Personnel, Policy and Procedure
- Physical Site

On-Site Reviews may be either announced or unannounced as determined by the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department. Belong will notify the Network Provider of an on-site visit via email and/or phone call at least 24 hours prior to most visits occurring. Belong reserves the right to make unannounced visits to the Network Provider.

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will complete the On-Site Reviews for each Network Provider and request assistance from the various departments of Belong as needed in preparation for the review. Administrative monitoring will be completed by the Finance Department, programmatic monitoring and quality is completed by the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department.

Quality Assurance and Contracts is responsible for the following:

- Scheduling the monitoring visit with the Network Provider and sending a letter requesting the required information prior to the monitoring visit
- Meeting with the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts to review any identified issues
- Distributing monitoring tools and coordinating the review
- Scheduling entrance and exit interviews
- Being the point of contact for the Network Provider during the monitoring activities
- Compiling and preparing the final monitoring report to issue to the Network Provider with any necessary Quality Improvement Plan
- Reviewing, accepting, and monitoring Quality Improvement Plans as needed

Quality Assurance and Contracts will participate in pre-meetings, on-site monitoring and/or desk reviews, entrance and exit interviews, and any activities needed for the final report and any sanctions as requested by the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts. The Network Provider should be prepared to make available the following, including but not limited to:

- Policies and Procedures Manual
- Personnel Records
- Foster Home Records
- Child Records
- Financial Records
- RCCL History and Documentation
- Data entry process/requirements related to census
- Other pertinent information requested by Belong

### **Pre-Monitoring Activities**

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will send an email with a letter to the Network Provider announcing the date of the monitoring and requesting necessary documentation. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will review the contract file and ensure that all applicable monitoring reports, licensing summaries, and other documentation are in the file. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will meet to review prior reports and any current issues and additionally will review monitoring tools and determine roles and timelines.

### **On-Site Activities**

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will meet with the Network Provider's staff to go over the purpose, scope, and activities planned for the review during the entrance interview. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department may be reviewing a variety of files including but not limited to client, personnel, foster parent, and financial files, as deemed appropriate in the pre-monitoring activities.

Interviews with staff and/or clients may be conducted, and a tour of the facility may be requested. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will compile work product papers as part of the monitoring. These papers are confidential during the review and must be secured daily. They are included as backup in the Belong file once the monitoring is concluded. During the review, if a safety concern is apparent, it will be addressed immediately with the Network Provider and will require immediate action and Intervention and include reporting to the hotline as necessary. The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will require a private space to review files. When the on-site review is completed, the Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will review the preliminary results with the Network Provider during the Exit Interview.

### **Monitoring Report and Follow-up**

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will document findings, attaching additional information as needed. Within 30 days of the exit interview, the assigned Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist will compile a final report. The report may include a request for a Quality Improvement Plan. The report will be submitted to the Network Provider.

If the Network Provider disagrees with the findings, the Network Provider needs to provide a written response within five (5) business days to the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts.

- The VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts will review the response and will respond in writing within five (5) business days with a final decision.
- Quality Improvement Plans will be due from the Network Provider within 30 days of receipt of the report.
- If accepted, the assigned Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist will notify the Network Provider, copying the VP of Quality Assurance and Contracts regarding follow-up action.
- If corrections and updates are needed, the Network Provider will be notified, and an updated Quality Improvement Plan will be requested.
- Once the Quality Improvement Plan is accepted, assigned Quality Assurance and Contracts Specialist will follow-up to ensure progress is made.

### **Contract Monitoring File**

Monitoring files will be maintained according to published retention schedules, to include:

- Previous year's monitoring results and Quality Improvement Plans
- Current year's result with backup documentation
- Current Quality Improvement Plans with backup documentation
- Any special reviews, analysis, meeting minutes, or other activities identified in review that relate to specific Network Provider oversight

### **Performance Quality Improvement Process**

Belong is committed to continually improving the quality of services delivered and the operational processes that support our continuum of care. Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI) is an ongoing agency-wide process incorporating our mission, vision, strategy, and values to promote a high-learning, high-performing, and results-oriented culture. PQI is not another thing we do at Belong—it is how our work is done.

It is the philosophy of Belong to adopt “best available practices” in providing services to clients. We are accessible to and inclusive of each client, employee, Trustee, Network Provider, and concerned community person. We provide them with opportunities to influence our practices and services to benefit the clients we serve. The systematic collection, collation and interpretation of data concerning certain aspects of care, trends in client service, outcomes of service delivery, and management practices allow

the agency to set broad goals that merit monitoring.

Belong is committed to promoting quality in a supportive manner that encourages participation and feedback when areas are identified as needing improvement.

The means of ensuring levels of quality service requires:

- A strong focus on our clients
- A strong employee involvement, at all levels, in the PQI process
- The regular and systematic collection and dissemination of stakeholder feedback

The strong emphasis on capacity building through solid program evaluation activities and data derived thereof.

- Collection, aggregation and review of client, program, management, and organization level data. Data is used by clients, employees, management teams, and Board of Directors to aid in decision making and planning, as it relates to PQI.
- An annual training schedule informed by PQI trends, and an organizational culture of ongoing learning and capacity development based on quality improvement philosophy and principles.

The Performance Quality Improvement (PQI) process will allow Belong management to hold ourselves, and those we partner with, accountable for financial, quality, and outcome measures that promote child safety, well-being, and permanency.

The Quality Assurance and Contracts department will engage in a continuous cycle of monitoring that is repeated until performance is at the highest achievable level and stability is maintained.

Through the PQI process, the Quality Assurance and Contracts department will work closely with Network Providers to ensure accountability and provide the necessary oversight and training to ensure that the Network Provider meets the conditions of their agreement.

### **Overview of Performance Quality Improvement Process**

Belong's Quality Improvement Process helps us identify issues or problems that affect program outputs and outcomes and implement quality improvement plans that address challenges as well as build upon Network strengths.

Belong's approach is based upon the identification of expected performance goals and outcomes, development and implementation of measurable objectives that tie to those goals and outcomes, utilization of tools to measure those objectives, continuous evaluation of data, and subsequently, the identification of additional changes that will drive continued improvement.

The comprehensive review includes, but is not limited to, an onsite review of records, interviews, and direct observations by the Quality Assurance and Contracts team. Network Providers must meet clear levels of contractual performance or immediately execute plans to meet performance expectations. This process will continue until the quality of the deliverables and processes meet the defined quality standards.

### **Contract Outcomes**

Network Providers will be monitored through Belong Performance Quality Improvement Process. This is a requirement of the Contract between Belong and the State of Texas as well as a requirement of the

Network Provider Services Agreement between Belong and the Network Providers.

Additional outcomes may be added to Network Providers based on their level of functioning within the Network.

- Daily submission of extensive data and information for each child served as well as data on Foster Homes or facilities within the Network must be entered into the Texas Provider Gateway. This includes placement vacancies, data entry related to Texas Provider Gateway outcomes quarterly, reporting of specific data elements to the utilized by Texas Provider Gateway system, and any other data as needed by Belong.
- Network Providers are required to enter the PMET measures on a quarterly basis by the 10th of the month after the quarter closes into the Texas Provider Gateway. Only Children under Belong contract in South Texas and Hill Country should be entered into PMET system, all other data continues to be entered into the DFPS PMET system.
- Compliance with applicable HHSC minimum standards for each service type provided by the Network Provider. Citations received by the Network Provider will be reviewed by Belong as part of Belong continuous quality improvement process. Action plans for Network Providers will be created based on the type of citation/violation received.
- Acceptable performance on stakeholder and consumer surveys administered by Belong.
- Acceptable performance on process checklists, project audits and quality assurance reviews to include peer reviews, deliverable reviews, documentation reviews, and process reviews.

## Reports

The Quality Assurance and Contracts Department will review the Network Provider's data/information compiled by the Belong Data Team. Quality and Assurance will review the data and complete a summary report on at least a quarterly basis. The summary report may include follow-up and/or recommendations for the Network Provider.

## Applicable Regulation, Statutes and Policies

All employees of Belong and the Network Providers are required to know and follow relevant laws and regulations for their respective professions.

Belong will comply with all applicable DFPS/HHSC Minimum Standards with state and federal laws and regulations, including but not limited to the following:

- Comply with all court orders and jurisdictional requirements
- Comply with all court orders regarding the provision of substitute care, case management services and/or purchased client services for children, youth, and families served through the SSCC, relevant to the stage being implemented
- Follow all State (including both Texas Family Code and Title 40, Part 19 of the Texas Administrative Code) and federal laws to include compliance with the and regulations (terms of all Performance Improvement Plans because of a Federal or State Audit) as well as HHSC Child Care Minimum Standards for 24-Hour Residential Care Operations and Child-Placing Agencies, and DFPS Records Management Policy:
  - **Texas Family Code:** <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/?link=FA>
  - **Title 40, Part 19 of the Texas Administrative Code:** [http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac\\$ext.ViewTAC?tac\\_view=3&ti=40&pt=19](http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.ViewTAC?tac_view=3&ti=40&pt=19)
  - **DFPS Child Care Minimum Standards:** [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child\\_care/child\\_care\\_standards\\_and\\_regulations/](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/child_care/child_care_standards_and_regulations/)
  - **DFPS Records Management Policy:** [https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/records/records\\_management\\_policy/](#)

- <https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/RMG/default.asp>
- **Child Welfare Services, Title IV-B, Subpart 1 of the Social Security Act.** For additional information: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs\\_fund/state\\_tribal/ss\\_act.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/state_tribal/ss_act.htm)
- **Promoting Safe and Stable Families, Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act.** For additional information: [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs\\_fund/state\\_tribal/ss\\_act2.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/programs_fund/state_tribal/ss_act2.htm)
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).** For additional information: <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/>
- **Title IV-E of the Social Security Act:** <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/resource/title-ive-foster-care>
- **Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA):** <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/about/>
- **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)** - Information on ICWA can be found by visiting: <https://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/25/chapter-21>
- **Multiethnic Placement Act (MEPA)** - Information on MEPA- Information on MEPA can be found by visiting: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/cb/pi9523.pdf>
- The SSCC will work in partnership with DFPS to improve outcomes for Children as it relates to the **Federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR)**. Information on the CF SR can be found by visiting: [https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/cfsr/DFPS - Title IV-B State Plan](https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/reform/cfsr/DFPS-TitleIV-BStatePlan)
- **National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD).** The SSCC shall assist children and support the necessary activities including on-going computer access required for entry of data into NYTD system and will assume this responsibility in Stage II. Information on NYTD can be found by visiting: <http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/txyouth/NYTD/default.asp>

Belong will report known serious incidents, licensing investigations, licensure board reports and investigations, suspected fraud or fraud investigations and violations that occur within Belong's service model (the Network) to HHSC and DFPS in accordance with Licensing Minimum Standards and contract requirements. Belong will make reasonable efforts to ensure services provided to children and families are offered in the individual's primary language.

Belong will meet all HHSC Residential Child Care Licensing (RCCL) Minimum Standards. Belong employees will receive a copy of the Belong Policies and Procedures.

### **Residential Child Care Licensing (RCCL)**

Belong will comply with the HHSC RCCL Minimum Standards.

#### **Providers shall:**

- Comply with HHSC RCCL Minimum Standards for any child-care license issued by the HHSC to the Network Provider for services provided under this Contract
- Comply with the operating or regulatory agency's regulations if the Network Provider, as a Facility operated or regulated by one of the state agencies specified in 40 TAC

§700.1321(e)

- Comply with all applicable service levels as designated by Belong Care Management staff
- Ensure that all staff providing direct services to the Child complies with state professional laws pertaining to the services provided including laws pertaining to licensure and confidentiality

**Role of Licensing**

Network Provider must report to Belong known serious incidents, licensing investigations, licensure board reports and investigations, suspected fraud or fraud investigations and violations that occur within Network Provider’s business in accordance with HHSC Licensing Minimum Standards and contract requirements. For these circumstances, and always in general, the Network Provider must have operational procedures and mechanisms in place to ensure staff are knowledgeable of and respond immediately to conditions or situations that may pose a threat to child safety.

Belong will regard any failure to disclose and report such incidents by the Network Providers as a breach of the Provider Agreement with Belong. Residential Child Care Licensing's role with all licensed providers, including the Belong Network Providers, will remain unchanged, and all Network Providers are expected to always maintain compliance with licensing standards and regulations.

**Background Check Policy**

Any person who has direct contact with DFPS clients or client information must undergo a DFPS background check in accordance with this section and the DFPS Background Check Policy. The Department reserves the right to conduct background history checks on Belong, Belong employees, subcontractors, volunteers, agents, and other individuals who interact with DFPS Clients or have access to Clients' records. DFPS will conduct all necessary background checks on Belong through the licensing process. If Belong chooses to provide services under this Contract through a subcontractor licensed by DFPS, then DFPS will conduct background checks on the licensed subcontractor through the licensing process. When Belong provides services for families in Stage II of the implementation model under this Contract through a subcontractor who is not licensed by DFPS, Belong must verify and ensure that such subcontractors and their employees, agents, and volunteers undergo DFPS background checks by using the DFPS Automated Background Check System (ABCS) according to the instructions in the user guide located at: [DFPS Background Checks Handbooks](#)

**Contact with Clients.**

Belong will prevent or promptly remove any employee, agent, volunteer, subcontractor, subcontractor's employee, subcontractor's agent, or subcontractor's volunteer from direct client contact and/or from access to client records who is identified by the DFPS Background Check Unit as Ineligible. If DFPS determines that the person in question has not committed the acts or offenses alleged, that person may again be assigned to direct client contact and/or access to client records. However, Belong will notify the Department of its intent to do so no later than ten business days after determination and receive Department approval prior to the reassignment. Belong must provide DFPS with further information concerning the reasons for the reassignment upon the request of the Department. If the person in question is found to have committed any of the acts or offenses listed in this Contract, that person will not be reassigned to duties involving any direct contact with clients and/or access to client records.

Belong will ensure **initial and subsequent Background History Checks** are performed in compliance with Minimum Standards, including:

- Submitting initial Checks in a timely manner
- Submitting subsequent Checks before their due date
- Ensuring employees, volunteers, Contractors, and caregivers are not present at the facility if the

Checks are submitted past the due date

- Timely complying with any DFPS Centralized Background Check Unit requirements when there is a relevant Check for a particular employee, volunteer, Contractor, or Caregiver, which includes but is not limited to restrictions on employee actions like not transporting Children or not being the sole Caregiver for Children or submitting complete requests for risk evaluations timely

### **Background Checks for Principals.**

In addition to the above requirements, anyone who is a Principal must follow the Purchased Client Services Background Check Policy. A Principal is defined as any person who can make unilateral fiscal decisions on behalf of Belong. The following positions are assumed to have such ability: Chief Executive Officer, Chief Administrative Officer, Chief Operating Officer, and Chief Financial Officer. This policy also applies to situations where a subcontractor performs any portion of Belong's financial or accounting operations. In such situations, Belong will require subcontractor's principals to follow the Purchased Client Services Background Check Policy. Any person or entity this policy applies to must conduct Background History Checks and submit them through the DFPS Automated Background Check System (ABCS) in accordance with the Purchased Client Services Background Check Policy, which can be found at:

#### DFPS - Background Checks ABCS

Belong will disclose and release, or cause its employees, subcontractors, and volunteers with direct client contact and/or access to client records to disclose and release, any allegation made against that employee, subcontractor, or volunteer alleging the commission of any act noted in either: (1) the DFPS Purchased Client Services (PCS) Background Check Criminal History Chart or (2) the DFPS Purchased Client Services (PCS) Background Check DFPS Central Registry Chart, both of which may be accessed using the below links:

- **CBCU Appendix 2000-1**  
[https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/Background\\_Checks/Files/BC\\_px\\_2000-1.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/Background_Checks/Files/BC_px_2000-1.asp)
- **DFPS Purchased Client Services (PCS) Background Check DFPS Central Registry Chart**  
[https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/Background\\_Checks/Files/BC\\_px\\_2000-2.asp](https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/handbooks/Background_Checks/Files/BC_px_2000-2.asp)

## **Information Technology**

### **Technical Contact**

Each Network Provider must specify a technical contact, a person familiar with program operations and relevant technology systems used within the organization. The technical contact's responsibilities include the following:

- Serve as liaison between the Network Provider and Belong technical staff
- Request the creation and deactivation of user accounts for Belong software systems
- Request training and support for the Network Provider's staff in the use of Belong software systems
- Serve as the local administrator for The Texas Provider Gateway accounts and password resets
- Report technical problems related to Belong software systems

### **Required Data**

Network Providers are required to submit timely data, including the following:

- Client data such as assessments, demographics, health information, medications, critical incidents, and the Child Plan of Service

- Resource home information such as address, contact information, licensing information, members of household, and preferences relating to the types of children to be placed

A detailed set of the required resource requirements, including required data fields, can be found at the website [texasprovidergateway.org](http://texasprovidergateway.org) (requires login). Network Providers must also submit quarterly performance data (PMET data) and other data as required by Belong.

### **Methods of Data Submission**

Network Providers may choose between the following methods of submissions for Resource Information and preferences updates:

- Direct data entry into Belong's web-based software systems (Texas Provider Gateway)
- Automated upload of data from the Network Provider's internal software systems through the Texas Provider Gateway using the API Interface

A Network Provider may also choose to use a combination of direct entry and automated uploads, so long as all required data fields are submitted on a timely basis.

Network Providers electing to enter data directly will log into Texas Provider Gateway to enter data related to homes, such as address, contact information, licensing information, members of the household, and preferences relating to the types of children to be placed. Other information such as assessments, demographics, health information, medications, critical incidents, and plans of care should be tracked by the Network Provider's internal systems and uploaded to Belong through the appropriate email links provided below. All email transmissions to Belong that include protected private information are required to be encrypted.

Network Providers electing to use the automated upload method are responsible for configuring their internal systems to capture and upload data in the required format, as described in detail at the Texas Provider Gateway website.

### **Texas Provider Gateway**

Belong intends to work with the Network Providers to offer training and information to support their efforts.

During business hours, Belong provides support by contacting [support@sjrctexas.org](mailto:support@sjrctexas.org) for Network Providers with issues related to Texas Provider Gateway.

### **Logins for Texas Provider Gateway**

The Network Provider's technical contact will serve as administrator to the Texas Provider Gateway for their organization. They will be able to provide the following functionality:

- Create New Users
- Delete and modify existing users
- Provide password resets

Each Network Provider's employee responsible for data entry should have his or her own login.

### **Scheduled Automated Upload**

Network Providers using the Texas Provider Gateway must upload the required data (as detailed at [texasprovidergateway.org](http://texasprovidergateway.org)) at least once daily (excluding weekends and holidays) by 7:00 PM CST. Network Providers may upload data more frequently if they choose or if requested by Belong.

## **Confidentiality and Secure Communication**

When Network Providers and Belong communicate in either direction by email or by fax, and those messages contain confidential information, appropriate precautions must be taken to protect the confidential information. Confidential information refers to protected health information, identifying information, personal information, proprietary information, or other information reasonably deemed confidential.

DFPS and Belong require the use of an email encryption system to transmit emails containing confidential information, whether the confidential information is contained within the email message, its headers, or any file attachments to the message.

DFPS and Belong require physical security around fax machines to prevent unauthorized access to confidential information. Belong encourages the use of secure digital faxing services which deliver faxes to a secure email account.

## **Finance and Billing Procedures**

Belong, as a division of SJRC Texas, will follow the process outlined in the Network Provider Services Agreement for payments and payment disputes. Questions that arise should be forwarded to the Chief Financial Officer at [accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org).

### **Initial Payment for Foster Care Services**

New placements - Network Providers will be paid by Belong for all new placements that have been referred by Belong.

Legacy transfers - Network Providers will be paid by Belong, for South Central and Hill Country or Bexar County region transferred legacy kids beginning on the date the legacy children are transferred into the Belong Network.

### **Payment Terms**

Belong will pay a Network Provider based on the level of care approved by Belong program staff. The rates for the levels of care can be found in the signed Provider Service Agreement and/or signed Addendum(s). These payments include, but are not limited to, the daily rates and fees for foster care, exceptional foster care, supervised independent living, preparation for adult living, and adoption services.

Exceptional Care is used to secure placement for children and youth with exceptional needs that cannot be met appropriately through the use of the foster care rate. DFPS will authorize use of exceptional care days of care using a validation process in instances when:

- (1) there is a Court Order that dictates a child specific placement or payment that exceeds the contemplated rate structure of the blended rate
- (2) the child has extraordinary service needs that far exceed the traditional residential childcare settings (example: major eating disorders, severe medical/psychiatric needs)
- (3) the SSCC has performed an exhaustive search, and placement cannot be located without the use of a negotiated rate that exceeds the contemplated rate structure of the blended rate

Once the data is certified as correct and complete at that moment in time by Belong's data team and program team, the SJRC Texas accounting department will process the data in our accounting system and initiate the payments to the network providers' bank accounts by electronic funds transfer (EFT)/direct deposit. SJRC Texas Inc. will pay all Network Providers no later than the 20th day of each month, however, Belong will make every effort to process payments as soon as possible after the end of the service month.

A payment report will be sent to each network provider to their specified contact information, providing details of the payment. The Network Provider will be able to compare the payment received to their records. Any discrepancies will need to be communicated by filling out a discrepancy report and submitting it to [accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org). The template for this discrepancy report can be obtained by contacting the Belong Accounting department at [accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org).

### **Foster Care Service Payments**

Belong will pay the Network Providers for foster care services at the fee-for-service rates shown in Exhibit I of the Provider Services Agreement.

- Network Providers will receive payment for each day a youth is in pre-authorized placement.
- Belong will pay the Network Provider for the calendar day of placement, but not for the calendar day for the day a child leaves care.
- Belong will not process payments for any foster care services for children for whom Belong has not yet issued a placement agreement.
- Belong may pay the Network Provider for up to 14 days of foster care in the following circumstances:
  - Psychiatric hospitalization
  - Medical facility hospitalization
  - Runaway
  - Unauthorized placement
  - Temporary placement/visit in own home
  - Locked facility, jail, juvenile detention center
  - Short-term substance abuse placement
- Under the above-referenced circumstances, Belong will pay the Network Provider for days of foster care on behalf of a child who is no longer in that Network Provider's care, to reserve space for the child's anticipated return to the same placement within that time frame. The maximum duration of continued payments to the Network Provider during a child's absence is subject to the limitations set forth in this section.
- Payments to the Network Provider for foster care during a child's absence will only be made if each of the following conditions are met:
  - The Network Provider plans to return the child to the same placement at the end of the absence
  - The Network Provider agrees to reserve space for the child's return for as long as payments are made in the child's absence
  - The Network Provider has approval or a request to hold the placement for a child from DFPS and/or Belong
- Belong will not pay the Network Provider for days of foster care when Children and/or Youth reside in the following non-DFPS paid placements:
  - Nursing home placement
  - Intermediate care facilities for persons with mental retardation (ICFMR)
  - State Supported Living Centers (SSLC)

- Placed with a non-licensed relative caregiver
- Pre-consummated adoptive placement
- Texas Youth Commission facility
- Texas State Hospitals

### **Adoption Service Payments**

Belong will pay the Network Providers for “Adoption Placement” services. The fees for these services are included in the Provider Services Agreement. Network Providers will be required to send an adoption document packet to the Belong Adoption Specialist for Adoption Placement services. The document packet must be received by Belong within 30 days from the date of service. For adoption placement services, the date of service is the date of the adoptive placement as shown on the DFPS adoptive placement agreement. For adoption post-placement services, the date of service is the date the adoption decree or final adoption order is signed by the judge.

Adoption service authorization - For all adoption placement and post-placement services conducted within the Belong network, the Belong Permanency Specialist will issue a POS Request directly to the Network Provider.

Adoption service documentation - Belong will work with the DFPS and Network Provider staff to acquire the following documents for all adoptions within 5 business days of the adoption placement or post-placement event. (Note: Other adoption documents may be required also, but these are the only documents required in this section of the manual.)

#### Checklist for Adoption Placement Services Payment

- Copy of the Belong POS Service Request Referral (with a date of adoptive placement within the period of the begin Date and the Termination Date)
- Copy of the approved and signed DFPS Adoptive Placement Agreement for each child
- Copy of the approved and signed Provider's Adoptive Placement Agreement for each child

#### Checklist for Adoption Post-Placement Services Payment

- Copy of the Belong POS Service Request Referral (with a date of adoptive placement within the period of the begin Date and the Termination Date)
- Copy of the approved and signed DFPS Adoptive Placement Agreement for each child
- Copy of the approved and signed Provider's Adoptive Placement Agreement for each child
- Copy of the file stamped petition for adoption
- Copy of the signed and notarized court report for the adoption proceedings
- Copy of the adoption decree signed by the judge

Once the adoption placement and post-placement documents have been received by the Belong Adoption Specialist, the documents will be uploaded to the record of the child (primary client/oldest sibling) in CareMatch™, and the adoption placement and/or post-placement request will be created by the Belong Adoption Specialist in CareMatch™ for the child(ren).

Once the adoption service request is approved in CareMatch™, payment will be made to the provider in 30 to 45 days. (No adoption service payment will be issued before placement for 88F placement services or before consummation for 88G post-placement services.) Please note that only Straight Adopt Placements qualify for both 88F and 88G adoptive payments. Foster to Adopt Placements only qualify for 88G post- placement services.

Belong may withhold payment for disputed services and begin the disputed service reconciliation process described in the Finances and Billing section of the provider manual.

### **Requirements for Voluntary Extended Foster Care or Return to Foster Care Provider Payments**

Belong will pay the Network Providers for Extended Foster Care Services, which also include Supervised Independent Living Services. Extended Foster Care Services will be paid based on the fee schedule included in the Provider Services Agreement. Rates for Supervised Independent Living will vary based on living arrangement. The fees for these services will be included in the Supervised Independent Living Provider Services Agreement.

To pay Network Providers for Voluntary Extended Foster Care or Return to Foster Care Services and Supervised Independent Living Services, the following conditions must be met:

- The Extended Foster Care agreement signed by the youth must be on file with Belong
- The Network Provider must be able to provide documentation on a periodic basis demonstrating that the youth is:
  - Regularly attending high school or enrolled in a program leading toward a high school diploma or GED up to the youth or young adult's 22nd birthday
  - Regularly attending an institution of higher education or a post-secondary vocational or technical program up to the youth or young adult's 21st birthday; The youth can remain in care to complete vocational-technical training classes regardless of whether the Youth or young adult received a high school diploma or GED certificate. (40 TAC §700.316)
  - Actively participating in a program or activity that promotes, or removes barriers to employment, up to the youth or young adult's 21st birthday
  - Employed for at least 80 hours per month up to the youth or young adult's 21st birthday
  - Incapable of doing any of the above due to a documented medical condition up to the youth or young adult's 21st birthday; or (40 TAC §700.316)
  - Accepted for admission to a college or vocational program that does not begin immediately. In this case, the youth or young adult's eligibility is extended three and a half months after the end of the month in which the youth or young adult receives his/her high school diploma or Graduate Equivalency Diploma (GED) certificate

### **Requirements for Psychiatric Hospitalization Payments**

Belong will pay out-of-network psychiatric hospitalization providers (Psych Hospitals) for days of service provided for Belong clients in accordance with the guidelines specified in their service agreements.

Superior Health is only required to pay for acute services. Belong will be responsible for all post-acute days.

### **Network Provider Monitoring – Minimum Pass-Through Rate Compliance**

Belong monitors its Child Placing Agency Network Providers for compliance with the minimum pass-through rate as determined by DFPS. This annual monitoring is performed by the Belong VP of Accounting with assistance by Belong's Quality Assurance and Contracts department. A sample of placements to be reviewed will be provided to the Network Provider.

### **Network Provider Monitoring – Financial Viability**

Belong may monitor the financial viability of the Network Providers when it is deemed appropriate.

Per the Provider Services Agreement, Network Providers must send their annual unaudited financial

statements to Belong within 90 days of the Network Provider's fiscal year end. These financial statements shall include Balance Sheet and Income Statement (or Statement of Activities and Changes in Net Assets). If the financial statements of the Network Provider have been audited or reviewed by an independent certified public accountant, then audited financial statements accompanied by the auditor's management letter or a financial review report are to be provided to Belong within nine (9) months following the Network Provider's fiscal year end.

Belong will utilize standard financial measures to monitor the financial viability of the Network Providers when it is deemed appropriate to do so. The monitoring will be performed by the Belong Chief Financial Officer's designee and the results of this monitoring will be submitted to the Belong COO.

### **Disputed Service Reconciliation**

The Network Provider will reconcile the payment from Belong to the Network Provider's records. If any discrepancies are noted, the Network Provider will need to initiate the following dispute resolution process within 30 days of receiving payment. The Dispute Resolution Process is in the Provider Services Agreement.

The parties will confer, in person or by telephone conference, to resolve disputes over payment for services through the following process. To initiate this process, either party must provide the other party with written notice by submitting a discrepancy report to [accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org). The template for this discrepancy report can be obtained by contacting the Belong Accounting department at [accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org](mailto:accountingbelong@sjrctexas.org).

- Staff Conferencing - Within ten (10) days of receipt of a written notice initiating the Dispute Resolution Process, Belong and Network Provider, through representatives of their services and financial staff, will confer and attempt to reconcile any disputed payments for which Belong—based upon a good faith review of any documents submitted by the Network Provider and Belong own documentation or records – does not believe it is responsible for paying. The parties shall complete the staff conferencing process described in this section within 30 days of the receipt of the written notice initiating the dispute resolution process. If the dispute is not resolved within this time, the process will continue to CFO Conferencing.
- CFO Conferencing - For services still in dispute following the staff conferencing reconciliation process, Belong Chief Financial Officer and the Network Provider's Chief Financial Officer, or their designees, shall confer to resolve, settle, or compromise the dispute. The parties shall complete the CFO Conferencing process described in this section within 30 days of the completion of the Staff Conferencing process described above.

Payment after Resolving Disputes - If Belong after conferring as provided herein with the Network Provider about the disputed payment concludes it is responsible for paying for a service or some part of it, Belong shall include this with the Network Provider's next monthly payment following the month in which Belong concluded it was liable for payment.

In the event the Network Provider owes Belong for any services provided herein or pursuant to any other agreement between the parties, and such balance has been due for more than 60 days from invoicing by Belong to the Network Provider, Belong may deduct the balance amount due to Belong from any amount owed to the Network Provider pursuant to this Agreement.

**Compliance with the Master Contract** – Belong shall take all reasonable and necessary action to comply with the requirements of the Master Contract and ensure payment for the Services thereunder.

If the Network Provider or its independent auditor discovers an overpayment has been made by Belong, the Network Provider shall repay said overpayment immediately to Belong without prior notification or request from Belong. If Belong discovers an overpayment has been made to the Network Provider, Belong shall notify the Network Provider by letter of such a finding and request repayment forthwith. Belong may unilaterally deduct overpayments made to the Network Provider from monies owed to the Network Provider.

### **Return of Funds**

Overpayments from Belong to Network Provider detected by Belong's payment system or by Belong staff will be automatically offset and deducted in subsequent payments to Network Provider and reflected in payment details. In the event an overpayment is not fully collected within 30 days, interest on all outstanding overpayments will be charged using the Department of Treasury's Median Rate (resulting from the Treasury's auction of 13-week bills) for the week in which the liability is assessed, but in no event to exceed the highest lawful rate of interest. Any question or dispute related to the recovery of an overpayment shall be handled in accordance with Belong's dispute resolution process set forth in the Provider Manual. If Network Provider or an independent auditor or agent of Network Provider discovers an overpayment has been made by Belong to Network Provider, Network Provider shall notify Belong and repay the overpayment immediately, in accordance with the Uniform Terms and Conditions Section 3.1.8, within ten (**10**) days of discovery, without prior demand from Belong. Failure to remit overpayments shall be a material breach of this Agreement. Absent prompt repayment of an overpayment known to or discovered by Network Provider, Belong may unilaterally deduct overpayments, plus interest, made to Network Provider from monies owed to Network Provider.

In compliance with the prompt payment rule, as stated in section 3.1.1(F) of the Uniform Terms and Conditions of the CBC contract, Belong will pay interest on late payments not issued within 30 days of the end of the service month. This does not include incorrect payments made due to critical information, such as YFT paperwork, not furnished by Network Provider. Interest starts accruing the first day that the payment is late and will be calculated using the Department of Treasury's Median Rate (resulting from the Treasury's auction of 13-week bills).

### **Provider Manual Revision**

This Provider Manual will be revised as needed. When it is revised, Network Providers will be notified and provided with a summary of changes, and the latest version will be posted on the SJRC Texas | Belong website. It is the responsibility of the Network Provider to ensure they are operating within the most current version of the Provider Manual.

## APPENDIX A

The Serious Incidents, outlined below, requires reporting to the Texas Abuse and Neglect Hotline at **1-800-252-5400**, or online reporting at <https://www.txabusehotline.org>. Some incidents may also require reporting to Law Enforcement. Please follow Minimum Standards for reporting requirements and timelines. The below are examples of required events for reporting but are subject to change so refer to Residential Child Care Licensing Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies (Human Resource Code Chapter 749) or General Residential Operations for current requirements (Human Resources Code Chapter 748).

- A child dies while in your care
- A substantial physical injury or critical illness that a reasonable person would conclude needs treatment by medical professional or hospitalization
- Allegations of abuse, neglect, harassment or exploitation of a youth, or any incident where there are indications that a youth in care may have been abused, neglected, or exploited
- Physical abuse committed by a child against another child. For the purpose of this subsection, physical abuse occurs when there is substantial physical injury, excluding any accident; or failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in substantial physical injury to the child
- Sexual abuse committed by a child against another child (For the purpose of this subsection, sexual abuse is conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional or physical welfare, including nonconsensual sexual activity between children of any age, and consensual sexual activity between children with more than 24 months difference in age or when there is a significant difference in the developmental level of the children; or failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child)
- A child is indicted, charged, or arrested for a crime, not including being issued a ticket at school by law enforcement or any other citation that does not result in the child being detained; or when law enforcement responds to an alleged incident at the foster home
- A youth is absent from your operation and cannot be located, including the removal of a youth by an unauthorized person:
  - Child Developmental/Chronically under six (6) - immediate report
  - Child Developmental/Chronically six (6) to twelve (12) – report within two hours of child missing
  - Child Developmental/Chronically thirteen (13) or older- report within 6 hours of child missing
- A child in your care contracts a communicable disease that the law requires you to report to the Department of State Health Services (DSHS) as specified in 25 TAC Chapter 97, Subchapter A, (relating to Control of Communicable Diseases)
- A suicide attempt by a youth
- Any incident that renders all or part of your agency unsafe or unsanitary for a child, such as a fire or a flood
- A disaster or emergency that requires a foster home to close
- An adult who has contact with a child in care contracts a communicable disease noted in 25 TAC Chapter 97, Subchapter A, (relating to Control of Communicable Diseases)
- An allegation that a person under the auspices of your agency who directly cares for or has access to a child in the setting has abused drugs within the past seven (7) days
- An investigation of abuse or neglect by an entity (other than Licensing) of an employee, professional level service provider, foster parent, contract staff, volunteer, or other adult at the agency
- An arrest, indictment, or a county or district attorney accepts an "Information" regarding an

official complaint against an employee, professional level service provider, foster parent, contract staff, volunteer, or other adult at the agency alleging commission of any crime as provided in §745.661 of this title (relating to which types of criminal convictions may affect a subject's ability to be present at an operation); or when law enforcement responds to an alleged incident at the foster home

- Any incident that renders all or part of the campus unsafe or unsanitary for a youth, such as a natural disaster or physical plant breakdown
- A disaster or emergency that requires a location to close
- An adult who has contact with a youth in care contracts a communicable disease that the law requires be reported to the Department of Health
- An allegation that a person under the auspices of SJRC Texas who directly cares for or has access to a youth in the operation has abused drugs within the past seven (7) days
- An investigation of abuse or neglect by an entity (other than licensing agency) of an employee, professional level service provider (e.g., therapist), volunteer or other adult at your location.
- A report, arrest, indictment, or a county or district attorney accepts "information" regarding an official complaint against an employee, professional level service provider or volunteer, alleging commission of a crime.
- A report by a non-employee (e.g., regulatory agency, donor, community individual or business, etc.) regarding a complaint against or incident involving an SJRC Texas employee, professional level service provider, or volunteer.