

## **Louisiana Child Care Emergency Preparedness and Response Plan**

(Prepared in response to 2014-2015 CCDF State Plan Section 1.6)

When one thinks of a disaster in Louisiana, they think of hurricanes. However, the fact is, Louisiana is susceptible to many of the same natural and man-made disasters as other areas of the country. The guidance below may be utilized for all types of disaster.

Safe environments for children assist families to resume work activities and return to normalcy. DCFS 's disaster preparedness and recovery plans for child care outlined below provides procedures that will all support families in re-establishing their daily lives in an expeditious manner.

### **I. Planning For Continuation of Services to Child Care Families**

#### Emergency Preparation and Notification

DCFS has in place a Continuity of Operations/Continuity of Government Plan (COOP/COG) which designates responsibility for essential staffing needs relative to the department's primary role of Economic Security (SNAP, Child Support and Child Welfare) and predetermined roles at the Emergency Operations Center, state program offices, disaster sites, shelters, etc.

DCFS has a communication plan which advises child care providers and parents annually of the need for emergency preparedness and where to obtain more information regarding emergency preparedness. Attached are the communication plan (Attachment #1), predetermined staffing assignments (Attachment #2), and sample notices that are sent to providers (Attachments #3a, 3b, & 3c).

Additionally, the DCFS disaster communication plan includes procedures for sending notices of emergency situations or impending emergency situations as well as updates regarding affected areas. Notices are reviewed and revised as appropriate to include event specific language and information regarding region/parish(es) affected. Notices are sent out via email, websites, text messages, Interactive Voice Response messages and by message on the Point of Service device used by the Child Care Assistance Program (CCAP) to capture time and attendance, hereafter referred to as TOTS (Tracking of Time Services).

The information provided includes a procedure for reporting closures and the condition of facilities to DCFS following a disaster as well as FAQs relative to disaster situations. Included in the FAQs is the procedure for seeking to re-open following a disaster. Attached are FAQs posted on the DCFS website for providers (Attachments #4 & #5).

## Disaster Declaration and Suspension of CCAP Providers

In order to ensure that child care is offered in a safe and healthy environment following disaster, a process to suspend both licensure and payment for subsidy was developed. The process is frequently communicated to providers beginning in early summer each year. The process has two goals: first, to ensure appropriate environments and second, to limit the impact of the suspension.

Once the governor declares a disaster in specific parishes, the Licensing Section, Economic Stability Section and CCDF Administrators determine the next steps. Upon the approval of the Deputy of Programs or their designee, the Systems Section is notified to suspend all Class A and Class R Centers in the disaster declared parishes utilizing a "Disaster" type disqualification code on the Tracking Information Payment System (TIPS) 316 screen. The process allows DCFS to selectively suspend payables to the Providers in disaster declared areas for definable time periods until a determination is made regarding facility safety.

At disaster declaration, the coding to suspend provider participation, along with the Begin Date for suspension, will be populated utilizing a system batch process for every Class A and Class R center in the disaster declared parishes. At the time the Provider case is suspended, the authorizations for the children in care are placed in a "Hold" status.

The suspension process for disaster differs from the disqualification process in that it does not require new certificates to clients and preserves the existing Service Authorizations for child care for any CCAP or Foster Care child in care in disaster declared parishes when the suspension is invoked. This minimizes the impact on families and staff.

Further, the process continues to store time and attendance information from TOTS during the suspension period until which time DCFS makes a decision to fully remove the restrictions on payables or restrict payment for care due to unsafe conditions.

Daily reports will provide information regarding providers affected by the suspension process. Additional information on the report will include provider number, provider class, totals by parish and class, as well as an indicator identifying whether the center is a STAR Center. (NOTE: Copy of User Requirements Document (URD) may be requested from DCFS Systems Section.)

## Reinstatement of CCAP

If a provider's eligibility to receive CCAP payments is suspended because the home or center is located in a parish that is declared a disaster parish, the Child Day Care Re-Opening Request Form (Attachment #6a) and the Family Child Day Care Home Re-Opening Request Form (Attachment #6b) is completed by the provider to report the condition of the home or facility. The department will utilize the information on the form to determine if a home or center can continue to properly care for children or whether an inspection is required. The provider will be required to complete a Re-Opening Request Form and fax, scan, or mail it to DCFS within 5 working days of the disaster.

Upon receipt of the Re-Opening Request Form, the form is reviewed by the appropriate DCFS staff. Possible courses of action include:

1. the program may be reinstated or
2. the program has damage and should remain closed. Since there is damage and, therefore, the potential for unsafe operation exists (such as the provider is using a generator), the provider will be contacted by telephone if possible and/or notified by mail that an inspection by the State Fire Marshal is required before reinstatement.

The provider is responsible for contacting the State Fire Marshal to schedule an inspection. The provider remains in suspend status during the inspection process and cannot resume operation until DCFS has confirmation the provider has passed inspection and the facility is safe for children. Once it is confirmed the provider has passed the inspection, the Provider is notified by DCFS of the effective date that they may resume participation in the CCAP.

Every effort is made to get providers reviewed and reinstated as soon as possible (See information below regarding Follow up on Suspended Providers). However, if the provider does not complete and return the Re-Opening Request Form by the date requested, the eligibility to receive CCAP payments may end and families may be required to choose another eligible provider to continue receiving CCAP payments for their children.

Daily statistics are compiled and monitored to determine number of providers, by type, with CCAP authorizations reinstated without lapse; reinstated with lapse; or those which sustained damages requiring Fire Marshal Report and therefore closed.

### Follow up on Suspended Providers

Provider Directory continues to follow up with providers remaining in suspension for which no re-opening form has been received. If Providers in the disaster declared parishes do not respond within 5 working days following the disaster, providers are contacted by telephone and text and through outreach with CCR&R staff. CCR&R staff outreach may include visits to the facility, if possible.

Reports identifying providers remaining in suspension are generated by DCFS data systems and monitored daily.

Every effort is made to reinstate providers without a lapse in service or payment for eligible services.

### Quality Start Rating

The quality star rating of a child care center is not impacted by a disaster unless a center notifies Licensing that they have closed due to damages. Licensing will notify Quality Start and the star rating will be revoked due to closure.

For those quality rated centers that had CCAP suspended or terminated due to the disaster, the data systems that are already in place will suspend or terminate the tiered bonus payments.

The SRTC tax credits may be affected if a center is closed before 7/1 of any year due to a disaster. The suspension or cancellation of the provider's quality rating will be determined on a case by case basis.

New applications are accepted and all pending applications for quality star awards continue to be processed. Star awards may be approved and awarded during a disaster unless a center has closed.

The Quality Start Child Care Specialist may be required to contact or visit centers in affected parishes to assess the provider's ability to provide child care. The Specialist will report their findings back to headquarters and to the CCRRs. This information will be utilized to inform parents and the public where child care is available.

## Continuity of Services

DCFS's priority is to protect the health and safety of children in care while minimizing the impact to providers and families.

The system capabilities allow DCFS to suspend only providers in areas affected by the disaster while allowing unaffected areas to function as usual. The authorizations of the children in the disaster affected areas are placed on "hold" at the time the provider case is suspended. These remain in place until DCFS makes a determination that it is safe for the center to reopen and resume care of children.

Families and providers in unaffected areas are not impacted by a disaster declaration for other areas of the State. TOTS continue to track and report attendance for children in unaffected areas in the usual manner as outlined in the paragraph below.

Payments are made to child care providers weekly, two weeks after care is provided. Every Monday night, Tracking of Times Services (TOTS) sends a Weekly Activity File containing attendance for the week to the Child Care Assistance Program System (CAPS) for payment. Every Tuesday night, CAPS pays for the attendance that is received in the Weekly Activity File. Deposits are available to providers within two business days. The pay cycle begins at 12:00 a.m. on Sunday and ends at 11:59 p.m. on Saturday. Providers are paid for absences on the first Tuesday following the 10th of each month following the month in which care was provided. If the 10th falls on a Tuesday, CAPS pays for attendance on the following Tuesday. Providers receive a Remittance Advice each time payment is made providing detailed payment information for payments directly deposited in their bank account or SVC account.

## **II. Coordination with other State/Territory Agencies and Key Partners**

DCFS is charged with the primary responsibility for coordinating with local, parish and tribal governments, state and federal entities, supporting agencies and non-governmental organizations to address non-medical mass care, emergency assistance, housing and human services needs of disaster victims. This includes the primary responsibility for coordinating and managing all state-sponsored Medical Special Needs Shelters (MSNS), Critical Transportation Needs Shelters (CTNS), Sex Offender Shelters (SOS), and providing staffing and resource support for parish-run General Population Shelters (GPS) upon request from local governments. This also includes the collection and reporting of data related to the evacuation and sheltering of disaster victims. This coordination is done through the Emergency Operations Center.

In DCFS, Critical Transportation Needs Services (CTNS), Child Respite Services are provided by the CCRR in the regions with support from staff in other regions when needed.

Coordination is made with various state agencies, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations/volunteer agencies such as Save the Children, Church of the Brethren, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, etc., for these services.

### **III. Emergency Preparedness Regulatory Requirements for Child Care Providers**

Licensing standards require that providers have an emergency preparedness plan in place in addition to an evacuation plan. Specific details are found in Louisiana Administrative Code, Title 67, Part III, Chapter 73 (Attachment #7).

Coordination is made with DCFS Licensing Section to determine re-openings, fire marshal inspections, sanitarian inspections, closures and/or suspensions.

### **IV. Provision of Temporary Child Care Services after a Disaster**

The CCRRs in the affected areas assess the need for child care in the disaster declared areas and identify providers and other programs not required to be licensed to determine whether they can care for children. Parents may contact the CCRRs for referrals.

Following a disaster, DCFS may consider allowing providers to temporarily increase capacity by using the building capacity calculated by the State Fire Marshal during their annual inspection. This approval would be granted on a case by case basis.

Implementation of Act 3 of the 2012 LA Legislature is proceeding with DCFS and LDE support of new early care and education collaboration through Community Network Pilots that are coordinating child care with schools, Head Start programs and other educational settings. These networks may provide opportunities for safe sites should temporary services be needed.

### **V. Restoring or Rebuilding Child Care Facilities and Infrastructure after a Disaster**

DCFS does not currently have provisions for restoring or rebuilding child care facilities and infrastructure after a disaster.

The collaboration efforts mentioned above with Act 3 may also provide new opportunities to restore facilities through new public-private partnerships.