Ensuring that Hoosier foster children have access to a library card

At the peak of the opioid crisis in 2017, there were more than 17,000 Indiana children in foster care. Many family reunification visits are arranged in public libraries, when service providers contracted by the Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) facilitate and observe meetings between foster children and their family members. These reunification visits create an opportunity to introduce the families to all the resources available to them at Indiana’s public libraries.

What is the issue?
Children in foster care may be visiting libraries where the child does not have access to a library card. Current law restricts access and is unclear for guardians of foster children. The child may be visiting in the library of the suspended custodial biological parent, the non-custodial parent, the foster parent, a group home, or the area of the court or DCS contracted provider.

What is Indiana Library Federation’s position?
Indiana Library Federation (ILF) seeks to ensure library card access for foster children by proposing the addition of children receiving foster care services to the list of exceptions allowed for public libraries to provide library cards. This exception would be added to IC 36-12-2-25(e).

What is the potential impact?
Having a library card is like having a ticket to exploring the world through information, technology and other resources. These early experiences with the library have the potential to create a lifelong love of learning in the foster child through use of the full range of library services:

- Checking out books, eBooks, audiobooks, games and music
- Using computers and technology
- Borrowing through Inter-library loans
- Reserving a study room
- Registering for library classes, such as computer coding, music, arts and crafts, STEM, space exploration and more
- Logging in to certain databases critical for research
How libraries currently serve children in foster care

Many public libraries have responded to the crisis in foster care. To improve the thousands of family reunification meetings, Indiana Library Federation collaborated with Indiana Department of Child Services (DCS) to develop the Best Practice Guide for Supervised Visits in the Library.

Here are a few examples from around the state:

- Adams County Library System and Greenwood Public Library developed Supervised Visitation Guides to help families spend time at the library interacting, learning and playing together.
- Libraries in Noble County meet regularly with DCS and its contractors to coordinate efforts.
- Noble County Public Library provides a private space for families to interact after they enjoy library services.
- Several public libraries offer food friendly areas so that families may share a meal together.

Library card access in Indiana

Most Indiana residents live in a library district and over 3.3 million Hoosiers are library borrowers. About 400,000 residents of 36 counties live in a geographic area not served by a public library. State law allows non-residents to pay for a nonresident card or for a PLAC (Public Library Access Card). Nearly 30,000 students gain access through a special exception for student non-residents, and 4,343 school employees take advantage of a special exception for them.

Many public libraries have developed partnerships with schools to provide e-card access of digital resources for students, educational supports, and regular deliveries of print materials.

Libraries Transform® Indiana

Indiana Library Federation believes that libraries, with all of their modern amenities and innovations, are a smart investment, with the potential to transform communities and create a passion for lifelong learning.

Our approach to advocacy

- Indiana Library Federation is a statewide nonprofit association that is dedicated to advancing library services for the benefit of Indiana residents.
- Indiana Library Federation is nonpartisan and reflects the core values of the library field, including lifelong learning, freedom of ideas and civil discourse.
- Indiana Library Federation monitors public policies that affect all types of libraries and the people who work in and support them. ILF engages its members and stakeholders to be positioned for action in library advocacy.

Indiana’s public libraries by the numbers*

236 public libraries  426 library branches  25 bookmobiles
85,016 children's programs  2,186,889 children's program attendance
13,474 young adult programs  149,778 total programs
3,280,838 total program attendance  30,836,051 total library visits per year