



Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services

A Way Forward

Volume II

Safe children and adults. | Strong families and communities. | Stronger Texas.



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A Letter From the Commissioner



A year ago, the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) embarked on a plan to improve our practices so those we encounter experience better outcomes. We made significant strides, and it is with pride that I present the second DFPS Annual Plan, A Way Forward. This plan details our latest efforts to accomplish our mission and fulfill our commitment to the well-being of children, families, and vulnerable adults across Texas.

Child Protection Evolution

We recognize that child protection is constantly evolving. Our commitment is to adapt to changing circumstances while continuing to improve the quality of our work. This ensures that the services we provide are not only effective, but also responsive to the unique needs of each child in our care. This constant evolution requires continuous learning, innovation, and a dedication to the betterment of our system.

Strengthening Families and Communities

By offering comprehensive support, guidance, and resources, we work to empower families in their journey toward stability and self-sufficiency. We understand that flourishing communities provide essential pillars of support, and we are resolute in our commitment to forge meaningful, uplifting partnerships.

Support and Retain Workforce

Our dedicated professionals are essential to this agency, protecting children and vulnerable adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We are committed to creating an environment that develops their skills, recognizes their contributions, and provides clear pathways for growth and advancement. By investing in the professional development and well-being of our team members, we ensure they are equipped with the training and tools necessary to accomplish our mission.

Addressing Children Without Placement

Among the most urgent challenges we face is the lack of suitable placements for children in our care. By bolstering our network of providers, and exploring innovative solutions, we can find each child a safe, nurturing environment to support them during their time in our care.

I am proud to be part of such a committed agency.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Stephanie Muth". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Commissioner Stephanie Muth

Executive Summary

The DFPS Annual Plan is both a framework and a story. It outlines our priorities for the 2025 Fiscal Year and serves as a guide for the agency as we continue working with communities to protect the most vulnerable in our state. It also highlights many of the tremendous accomplishments we achieved during Fiscal Year 2024.

In recent years, DFPS has evolved in the way it meets the unique and individual needs of children and vulnerable adults. As such, the agency revisited and recalibrated its mission and vision statements to reflect its identity more accurately:

Mission

We build on strengths of families and communities to keep children and vulnerable adults safe, so they thrive.

Vision

Safe children and adults.
Strong families and communities.
Stronger Texas.

A Way Forward, Volume II, allows DFPS to share its roadmap with stakeholders, including our employees, legislators, external partners, and communities across the state. It connects our vision – *Safe children and adults. Strong families and communities. Stronger Texas.* – to our priorities and work.

The agency continues building on its primary goals:

1. Child Protection Evolution 2. Strengthening Families and Communities 3. Support and Retain Workforce

Child Protection Evolution encompasses a multitude of efforts to address the changing landscape of the child protection system. This goal includes:

- Community-Based Care (CBC) Expansion
- Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C)
- Business Process Redesign
- Alternative Response Expansion
- Improve Mandatory Reporting in the State of Texas through Training and Resources

Strengthening Families and Communities initiatives underscore DFPS’s commitment to continuously improving to promote safe and healthy families. This goal includes:

- Expand Support for Screening Functions
 - » Increased Support for Screening
- Strengthen Community Partnerships
 - » Adult Protective Services (APS) Partnering to Protect
 - » Partnerships for Children and Families Committee
- Meet the Growing Needs of Vulnerable Adults
 - » Adult Protective Services (APS) Financial Exploitation Specialization
 - » APS Complex Service Delivery Unit Pilot
- Meet the Growing Needs of Children and Families
 - » Enhance and Expand Behavioral Health Services
 - » Capacity Stabilization, Development, and Child Watch Mitigation
 - » Family First Prevention Services Act
 - » Family Matters: Connecting Children to Kinship

Support and Retain Workforce outlines the agency’s commitment to strengthening the DFPS workforce and enhancing the agency’s capacity to accomplish its mission. DFPS efforts aim to foster an environment to support the workforce that serves the most vulnerable Texans. This goal includes:

- Agencywide Recruitment, Retention, and Wellness
- APS Retention Efforts
 - » Training While Working Pilot
 - » Enhanced Support for APS Supervisors
- Statewide Intake Retention Effort: *Retention Initiative Steering Committee*

Goal 1:

Child Protection Evolution

The nature of the child protection system requires that we continuously improve to better support children and families. To accomplish this we must examine every aspect of our operations – from how we handle a report of suspected abuse or neglect, to the investigation of that allegation, to helping ensure the best outcomes for children who have been victims of abuse and neglect.



This goal encompasses multiple operational areas. It includes:

- Continuing the expansion of Community-Based Care (CBC), the model of care that enables Texas communities to provide care for and serve *their* local children who are in state conservatorship.
- Implementing Texas Child Centered Care (T3C), a new reimbursement and service provision structure for providers based on meeting the individual needs of a child.
- Reviewing of our investigations process to maximize resources and the use of alternative responses to support families and avoid unnecessary intervention.
- Improving the community’s understanding of abuse and neglect definitions, signs of abuse and neglect, and mandatory reporting requirements.

In 2017, the Texas Legislature expanded the agency’s efforts to transform foster care by creating Community-Based Care (CBC). The CBC model moves the Texas child protection system from a statewide, “one-size-fits-all” approach to a community-based model designed to meet the individual and unique needs of children, youth, and families. CBC allows community providers to offer case management, placement services, and capacity/

network development to serve children in foster care and kinship care, and their families, under a single source continuum contractor (SSCC). Local communities do this by tapping into the strengths and resources of each community, as they have a deep understanding of the unique challenges faced by families in their areas and can design interventions that are sensitive and responsive in that local context.

Complementing the Texas customized foster care system under CBC is Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C). T3C redesigns the foster care model and supports the development of innovative caregiving practices to meet the unique and diverse needs of children in Texas. Under these new approaches, Texas will ensure children remain in their home communities, close to the people who love and care about them, and receive services designed to help them grow and heal.

Currently, more than 50 percent of children in state custody are served by a local SSCC. In FY 2024, a Request for Application (RFA) was released for Harris County, the Bay Area, Bexar County, and El Paso. All areas received applications except for El Paso. In FY 2025, upon successful completion of contract negotiations with awarded grantees, DFPS will determine the readiness and implementation schedules for Harris County, the Bay Area/Montgomery County, and Bexar County.

COMMUNITY-BASED CARE EXPANSION

Initiative

Expand Community-Based Care across Texas

Lead Divisions

DFPS Community-Based Care Operations and the Office of Community-Based Care Transition

Background

In 2017, the Texas Legislature directed DFPS to contract with community-based nonprofits and local governments to provide child protection services. These services must include direct case management to ensure child safety, permanency, and well-being in accordance with state and federal child protection goals. Senate Bill 11 codified Community-Based Care (CBC) in Texas Family Code, Section 264.151, Subchapter B-1. The intent of the legislation is not to change the vital work done by caseworkers but to shift from a state-run child protection system to a community-based system with more flexibility. CBC now provides foster care, case management, kinship care, and reunification services in many areas of the state. A single organization in each community area (usually a collection of counties) creates a network of services, foster homes, and other living arrangements for children and youth.

Expansion

CBC is expanding in multiple stages to provide a smoother transition for the children and families it serves:

- In **Stage I**, the SSCC develops a network of services and places children in its foster homes or other living arrangements. The focus in Stage I is improving the overall well-being of children in foster care and keeping them closer to home and connected to their communities and families.
- In **Stage II**, the SSCC provides case management, kinship, and reunification services. Stage II expands the continuum of services to include services for families and to increase the number of children and youth who find permanent homes. This stage lasts 18 months at a minimum.

- **Stage III** begins no sooner than 18 months after the contractor began providing case management to all children and families in the community area. In this stage, DFPS can assess the contractor fiscal incentives and remedies for outcomes related to performance, including permanency outcomes.

DFPS has made tremendous strides with CBC expansion. During FY 2024, Our Community Our Kids (Metroplex West, Region 3W) expanded into Cook, Denton, and Wise Counties, and EMPOWER (Metroplex East, Region 3E), 4Kids4Families (Piney Woods, Region 4), and Texas Family Care Network (Deep East, Region 5) moved into Stage II of CBC. Additionally, Saint Francis Ministries (Panhandle, Region 1), 2INgage (Big Country and Texoma, Region 2), Our Community Our Kids (Metroplex West, Region 3W, in its southern seven counties), and Belong (South Central and Hill Country, Region 8B) moved into Stage III of CBC. This expansion increased the number of children served by CBC from 25 percent in FY 2022 to over 50 percent in FY 2024.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

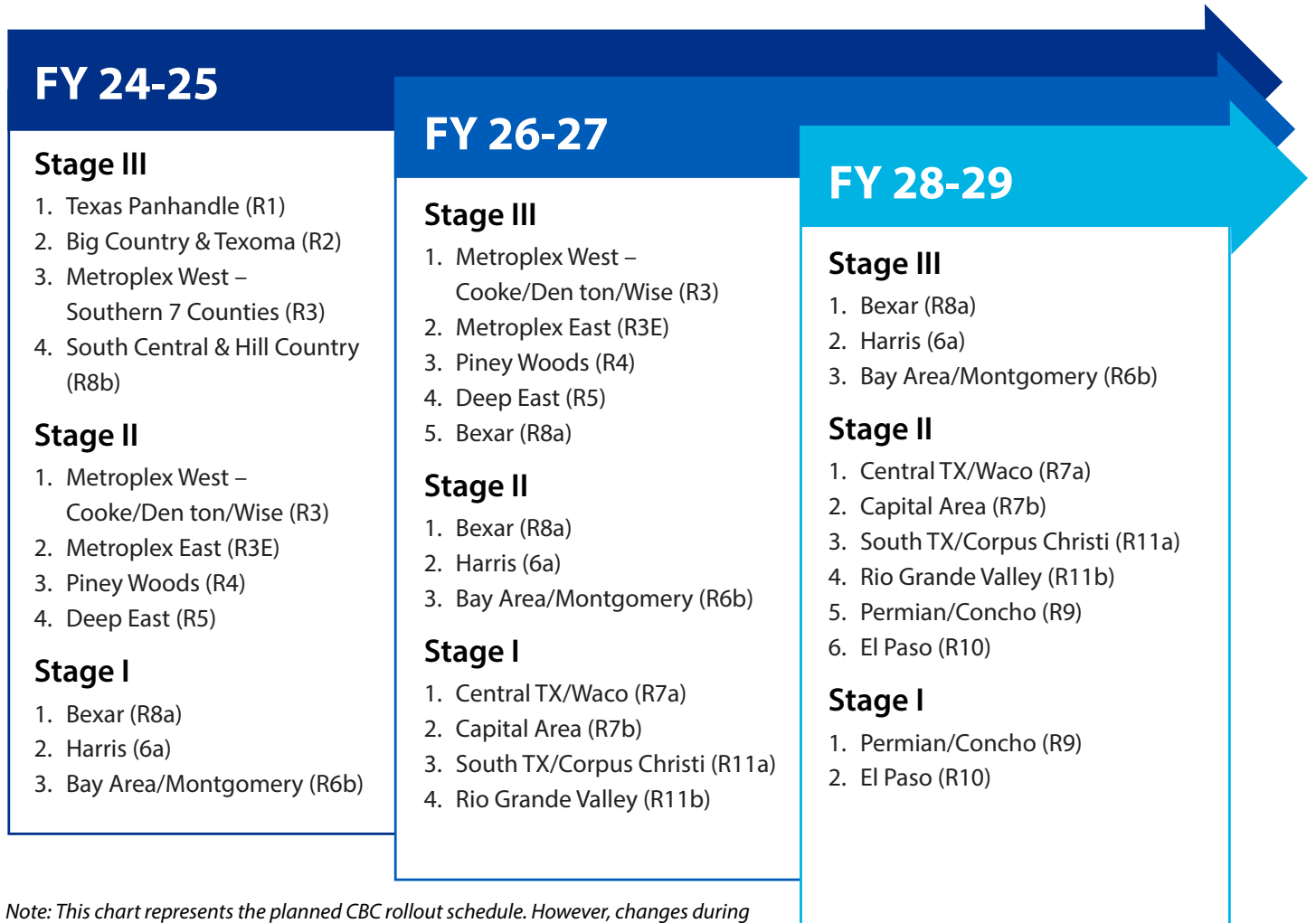
- Transitioned four SSCCs into Stage II and then into Stage III.
- Released an RFA for four new designated community areas: Harris County (Region 6), Bay Area/Montgomery (Region 6B), Bexar County (Region 8A) and El Paso (Region 10).
- Released a Request for Information (RFI) for Regions 9 and 10 to solicit feedback from these communities regarding the barriers to implementing CBC in their communities. These areas were previously part of an advertised RFA, and neither area had a respondent.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Develop and implement a change management framework for supporting and educating staff as DFPS continues to expand CBC areas, recognizing that change increases the need for communication to set new direction and prevent misinformation.
- Develop a communication policy and processes to capture, distribute, and standardize communications from CPS State Office and regional leadership to regional staff.
- Increase communication to staff related to understanding the CBC model, the role they play, and the positive outcomes gained by making such a systemic change.
- Maximize the transition of CPS conservatorship caseworkers and other staff from DFPS to the SSCC.
- Complete negotiations, readiness, and implementation of rollout for Regions 6A, 6B, and 8A.

Community-Based Care Expansion by State Fiscal Year



Note: This chart represents the planned CBC rollout schedule. However, changes during implementation may alter the depicted schedule.

MATURING THE CBC MODEL

Under the CBC model, SSCCs have more flexibility than under the legacy model, and the emphasis of oversight is on performance. Instead of direct delivery, DFPS must develop and build additional expertise in running services through performance-based contracts. DFPS has established the Community-Based Care Operations Division to create and mature processes and procedures related to contract administration and oversight. DFPS is maturing the infrastructure that supports the CBC model by building a framework of partnerships and accountability with the SSCCs.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

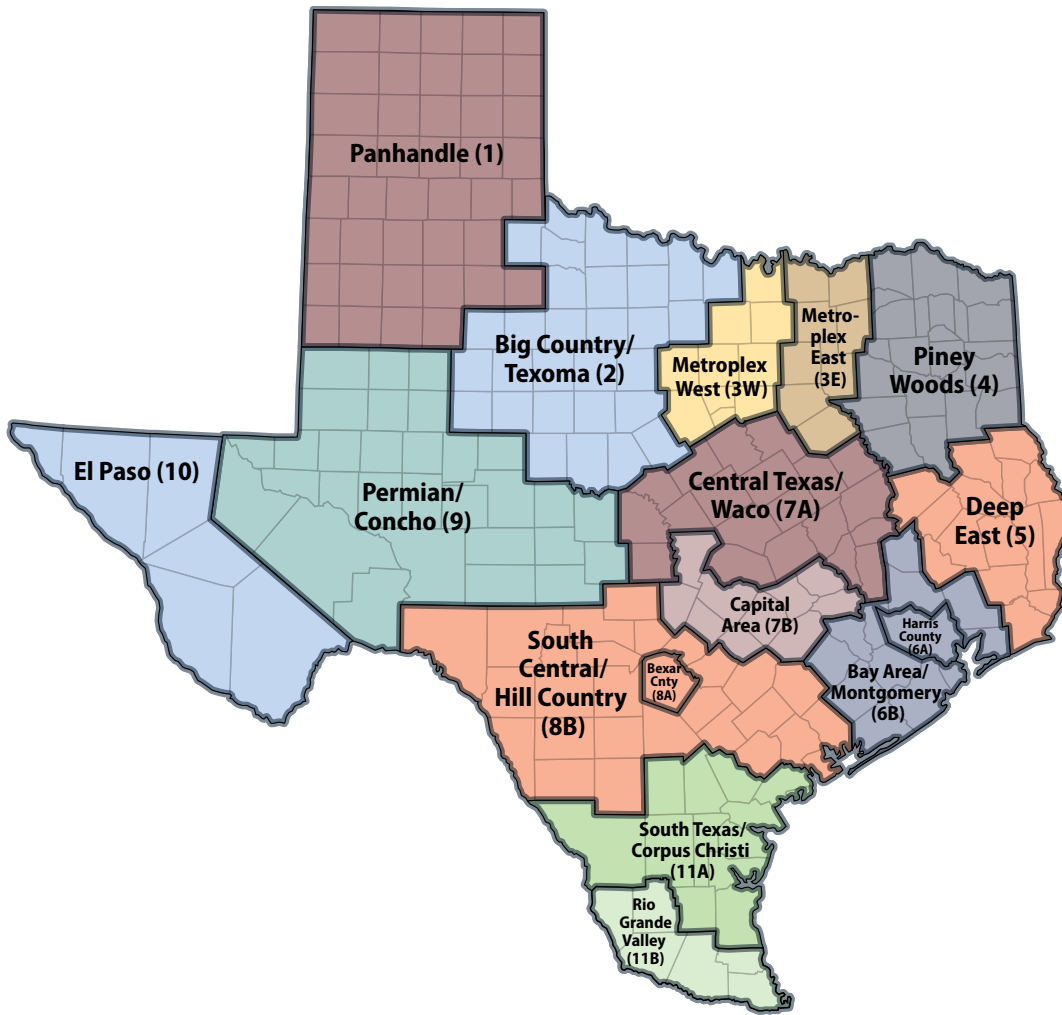
- Established and staffed the Community-Based Care Operations Division.
- Began the development of formal policies and procedures for the CBC Guidance Manual.
- Conducted an end-to-end process mapping of the CBC contract model as part of the work tied to Senate Bill 593 of the 88th Legislative Session.
- Created a more user friendly SSCC uniform deliverable matrix by updating it to include contract chapter/section references, deliverable name and descriptions, report frequency, due dates, responsible DFPS program areas, and submission instructions.
- Developed a formal inquiry and complaints process for staff, children, families, and communities served by an SSCC.
- Executed data sharing agreements for SSCCs.
- Collected comprehensive cost report data from the SSCCs, creating a foundation for a better-informed methodology to develop the financial model for CBC.
- Developed Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) and Corrective Action Plan (CAP) procedure templates.
- Established Partners in Technology, which is a group comprised of legacy and SSCC providers who meet every other month to ensure strategic alignment with technology projects and to share information about their technology updates and plans, infrastructure, security, posture, and data.
- Continued quarterly storyboard meetings with SSCCs to review performance, retention, workforce stabilization, and child outcome data.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue developing a plan to restructure the agency to support CBC.
- Standardize the SSCC Joint Operations Manual.
- Clarify roles and responsibilities for agency staff working with CBC.
- Continue to develop a comprehensive CBC Guidance Manual that includes policies and procedures regarding readiness review, contract monitoring, fiscal reviews, complaints process, and CQI procedures.
- Advance interoperability and data exchanges with the SSCCs, including data related to contacts with children, placement data, and children's service plans.
- Conduct a process review of case management oversight activities and create a statewide escalation and communication process.
- Develop a formal SSCC notification process outlining required approvals for posting and storing notices electronically for easy access by all relevant DFPS and SSCC staff.
- Continue to refine contract performance measures and thresholds.
- Finalize SSCC contract amendment process.

Geographic Information for Community-Based Care



Designated Community Area	Counties
Panhandle <i>SSCC: Saint Francis Ministries</i>	Armstrong, Bailey, Briscoe, Carson, Castro, Childress, Cochran, Collingsworth, Crosby, Dallam, Deaf Smith, Dickens, Donley, Floyd, Garza, Gray, Hale, Hall, Hansford, Hartley, Hemphill, Hockley, Hutchinson, King, Lamb, Lipscomb, Lubbock, Lynn, Moore, Motley, Ochiltree, Oldham, Parmer, Potter, Randall, Robert, Sherman, Swisher, Terry, Wheeler, Yoakum
Big Country/Texoma <i>SSCC: 2iNgage</i>	Archer, Baylor, Brown, Callahan, Clay, Coleman, Comanche, Cottle, Eastland, Fisher, Foard, Hardeman, Haskell, Jack, Jones, Kent, Knox, Mitchell, Montague, Nolan, Runnels, Scurry, Shackelford, Stephens, Stonewall, Taylor, Throckmorton, Wichita, Wilbarger, Young
Metroplex East <i>SSCC: EMPOWER</i>	Collin, Dallas, Ellis, Fannin, Grayson, Hunt, Kaufman, Navarro, and Rockwall.

Designated Community Area	Counties
Metroplex West <i>SSCC: ACH/Our Community Our Kids</i>	Cooke, Denton, Erath, Hood, Johnson, Palo Pinto, Parker, Somervell, Tarrant, Wise
Piney Woods <i>SSCC: 4Kids4Families</i>	Anderson, Bowie, Camp, Cass, Cherokee, Delta, Franklin, Gregg, Harrison, Henderson, Hopkins, Lamar, Marion, Morris, Panola, Rains, Red, River, Rusk, Smith, Titus, Upshur, Van Zandt, Wood
Deep East <i>SSCC: Texas Family Care Network</i>	Angelina, Hardin, Houston, Jasper, Jefferson, Nacogdoches, Newton, Orange, Polk, Sabine, San Augustine, San Jacinto, Shelby, Trinity, Tyler
Harris County	Harris
Bay Area/Montgomery	Austin, Brazoria, Chambers, Colorado, Fort Bend, Galveston, Liberty, Matagorda, Montgomery, Walker, Waller, Wharton
Central Texas/Waco	Bell, Bosque, Brazos, Coryell, Falls, Freestone, Grimes, Hamilton, Hill, Lampasas, Leon, Limestone, Llano, Madison, McLennan, Milam, Mills, Robertson, San Saba, Williamson
Capital Area	Bastrop, Blanco, Burleson, Burnet, Caldwell, Fayette, Hays, Lee, Travis, Washington
Bexar County	Bexar
South Central/Hill Country <i>SSCC: Belong</i>	Atascosa, Bandera, Calhoun, Comal, De Witt, Dimmit, Edwards, Frio, Gillespie, Goliad, Gonzales, Guadalupe, Jackson, Karnes, Kendall, Kerr, Kinney, La Salle, Lavaca, Maverick, Medina, Real, Uvalde, Val Verde, Victoria, Wilson, Zavala
Permian/Concho	Andrews, Borden, Coke, Concho, Crane, Crockett, Dawson, Ector, Gaines, Glasscock, Howard, Irion, Kimble, Loving, Martin, Mason, McCulloch, Menard, Midland, Pecos, Reagan, Reeves, Schleicher, Sterling, Sutton, Terrell, Tom Green, Upton, Ward, Winkler
El Paso	Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, Presidio
South Texas/Corpus Christi	Aransas, Bee, Brooks, Duval, Jim Wells, Kenedy, Kleberg, Live Oak, McMullen, Nueces, Refugio, San Patricio, Webb
Rio Grande Valley	Cameron, Hidalgo, Jim Hogg, Starr, Willacy, Zapata

TEXAS CHILD-CENTERED CARE (T3C)

Initiative

Continue implementation of Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C), the new foster care system transformation.

Lead Division

Office of Finance

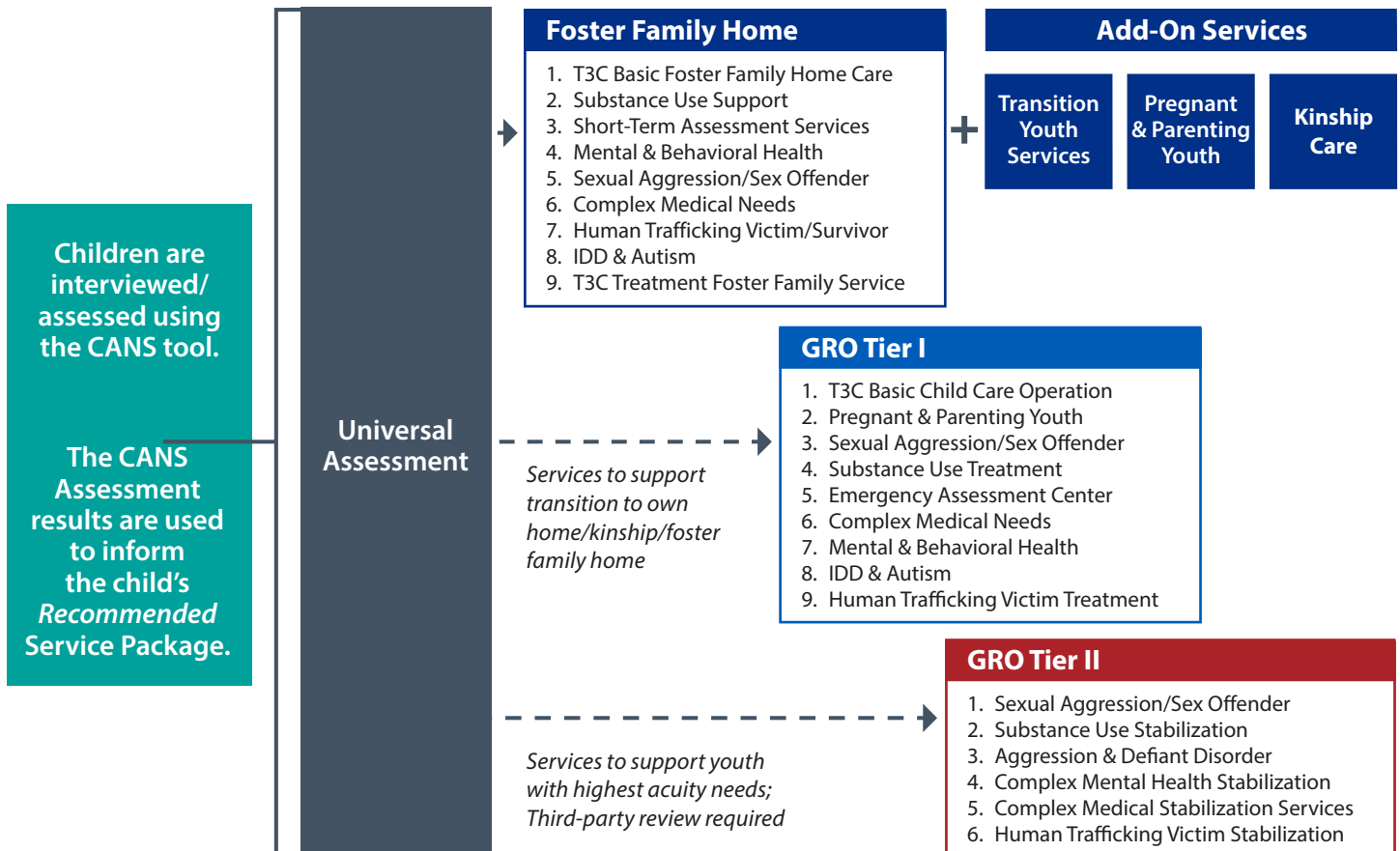
Background

The T3C system represents a complete transformation of the foster care system. T3C is designed to improve outcomes for children, youth, and young adults by establishing a well-defined service continuum that meets the needs of the foster care population and compensates the caregiver for delivering high-quality services. This includes an evidence-informed universal assessment of child need, clearly defined service packages tailored to meet the specific needs of the children, and a new foster care rate methodology that aligns payment with the cost of care.

To successfully transition to T3C, modifications were made to information technology infrastructure, policy, procedures, contracts, contract monitoring, and the process for assessing, matching, and placing children under the new modernized system. The infrastructure and readiness work to implement T3C was completed in December 2024. Beginning in January 2025, children and youth will begin to transition under the new foster care continuum.

To ensure new and existing providers can provide the distinct service packages and add-on services, DFPS developed a credentialing process. Through this process, DFPS will be able to verify that the provider's operation is able to provide services based on infrastructure, policy, procedures, training, and treatment and logic models.

New Foster Care Continuum



Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- DFPS established the Project Management Office to oversee the infrastructure setup and transition process.
- Hired all Project Management Office staff and developed policies and procedures.
- Executed a contract to aid in the development of the forecasting model.
- Distributed \$8.45 million in grant funding to SSCCs and 24-hour residential child care providers to support business model and infrastructure changes needed to implement the T3C system.
- Created the T3C section of the DFPS website: **DFPS – Texas Child-Centered Care**.
- Developed the T3C System Blueprint, a resource guide to support T3C service packages, add-on services, CANS 3.0 assessment, and placement process. Released quarterly updates as the model developed.
- Collaborated with the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS) to create **T3C Ready – TACFS**, a website that provides information on readiness assessment, grants, training opportunities, and frequently asked questions.
- Developed an interim credentialing process to ensure new and current providers have the infrastructure and support to provide the distinct services.

- Hosted webinars for providers to orient them to the credentialing process and provide technical assistance.
- Piloted the new Interim Credential Application and process in October 2024.
- Began accepting Interim Credentialed Applications in December 2024.
- Developed an enhanced version of the CANS assessment tool, known as the CANS 3.0, which identifies the specific service needs of every child in care.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Begin credentialing existing providers so that they may offer one or more of the T3C service packages.
- Implement the CANS 3.0 Assessment Tool and placement process.
- Update SSCC protocol manuals to support T3C system.
- Publish amended and new rules in the Texas Administrative Code.
- Continue provider transition grants.
- Continue updating the DFPS case management system (IMPACT) to support T3C.
- Conduct T3C trainings for DFPS and SSCC staff, judges, and Court Appointed Special Advocate volunteers.
- Begin T3C transition on January 1, 2025. DFPS plans to begin accepting Full Credential Applications in January 2025.

BUSINESS PROCESS REDESIGN

Initiative

Evaluate the DFPS intake and child protective investigations process to assess its impact and ability to serve Texas children and families.

Lead Division

Child Protection Investigations

Background

Business process redesign describes the effort of capturing an organization’s hidden capacity, reducing activities that do not add value and decreasing cycle times required to process work. DFPS is contracting with a third-party entity to assess the investigations process, from intake and screening through investigative closure. Business process redesign goals include increasing the capacity of agency staff, ensuring consistency in

investigations, and improving the overall quality of investigations.

A comprehensive review of the current business processes is a critical need for the agency because it will improve effectiveness, result in improved business outcomes, and lay the groundwork for future automation efforts. By continuously looking for the potential for improvement and innovation, DFPS strives to constantly improve client outcomes and delivery of services.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Conducted procurement activities and selected vendor.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Conduct process review and business mapping for Statewide Intake and Residential Child Care Investigations.
- Initiate program and process changes based on results.

ALTERNATIVE RESPONSE EXPANSION

Initiative

Increase the number of families served through Alternative Response.

Lead Division

Child Protective Investigations (CPI)

Background

Starting in the 1990s, the idea of child protection agencies using different models to respond to different types of cases emerged. Child protection agencies noticed most neglect cases referred for investigation did not show evidence of deliberate acts of harm, and formal investigations did little to help families meet their children’s needs. Nationally, long-term success was seen when child protection systems sought to understand why parents could not safely care for their child, then provided services to address those problems. This process became known as differential response. Texas implemented a more comprehensive version of differential response – Alternative Response (AR) – and phased it in in 2014 and 2021. The AR approach works with the family in a collaborative and non-judgmental manner, allowing DFPS to meet the needs of the family while keeping children safe. In AR, there is no alleged perpetrator, no disposition, and no entry into the Central Registry. Currently, 20 percent of cases assigned to investigations are designated for AR.

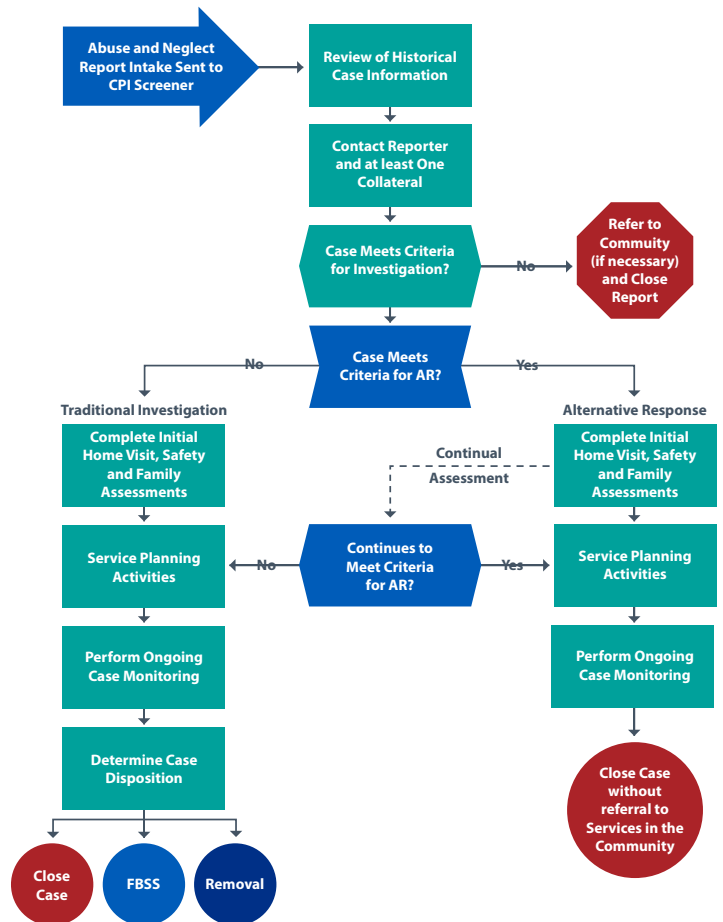
Generally, cases are eligible for AR if the allegations meet the criteria for abuse or neglect but do not require an immediate response to protect the child. The Statewide Intake (SWI) program’s CPI screeners decide which stage of service the report goes to – AR or traditional investigations – by following a pathway assignment tool and policy guidelines. If the AR caseworker and supervisor determine the case is not appropriate for AR, the case will be worked as a traditional investigation.

The goal is to increase the number of families served through AR and reduce the number of families who

- Pilot proposed process changes.
- Evaluate feasibility of conducting additional reviews in other areas of Child Protective Investigations, including Day Care Investigations and family-based investigations.

go through a traditional investigation unnecessarily. AR improves engagement with families – specifically for those with younger children in the home – and the expansion allows DFPS to provide AR to families that have children in the home under the age of 6. During FY 2024, DFPS piloted AR expansion in El Paso (Region 10) to ensure the changes meet the anticipated outcomes while ensuring child safety. DFPS plans to continue expanding these changes to AR over the next three years and the pilot evaluation will help inform those efforts.

Alternative Response Process



Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Developed policy changes to reflect expansion efforts including allowing cases with children under the age of 6.
- Trained all CPI investigators in Region 10.
- Initiated AR pilot in Region 10.
- Added AR to CPI training academy for all new investigators.
- Updated Texas Administrative Code to support AR.
- Updated CPI and SWI policy to allow for all Priority 2 intakes to be screened for AR expansion in January 2024.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue using AR data to evaluate program results to identify and address any challenges in implementation.
- Continue AR expansion.
- Continue cross-training all CPI staff to work AR cases.
- Update the case management tool DFPS uses (IMPACT).
- Increase the number of AR screeners to meet increase in cases based on policy changes expanding program criteria.

IMPROVE MANDATORY REPORTING IN THE STATE OF TEXAS THROUGH TRAINING AND RESOURCES

Initiative

Provide comprehensive resources and consistent messaging regarding mandatory reporting to DFPS.

Lead Division

Statewide Intake

Background

A considerable number of reports received by Statewide Intake (SWI) do not meet the legal definition of abuse and neglect.

The revamping of the public-facing DFPS Mandatory Reporting course (a guide for professionals) includes an update of the legal definitions of abuse and neglect, potential signs of abuse and neglect, examples of appropriate prevention referrals, instructions for reporting by phone and online, and a call for prevention.

Reaching the correct audience is important for the Mandatory Reporting course. DFPS Faith-Based and Community Engagement (FBCE) staff statewide provide the Mandatory Reporting training in person and virtually, upon request from professional groups and the general public.

DFPS can reduce the number of calls that do not meet the legal definition of abuse and neglect by providing more detailed information to the public, including guidance and the legal definitions of abuse and neglect, DFPS jurisdiction in specific situations, and resources available prior to contacting DFPS. By increasing the public's awareness, DFPS can assist in ensuring people

are served by the most appropriate system and improve the information provided through the electronic report system, reducing instances of incomplete information and sparse narratives that delay SWI.

Since launching the updated training, more than 78,000 people have enrolled in it, and initial feedback is positive. Many people mention the training is a requirement for their local school.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- SWI released the updated web-based training.
- FBCE and CPI staff continued to provide trainings in the community, upon request.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- FBCE will continue providing *Reporting 101* training quarterly via webinars.
- FBCE will present Mandatory Reporting training at the Professional School Counselor's Conference and the Texas Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Conference.
- FBCE will contact law enforcement agencies to offer Mandatory Training opportunities.
- SWI will redirect calls to the youth helpline when they concern youth and families who need services but do not need DFPS intervention.

Goal 2:

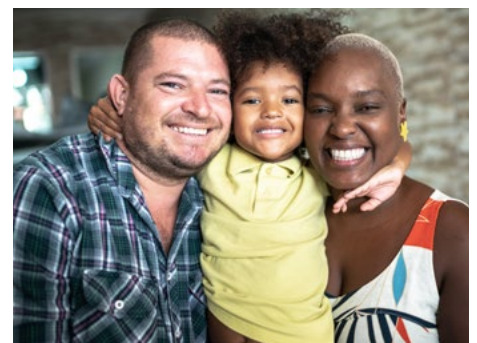
Strengthening Families and Communities

The Strengthening Families and Communities goal focuses on four critical areas:

- Expand Support for Screening Functions
- Strengthen Community Partnerships
- Meet the Growing Needs of Vulnerable Adults
- Meet the Growing Needs of Children and Families



By prioritizing reports and employing specialized screening resources, DFPS strives to ensure that every child's safety and well-being remains paramount. The enhanced capabilities of Adult Protective Services reflect dedication to safeguarding the welfare of the elderly and vulnerable adults. Establishing a dedicated behavioral health strategy team addresses the complex intersection of behavioral health issues within our communities, ensuring that families have access to the support they need. This includes strengthening existing resources and pioneering innovative strategies to enhance placement capacities and support in-home services. By fortifying these four areas of focus, DFPS continues efforts toward strengthening families and communities.



EXPAND SUPPORT FOR SCREENING FUNCTIONS

Initiative

Enhance collaborative relationships between Child Protective Investigations (CPI) and Residential Child Care Investigations (RCCI) field staff to increase communication and knowledge of changing policies and procedures.

Lead Division

Statewide Intake

Background

DFPS staff must screen every call and review every report alleging child abuse and neglect to ensure the appropriate response or referral is made. We investigate only when DFPS is the responsible agency under the law and the child’s need for protection warrants an investigation. By bolstering communication and knowledge-sharing about evolving policies and procedures, screeners support field staff.

State law requires DFPS to maintain a flexible response system. The system requires DFPS to screen all reports of abuse and neglect and assign a lower priority to less serious cases. A case is considered less serious if the circumstances reported do not indicate immediate risk of serious harm to the child. In 2005, Senate Bill 6 established screeners as a CPI program. CPI screeners identify less serious reports of abuse and neglect if they determine after contacting a professional or other credible source that the child’s safety can be assured without an investigation or referral to Alternative Response. A report is eligible for screening if it meets the following criteria:

- The report was not initially a Priority 1 (P1). Only Priority 2 (P2) reports can be screened. In these situations, the reported information does not involve severe harm or does not require an immediate response.
- The report does not involve a child younger than 6 years old.
- There is no open investigation, Alternative Response, or other stage involving direct delivery services to the family.

In 2019, DFPS added screening for RCCI intakes. RCCI screening reviews all P1 and P2 RCCI intakes to ensure the correct initial priority was assigned. RCCI screening can only close intakes when all current allegations have been previously investigated or the intake is under the jurisdiction of another DFPS program or another agency.

Both screening functions were moved to SWI in November 2020. Since that time, the number of cases meeting screening eligibility has consistently grown.

To help CPI screening handle the increased volume of intakes, the screening program has established a small group of eight hybrid screeners trained to screen for both CPI and RCCI. Since September 1, 2023, CPI screening has 64 screeners covering all 254 Texas counties. RCCI screening has eight screeners.

CPI screening has seen a yearly increase in the number of intakes screened, and in FY 2022, CPI saw a 40 percent increase in the number of intakes screened compared to FY 2021.

By adding screening positions, the SWI Screening Division will make better use of Alternative Response, refer more families to community resources instead of an investigation, and ensure CPS caseworkers promptly get necessary information regarding children on their caseloads.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- SWI trained its staff for the AR pilot that was conducted in Region 10.
- Implemented Screener Basic Development Training.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Begin screening all CPI P2 intakes (excluding intakes with an open case) to evaluate expanding the number of screeners needed for Alternative Response expansion.
- Increase flexibility and cross-training among screeners to allow for adjustments in workloads.
- Develop a new performance measure report for screeners to better identify trends and patterns in SWI practices.

STRENGTHEN COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

Adult Protective Services (APS) Partnering to Protect

Initiative

To continue, in close partnership with Faith-Based and Community Engagement (FBCE), building and growing community partnerships to improve outcomes for people served by APS.

Lead Division

Adult Protective Services

Background

The APS Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2026 notes that services from both the agency and its partners are necessary to meet clients' needs. To better support clients and to improve outcomes, APS developed a strategic framework to guide future relationship-building with community-based partners among APS and FBCE staff.

APS categorized partnerships into three groups:

- **Critical Partners** – Entities such as law enforcement and other first responders who are critical to APS effectively alleviating abuse, neglect, and financial exploitation.
- **Essential Partners** – Entities such as home health agencies and financial institutions that are essential in providing help to APS clients.
- **Network Partners** – Entities such as food banks and registered or permitted boarding homes that may assist APS in serving its clients.

APS developed partnership strategies including:

- Establishing points of contact with partners, including who to contact in an emergency.
- Celebrating victories and showing appreciation for mutual work.
- Hosting training, conferences, lunch and learns, and cross-training with partners.
- Promoting the use of Speakers Bureau members with partners.
- Crafting agreements to work together and share information and resources.

APS launched the partnership model at its 40th Annual Conference in October 2023.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Developed district engagement plans to focus on *Critical Partners* in specific communities across the state.
- Launched the APS Speakers Bureau – a partner-engagement tool to strengthen relationships with community-based partners and increase awareness of APS by promoting APS as a community resource in local, state and national conversations, helping community partners gain greater understanding of APS through education, and providing a platform to expand conferences that may not be APS-focused but involve organizations that serve or work with vulnerable adults.
- Developed and launched a software-based partner repository, the APS Customer Relationship Management (CRM), housing contact information and partnership model information for 1,700 community-based partners.
- Developed and shared educational materials – including **Partnering to Protect, Protect Texas Adults**, brochures, and fact sheets – with the newly developed Partnering to Protect brand to support partner engagement activities.
- Strengthened partnerships with local law enforcement, hospitals, and fire departments, and partnered with Area Agencies on Aging (AAA) on the submission of an Administration for Community Living (ACL) Elder Justice Innovation Grant.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Implement district engagement plans to focus on *Critical Partners*.
- Expand district engagement plans to include *Essential Partners* in future engagements.
- Develop a State Office engagement plan for partners that spans the entire state.
- Continue to expand the number of partners who attend or speak at the APS conference.
- Continue growing the number of presentations given by APS experts at partner events through the Speakers Bureau to raise awareness about the APS program.
- Continue developing performance measures to evaluate the Partnering to Protect initiative.

Partnerships for Children and Families Committee

Initiative

Engage clients, families, and communities by creating a path for their voices to be heard and integrating their lived experiences into practices so the agency may better meet their needs.

The Partners for Children and Families Committee (PCFC) will explore, study, and recommend innovative practices that affect the Texas child protection system. The committee also advises DFPS, single source continuum contractors (SSCCs), and the Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) on the evolution of the child protection system to its model of Community-Based Care (CBC) and the impact on the child protection system at large.

Lead Division

Office of Chief of Staff

Background

In January 2010, Foster Care Redesign was conceived by DFPS leadership and stakeholders as a new community-based model. To ensure the success of this model, the Public Private Partnership (PPP) was formed. The PPP advised DFPS on both the rollout and implementation of Foster Care Redesign as well as the transition to CBC.

Separately, as the system of DFPS licensing and contracting developed and gave rise to a core community of residential providers, the agency and providers began meeting regularly. By 2012, the Committee on Advancing Residential Practices (CARP) was formed to discuss and stay abreast of legislative, legal, and regulatory developments. Both PPP and CARP were a part of the foster care discussion and review of DFPS by the Sunset Advisory Commission in 2014. The staff report recommended that both committees be formalized, which was done and followed by their inclusion in the Texas Administrative Code in 2016.

Both committees provided extremely valuable input, insight, and a variety of viewpoints that contributed to the growth of redesign and the transition of residential licensing authority from DFPS to HHSC. However, much has changed since the committees were formed: Foster Care Redesign is now CBC, and its expansion is underway. As our SSCCs grow in number, they occupy more of the residential provider landscape. In recent years, the issues tackled by the PPP and CARP converged

– and in many cases overlapped. Their meetings became joint proceedings, at times indistinguishable.

While there are obviously still many areas of legacy foster care, they will continue to shrink as CBC is the present and future of Texas foster care. That single, unified vision called for a single primary advisory committee: Partners for Children and Families Committee.

A single committee will provide a constant global viewpoint with clarity of vision – supplemented by the extensive subject matter expertise of multiple subcommittee members. In fact, the new structure allows for more subcommittees, encouraging a diverse range of voices and experiences. This merger allows the committee to amplify the impact of partnership and continue making a difference for the children, youth, and families of Texas.

The new PCFC consists of a core committee and multiple subcommittees.

<i>Subcommittee</i>	<i>Topics</i>
Community-Based Care	Operations, expansion, and transition
Placement	SSCC capacity, legacy provider capacity, and shared capacity
Contracting and Oversight	Multiple-entity contracts, Heightened Monitoring
Policy and Process	Practices, policies, and procedures
Intake and Investigations	Intake and investigations
Services and Support	Behavioral health, family support services, and older youth

Members include:

- Providers and provider associations, including CBC organizations
- Young adults formerly in foster care
- Members of the judiciary and legal system
- Child welfare advocacy groups
- Foster parents and kinship families
- Other child welfare stakeholders

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Created PCFC and held inaugural meeting.
- Elected a committee chair and selected subcommittee chairs.
- Developed committee bylaws.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Adopt rules to govern PCFC.
- Engage community partners in system improvement efforts through monthly and quarterly meetings.

- Refine subcommittee roles and responsibilities.
- Meet with committee members to:
 - » Discuss CBC implementation, expansion, and common issues.
 - » Share capacity data to identify needed services and develop collaborative solutions to meet the needs of children.
 - » Identify strategies to streamline the contracting process.
 - » Explore issues related to intake procedures.
 - » Discuss supports and needs of children and caregivers.

MEET THE GROWING NEEDS OF VULNERABLE ADULTS

Adult Protective Services (APS) investigates abuse, neglect, and exploitation of adults who are elderly (at least 65 years old) or have disabilities.

APS is seeing more complex investigations, so more capacity and resources are being added to serve its client population.

APS Financial Exploitation Specialization

Initiative

Expand the three APS financial exploitation units to enhance their capacity for financial exploitation investigations.

Lead Division

Adult Protective Services

Background

Financial exploitation of people over 65 is a growing problem in Texas and one that is expected to worsen as this segment of the overall population increases. From FY 2013 through FY 2020, exploitation allegations among this age group increased 29 percent. In certain urban areas of the state, the increases have been even more dramatic, rising as much as 40 percent in the Dallas-Fort Worth (DFW) area and 66 percent in Houston.

Since 2015, exploitation cases have taken an average of 20 days longer to complete than physical neglect cases, which comprise most APS cases. Financial exploitation investigations are also increasingly complex. To conduct a thorough and complete investigation, investigators need specialized skills to review bank records, investment accounts, credit card statements, mobile payment transactions, and property deeds. For the most

complex exploitation cases, additional time is needed when APS needs help from outside forensic accountants.

In anticipation of the projected rapid increase in this segment of the population between 2020 and 2030, APS piloted an exploitation unit in the DFW area beginning in 2018. Building off this initial pilot, APS developed pilot exploitation units in March 2022, located in Tarrant County, Houston, and San Antonio/Rio Grande Valley. APS requested and received additional funding from the 88th Texas Legislature to help make these units permanent.

The creation of the exploitation teams resulted in many benefits, some of which are developing a new expertise and career path for existing staff, removing more complex cases from less experienced staff, having more tenured staff focus on clients with greater complexity in needs, and increasing collaboration with law enforcement and the judiciary. APS anticipates that the longer-term benefits from this program will result in an increase in the number of prosecutions of people preying on the elderly and vulnerable, increased prevention, an increase in the amount of assets recovered through the courts, and reduced APS turnover.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Engaged with local partners whose work intersects with exploitation investigations to build and strengthen working relationships.
- Provided additional training for financial exploitation investigators, including forensic interviewing training for staff involved in exploitation cases.

- Launched the Partnering to Protect initiative at the 40th APS Conference in October 2023.
- Joined the Association of Certified Fraud Examiners (ACFE) Law Enforcement and Government Alliance (LEGA).
- Established performance measures for the exploitation units to help ensure consistency in practices, monitor performance data to identify areas for program improvement, and identify training needs.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Strengthen the investigation track at the 41st APS Annual Conference in October 2024 by having experts present on forensic interviewing techniques, using social media tools, and better assessing credibility.
- Continue developing and implementing the exploitation policies, practices, and staff skills.
- Develop and release a Financial Exploitation Guide to help develop consistency in APS investigation practices.
- Work with partners on a data sharing agreement to evaluate the impact of the Financial Exploitation specialization on other systems.

APS Complex Service Delivery Unit Pilot

Initiative

Pilot the creation of a specialized Complex Service Delivery (CSD) unit to meet the complex service needs of clients.

Lead Division

Adult Protective Services

Background

Providing services related to elder abuse and self-neglect has become increasingly complex and often requires interagency collaboration. There has always been a level of complexity to service delivery in APS, but the process of interacting with many entities has become more complex. With automated phone systems and online applications, clients often find obtaining services to be too confusing or overwhelming. As a result, clients give up before ever getting the assistance

they need. Furthermore, many clients need services from multiple entities. APS can step in and assist them by working through these arduous processes to make sure clients receive the services they need.

Also, APS is serving an increasingly older population. More and more people are living into their 80s and 90s, with the issues (medical, financial, and cognitive) that increasing age entails.

The goal of the Complex Service Delivery (CSD) unit is to provide prolonged interventions to allow APS specialists time to navigate multiple resources such as the Social Security Administration, immigration, guardianship programs, Veterans Affairs, hospitals, probate courts, law enforcement, medical services, and mental health services.

In the Houston District, self-neglect cases are the most common, with more than 75 percent of all intakes. While the Houston District is accustomed to providing services to clients in more than 50 percent of these cases, arranging services for clients with complex needs is time-consuming.

Having staff in the CSD pilot specialize in providing services will allow staff in other units to focus on complex investigations. Across the entire Houston District, 16 percent of alleged victims in an initial investigation come back in a new intake within 12 months. Being able to provide the necessary services to clients with complex needs will also help decrease the number of repeat cases.

Outside of Harris County, the recidivism rate in smaller counties is even higher, as these counties often lack available resources to address the underlying causes of self-neglect. By building the CSD unit with staff knowledgeable about available resources, the CSD unit will address the intervention gap to strengthen the support to the client. Specialized APS caseworkers and units will begin to develop stronger relationships with partners that meet the needs of our clients. We know through experience that successful outcomes often depend as much on the relationships and contacts that APS has as they do on the actual “eligibility” of the client. Knowing who to contact when navigating a challenging service plan is frequently a key element to match the client with customized support and services.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Created the CSD Program and initiated the pilot in September 2023.
- Initiated communication with critical partners whose work intersects with that of the CSD unit.
- Increased connections between clients and the Social Security Administration, immigration, guardianship programs, Veterans Affairs, hospitals, probate courts, law enforcement, medical services, and mental health services.
- Closely coordinated with Houston law enforcement in the wake of boarding home closures resulting in smooth transitions for the people impacted by the closures.
- Developed data metrics to measure the unit's workload and case activities to evaluate the program's impact on APS and the community.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- The CSD unit presented *BOARDING HOMES: A Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) Approach to Protecting the Unprotected* with the Boarding Home Task Force at the 41st Annual APS Conference on October 9, 2024.

- Apply for outside funding opportunities in support of this work in connection with the RISE Model. RISE is a model for working with older people who have experienced, or are at risk of, elder abuse or self-neglect and is designed to strengthen social supports around these people. The model integrates complementary models and stands for:
 - » **Repair Harm:** *Restorative justice approaches* to reduce harm, promote healing, and help those involved in conflict work toward meaningful accountability and transformational change.
 - » **Inspire change:** *Motivational interviewing* to help people feel that change is possible.
 - » **Support connection:** *Teaming* to build more consistent formal (such as Meals on Wheels) and informal (such as neighbors) supportive networks around people in need.
 - » **Empower choice:** *Supported and interdependent decision-making* to assist people with cognitive impairment achieve their goals.
- Continue communication collaborations to develop strong local partnerships.

MEET THE GROWING NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

As the needs of children and families evolve, so must the focus of the Texas child protection system. In FY 2024, DFPS established a behavioral health strategy team and put in place a plan to expand and strengthen placement capacity.

Enhance and Expand Behavioral Health Services

Initiative

Strengthen behavioral health services for youth in care by developing a behavioral health strategy for DFPS.

Lead Division

Office of Behavioral Health Strategy

Background

Addressing the behavioral health needs of youth in DFPS conservatorship remains a priority. Many DFPS-involved children have experienced considerable

trauma, which can significantly impact their overall health and well-being.

The STAR Health Medicaid managed care program provides health care coverage to address the physical and behavioral health needs of all Texas youth in foster care. Some youth involved with DFPS have acute treatment needs that require access to other Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) programs. To assure access to a range of behavioral health care services, DFPS works closely with HHSC to address solutions and coordinate care.

The Office of Behavioral Health Strategy (OBHS) was created to provide coordination and facilitate collaboration between DFPS and the myriad of state funders and local providers of pediatric primary and behavioral health services. OBHS helps to:

- Address access to care issues for children, youth, and families with behavioral health needs.

- Strengthen partnerships with critical stakeholders, including other state agencies, local mental health authorities (LMHAs), local intellectual and developmental disabilities authorities, trade organizations, and public and private hospitals.
- Provide insight and recommendations to help identify and resolve gaps in the Texas behavioral health provider system.
- Work with the agency’s Human Resources team to support the health and well-being of the DFPS workforce.

In 2023, DFPS conducted a statewide analysis (surveys and listening sessions) with key stakeholders to gather feedback on ways to improve access to behavioral health services for DFPS-involved youth and their families. Information garnered through the analysis highlighted the following areas of need:

- Increase behavioral health services.
- Increase and retain providers.
- Improve the quality of providers.
- Improve the quality of DFPS services.
- Improve communication.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Fully staffed the OBHS team.
- Conducted listening sessions and surveys to gather information (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats analysis). See the **Behavioral Health Services for Youth in DFPS Care report** for more information.
- Developed and defined behavioral health strategic initiatives.
- Collaborated with HHSC to resolve challenges to children and youth accessing behavioral health benefits.
- Executed contracts to support Single Source Continuum Contractor Kinship Care Exceptional Item funding from the 88th Legislative Session.
- Worked with HHSC to establish a plan for 20 extended stay (long-term) inpatient psychiatric beds for youth engaged with DFPS or at risk of entering conservatorship. These beds will serve as

a statewide resource to provide more timely access to inpatient treatment and psychiatric stabilization for youth with high acuity behavioral health needs. This item ensures inpatient capacity for youth, who are unable to readily access treatment at a state hospital.

- Worked with HHSC to develop parameters for the mobile Youth Crisis Outreach Team (YCOT) program that provides 24/7 mental health crisis response and support for children and their families. YCOTs use trauma-informed interventions and strategies to de-escalate a crisis, aid in relapse prevention and safety planning, and provide support for up to 90 days after the crisis to ensure connection to an LMHA, local behavioral health authority or other community mental health resources.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue partnership with HHSC to provide DFPS staff and SSCCs with information about rollout of new initiatives funded by the 88th Texas Legislature and about existing services available through the HHSC provider system.
- Continue partnership with Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to identify opportunities to maximize Medicaid in serving DFPS youth.
- Continue working with HHSC throughout the implementation of the YCOT program to ensure children and families are experiencing the anticipated outcomes and develop strategies to address any areas where improvements are needed.
- Identify ways to increase access to behavioral health services for youth in DFPS conservatorship.
- Continue to promote access to Kinship Behavioral Health Support Services across Texas, through ongoing oversight of existing contracts with SSCCs.
- Evaluate effectiveness of the Kinship Behavioral Health Support Services program to inform use of additional funds.
- Continue to work with the DFPS Workforce Development Division to roll out activities in support of employee wellness, including ways to support staff experiencing work-related trauma.

- Continue promotion of the system of care framework and its applicability within the child protection system, including use of Peer/Family Support, use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment, involvement with the Statewide Children and Youth Behavioral Health Subcommittee, and other relevant multi-agency efforts to address access to children’s behavioral health services.
- Maintain involvement in efforts to address the needs of youth with high acuity, including youth at risk for parental custody relinquishment or involvement with juvenile justice, and youth who are multi-system involved and who are at risk for involvement in foster care.

Capacity Stabilization, Development, and Child Watch Mitigation

Initiative

Continue to advance the DFPS placement capacity strategy to ensure safe and appropriate placements for all children and youth in conservatorship, with a focus on individual service needs in the least restrictive setting.

Lead Division

Child Protective Services

Background

DFPS must ensure that it is able to meet each child’s unique needs while in foster care and that the system has a sufficient array of placement options to meet the changing demands of children and youth in foster care. Over the past decade, DFPS recognized the increased need for specialized care for children with more unique and acute placement needs and responded to that need by developing programs such as the Temporary Emergency Placement (TEP) program, the Intensive Psychiatric Stabilization Program (IPSP), and Treatment Foster Family Care, and seeking funding through House Bill 5 to support providers with growing capacity for children without placement. These programs added to the foster care continuum and continue playing an important role in meeting children’s needs. As foster care continues evolving, so does the need to develop and support innovative services and placements for children.

DFPS uses the Foster Care Needs Assessment to forecast placement service needs and regularly assesses

child placement outcomes for areas of improvement and continued growth. CPS regional directors work with providers in their local areas to create capacity development plans to ensure that all children have safe and appropriate placements. Through the expansion of CBC and the implementation of Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C), there will be more opportunities for children to remain in their home communities, thus increasing their connections to their home communities and subsequently improving their overall well-being.

Youth in DFPS conservatorship without an appropriate placement have complex mental and behavioral health needs. These youth require placement into settings with an elevated caregiving capacity, including a stable, trained workforce and specialized programming. Capacity development efforts are focused on filling identified gaps in the foster care continuum, including capacity for older youth with the most complex needs.

Capacity Stabilization

Maintaining placement capacity is as important as capacity building and DFPS continues to explore new strategies while continuing to support existing ones.

During the 87th Legislative Session, the Texas Legislature passed House Bill (H.B.) 5 which provided funding for 20 providers (10 child placing agencies and 10 general residential operations) to build foster care capacity by providing targeted foster care capacity grants to address foster care capacity shortage. The grants targeted operations serving children with the highest level of need, adding new providers, and promoting the long-term viability of child placements. The grants covered a three-year period and were available beginning in the Fall of 2022. Utilizing the grant funds, residential providers increased GRO capacity by adding 78 additional beds and increased child placing agency capacity by adding 306 new foster homes. This growth resulted in grantees accepting placement of 111 youth who were previously without placement or at risk of being without a placement.

In addition to the H.B. 5 grants, DFPS took steps to partner with residential providers that contract with DFPS to stabilize existing capacity while continuing expansion efforts. Providers also shared insight into factors affecting capacity stabilization, including the ability to hire and retain qualified staff. Stabilization efforts include:

- Increased communication, support, and engagement with residential providers.

- Continued collaboration with residential providers to assist in addressing concerns.
- Established limits on the number of children a new residential provider may accept for placement until stability is demonstrated with children who have lower levels of treatment needs and the provider feels comfortable handling more complex needs.
- Increased monitoring and tracking of new provider progress and addressing concerns with the provider as they occur.
- Staggered admissions for new residential providers to ensure the provider is not overwhelmed.

- Increase monitoring and tracking of new provider progress and address concerns with the provider as they occur.
- Ensure new providers stagger admissions to ensure the provider is not overwhelmed.
- Continue the Provider Clinical and Technical Support Pilot to provide support to operations on Heightened Monitoring and expand the pilot to include CPAs.
- Use the PCFC subcommittee on placement to develop strategies to maintain current capacity and develop new capacity to meet the unique needs of children in foster care.
- Continue to evaluate the needs of children and youth in foster care and develop placements and services to meet those needs.
- Continue to evaluate SSCC quality indicators regarding capacity growth to ensure each SSCC has capacity development plans to meet their catchment area's unique placement needs.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Participated in a third-party evaluation of DFPS Residential Child Care Contracts and Residential Child Care Regulation (RCCR) Minimum Standards.
- Generated placement reports for regional leadership to identify children and youth who may be ready to move into a family setting and monitored progress.
- Developed a data project to analyze placement outcomes for legacy and CBC areas, including placement stability, least restrictive settings, and placement close to home community (quarterly).
- Established the Provider Clinical and Technical Support Pilot to provide additional support and training to residential providers who serve DFPS youth. Four GROs enrolled in the program, completed their assessments, and will be receiving their individual training and technical assistance plans.
- Created capacity development plans for the legacy system and the SSCCs to grow and develop therapeutic placement settings for children and youth with high acuity needs.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Participate in a provider workgroup to provide input into the DFPS and HHSC implementation plan for the Texas HHSC and DFPS Independent Assessment of Residential Child Care Rules, Standards, and Requirements.
- Use data analytics to assist with ensuring children are placed in the least restrictive, most family-like setting.

Treatment Foster Family Care

Treatment Foster Family Care (TFFC) is a program designed to provide innovative, multi-disciplinary treatment services to a child or youth in a highly structured, family home environment. It is a cost-effective and less restrictive alternative to residential treatment. DFPS has an ongoing open enrollment application for the expansion of this program. The DFPS legacy system currently has six contracted TFFC providers, an increase from four providers since the beginning of FY 2023. The SSCCs each have a capacity building plan that includes increasing the number of TFFC homes in Community-Based Care (CBC) catchment areas by collaborating with their provider community.

As previously noted, during the 87th Legislative Session, DFPS was appropriated \$19 million for targeted capacity building through HB 5. DFPS awarded grants to providers to expand their capacity to serve children with the highest level of need. Four child placing agencies applied to expand the TFFC program across the state with a projected increase of 100 TFFC families and 200 beds by the end of FY 2025. Prior to the open enrollment for TFFC in July 2022, DFPS had 173 active TFFC homes statewide. DFPS projects the number of children being served by TFFC to double by the end of FY 2025.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Fully executed pending TFFC contracts.
- Targeted outreach to more than 30 child placing agencies to explore adding TFFC program to their treatment offering.
- Added 98 new TFFC beds.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue to discuss and promote the TFFC program during regional provider meetings.
- Add information about TFFC to the provider information meeting agenda to ensure potential foster parents are aware of the program.
- Support the expansion of Kinship TFFC with the six TFFC contracted providers by identifying children and youth appropriate for the program earlier in the kinship verification process.
- Present TFFC information to DFPS kinship workers to ensure adequate understanding and increase their ability to recommend TFFC verification to kinship families.
- Meet quarterly with the six TFFC providers to understand the barriers to verifying kinship families for TFFC.
- Evaluate ongoing support needs for TFFC caregivers by reviewing prior placement outcomes and develop a plan to work with providers to address any identified unmet needs.

Transitional Living Programs

DFPS is responsible for ensuring a successful transition to adulthood and focused on building capacity for Transitional Living Programs (TLPs). TLPs are residential services specifically designed to serve youth 14 or older for whom transitional living services or treatment goals include basic life skills training. These programs can be offered as part of a larger operation or can be independent programs. A TLP allows youth to start building a solid foundation of life skills and community connections.

DFPS discussed the opportunity for Supervised Independent Living (SIL) providers to expand their services by adding TLPs to support youth who need

more structure and preparation. Since both programs are designed to prepare youth for adulthood and independence, it is a good match. Several SIL providers expressed interest in expanding to TLP but did not add the service in FY 2024.

The Transitional Living Services (TLS) team also reached out to TLP providers that do not contract with DFPS or the SSCCs to gauge interest in providing this service for youth in foster care. Many providers expressed interest in serving this population but have not moved forward with a contract. TLS will continue efforts to expand TLP providers and established a goal of one TLP in every legacy region for young men and women.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Completed targeted outreach to SIL providers interested in modifying treatment models to serve youth through the TLP.
- Hosted regional information meetings to explain the process of becoming licensed with HHSC and contracting with DFPS as a provider.
- Developed TLP talking points to share with potential providers who reach out to inquire about opening a SIL.
- Assessed TLP readiness for increased capacity.
- Conducted targeted outreach to more than 25 TLP providers to inquire about contracting with DFPS.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue referring those interested in providing SIL services to the TLP through the capacity-building specialist.
- Host information meetings for potential providers.
- Connect prospective TLP providers with HHSC for licensing.
- Review and rebrand the SIL program, incorporating input from current and former foster youth and young adults.
- Targeted outreach to TLP providers who do not contract with the state to assess interest and address barriers.

- Expand the percentages of youth aging out of care who enter extended foster care after aging out of care by continuing to connect young adults in extended foster care and those considering extended foster care through:
 - » World Café engagements through statewide and regional Youth Leadership Councils.
 - » Surveys sent out seeking feedback from both youth and providers.
- Continue meeting with extended foster care providers through quarterly meetings, regional provider meetings, and surveys seeking feedback to identify strengths and gaps in service or needs.
- Update websites, brochures, and manuals to provide more information on the benefits of extended foster care and SIL.
- Continue quarterly Open House events for SIL providers to introduce both staff and youth to our providers.
- Research what other states are doing to support youth in extended foster care to identify potential new opportunities.

Family First Prevention Services Act

Initiative

Explore options for eligible populations and Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) approved evidence-based models to support development of the Texas FFPSA prevention plan through continued support of the Texas Family First (TFF) pilots.

Lead Division

Prevention and Community Well-Being

Background

Passed by the U.S. Congress in 2018, FFPSA provides states the opportunity to receive a 50 percent federal match for general revenue funds spent on evidence-based, in-home parenting, substance use, and behavioral health prevention services. To claim federal funding for eligible prevention services, Texas must have a federally approved prevention plan. Services are for children or the parents or caregivers of children who are determined to be at risk for entry into foster care but can

remain safely in their home or in a kinship placement if services or programs necessary to prevent the entry into foster care are provided. Services are time-limited, and the evidence-based models must be included in the Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse.

To assist with FFPSA implementation, the President signed the Family First Transition Act (FFTA) in December 2019. DFPS received approximately \$50.3 million in one-time funding to spend through Federal FY 2025.

Texas Family First Pilots

The 87th Legislative Session allocated FFTA funds for the TFF pilots. The pilot program provides an alternative to removing a child at imminent risk with a court order, allowing the child to remain safely in the home. The 88th Legislative Session continued support of TFF and QRTP by allocating remaining FFTA funds toward the pilots.

SSCCs currently operate TFF in pilot counties within four Texas regions. TFF services will continue through FY 2024, and DFPS is exploring expansion.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Completed the TFF pilot evaluation with the University of Texas Medical Branch.
- Partnered with the Supreme Court of Texas Children's Commission, and hosted TFF community meetings in Regions 8B, 3W, 1, and 2.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Finalize the University of Texas Medical Branch independent assessment on the effectiveness of the program.
- Expand the TFF pilot to Harris County and Bexar County and continue evaluating TFF results.

Family Matters: Connecting Children to Kinship

Initiative

Recognizing the significance of kinship care to children, DFPS aims to increase the percentage of children and youth connected to family either through placements with kinship caregivers, placement with siblings, kinship involvement in case planning and visitation, or permanency exits to family. DFPS also intends to increase support to kinship caregivers.

Lead Division

Child Protective Services in strong partnership with Child Protective Investigations

Background

Kinship care is the care of a child by relatives or close family friends, also known as fictive kin. Kinship caregivers are the preferred placements for children who must be removed from their homes because it maintains the children's connections with their families and communities. There are many benefits to placing a child with relatives or other kinship caregivers. A child in kinship care:

- Is less likely to reenter care than a child in foster care.
- Experiences fewer placement changes.
- Is more likely to be placed with siblings and maintain relationships with birth parents and relatives.
- Is more likely to remain in their community of origin and maintain connections to cultural identity.
- Experiences less trauma than a child placed with strangers, as it enables a child to live with people they know and trust.

DFPS continues to connect more children in care to kinship placements, placing children with family more quickly and helping children exit to permanency with a kinship caregiver. During FY 2024, nearly 74 percent of the 10,771 exits from DFPS legal custody were either to family reunification or to a relative.

Unfortunately, kinship caregivers typically have little planning time before children are placed in their homes. Many are retired or living on fixed incomes, which makes it difficult for them to purchase items such as beds, car seats, clothing, diapers, and other immediate needs.

Also, day care funding is limited and only offered to kinship caregivers who meet required eligibility.

The 88th Legislative Session provided \$6.9 million to assist kinship caregivers with immediate needs, provide reimbursement for expenses associated with foster care licensing, and offer Enhanced Permanency Care Assistance for kinship providers caring for children with increased needs. Pursuant to Senate Bill 135 of the 88th Legislative Session, DFPS will develop a statewide electronic tracking system to track kinship home assessment requests. This system will enable improved oversight and accountability for timeliness of home assessments.

The Kinship Collaboration Group allows DFPS collaboration with kinship advocates and kinship caregivers whose cases have reached permanency. Partnering with kinship caregivers helps the agency understand how to meet their needs. The Kinship Collaboration Group:

- Created the *After the Call* brochure to provide kinship caregivers with resources and information when they first expect a child placement.
- Is working on another brochure, *After the Case*, to help caregivers find resources once children are in their care.

The CPS Day Care Program is working to provide day care for more kinship caregivers. Currently, day care is offered to kinship caregivers when they have an approved home study and a signed Kinship Caregiver Agreement, and all caregivers work 40 hours a week. Kinship caregivers with children 6 years old or younger may receive funding for day care during the school year, and all children 12 and younger receive summer care.

In Fall of 2023, the federal Administration for Children and Families released recommendations and guidelines related to supporting kinship caregivers. Previous rules required all foster family homes to meet the same licensing standards. The new rules allow child protection agencies to adopt simpler licensing or approval standards for all kinship foster family homes. States must also provide kinship caregivers with the same level of financial assistance that any other foster care provider receives. CPS is currently working alongside HHSC to ensure an implementation to these rules and recommendations.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Implemented Kinship Placement Assistance funding to meet the immediate placement needs of children and kinship families.
- Implemented Kinship Verification Reimbursement funding to assist kinship caregivers with expenses related to licensing.
- Completed an analysis of kinship caregiver day care funding to determine what additional funding is needed to support all kinship families.
- Developed a statewide electronic tracking system to track kinship home assessment requests.
- Launched *Kinship Corner* in November 2023 as part of CPS State Office's monthly policy and practice newsletter to staff. It highlights benefits of kinship care and includes information about:
 - » Policy.
 - » The support that verification provides to kinship families.
 - » Kinship financial assistance.
 - » The Kinship Collaboration Group's work.
 - » Any other relevant kinship information.
- Partnered with the Kinship Collaboration Group to create a brochure providing caregivers with resources and training to help caregivers develop guidelines for continued contact between parents and children.
- Developed a *Kinship as First Placement* campaign that included a statewide tour to provide information about the importance of kinship and the benefits of placement with kin. DFPS saw an increase in kinship as first placement from 28 percent in September to 40 percent in April.
- Provided kinship-specific training for CPI staff.
- Initiated Kinship Finder Sessions for new removals to incorporate relatives and fictive kin into the process and support placements with kin.
- Hosted Kinship Fireside Chats with CPI and CPS staff to discuss barriers to placing children with kinship caregivers and identify ways to support investigations increasing the percentage of children initially placed in kinship care.
- Created a Kinship website for CPI staff to centralize kinship information and resources.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Explore amending the Texas Administrative Code to support kinship TFFC and respite care services for this program.
- Use kinship staff to educate kinship caregivers about the process to become verified, the benefits of verification, and the Permanency Care Assistance fund to ensure caregivers have access to all available resources.
- Establish contracts for kinship TFFC providers.
- Assess and adjust the number of kinship staff to support the anticipated increase in children living with kinship families.
- Increase kinship staff's knowledge of kinship resources and support, including behavioral health resources, through ongoing professional development and resource awareness. Use appropriate financial support, community referrals, Kinship Support Groups, Family Group Decision Making, and Kinship Disruption Staffings to prevent placement disruptions.
- Deliver *Preserving Kinship Connections* training to DFPS and SSCC staff.
- Continue staff education efforts on the benefits of kinship placements and support available for kinship caregivers to encourage kinship placements as a first option.
- Implement a kinship caregiver co-parenting training to support parents and kinship caregivers co-parenting children to reduce confusion and lead to improved outcomes.
- Incorporate kinship training in CPI mentor training to increase staff knowledge and understanding of the importance of kinship and provide kinship-focused sessions at the CPI leadership conference.
- Continue to collaborate with HHSC on implementation of the new Kinship Minimum Standards.

Goal 3:

Support and Retain Workforce

The Support and Retain Workforce goal addresses the challenge of turnover within DFPS. It includes efforts to enhance recruitment strategies, streamline hiring processes, and offer competitive compensation packages to attract and retain qualified candidates. Additionally, comprehensive orientation and supportive supervision models will be implemented to improve retention rates and create a supportive work environment.



Professional development opportunities will be enhanced through ongoing training, mentorship programs, and career advancement initiatives, ensuring staff possess the necessary skills and expertise to deliver effective services. Moreover, efforts will be made to strengthen the organizational culture, prioritizing employee well-being, teamwork, and recognition of achievements. This multifaceted approach is poised to drive positive change and fortify the agency's capacity to fulfill its vital mission.

The agencywide recruitment and retention initiative illustrates DFPS's commitment to supporting its workforce by implementing trainings and support to help staff develop their skills while ensuring they are supported in their everyday work and finding and recruiting the right talent to do this rewarding

but challenging work. In APS, the Training While Working initiative focuses on building competence and confidence among new APS caseworkers. By revamping the training program, APS aims to equip workers with the necessary skills to excel. SWI's Retention Initiative Steering Committee will engage staff at all levels in planning and implementing initiatives to support retention and improve morale. This collaborative approach, driven by employee feedback, seeks to enhance the workplace environment and boost employee satisfaction and retention rates.

These initiatives collectively represent a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the agency workforce and improve its ability to serve vulnerable populations effectively.

AGENCY-WIDE RECRUITMENT, RETENTION, AND WELLNESS

Initiative

Attract qualified people and create an environment that encourages their commitment to protect vulnerable children and adults from abuse, neglect, and exploitation and promote safe and healthy families.

Lead Division

Workforce Development

Background

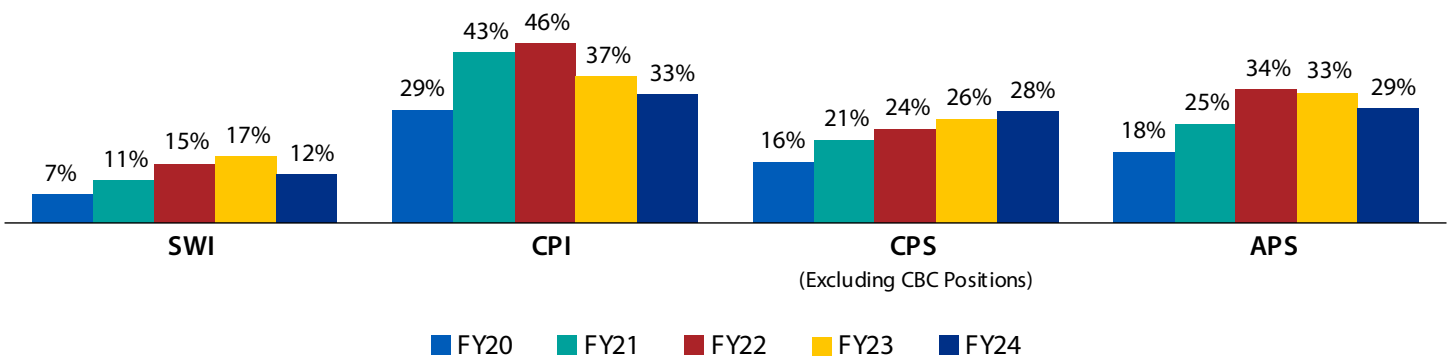
High turnover rates impact the quality and timeliness of critical investigations, as it results in a loss of tenure, knowledge, and agency stability. In FY 2023, a task force was established to address turnover within Child Protective Investigations (CPI). The DFPS Recruitment and Retention task force consisted of staff from across the agency, including program specialists, human resources professionals, training specialists, data analysts, and finance experts. The task force developed strategies targeting four specific areas identified for improvement: *Recruitment, Retention, Professional Development, and Organizational Culture*. In FY 2024 the task force expanded its efforts and strategies to all areas of the agency.

The 2022 and 2024 Survey of Employee Engagement cited pay as a primary reason for job dissatisfaction at DFPS, while FY2024 exit interviews performed by the Institute for Organizational Excellence at the University of Texas at Austin indicate the top three reasons investigators leave are:

- Issues with Supervisor
- Work Related Stress
- Accepted Another Job

In FY 2024, DFPS implemented multiple strategies and tools developed by the DFPS Recruitment and Retention task force to retain staff while identifying and implementing longer-lasting recruitment and retention strategies. CPI retention at six months after completing training was 69.3 percent for FY 2023 and 67.2 percent for FY 2024. DFPS made considerable progress in this endeavor and experienced reduction in turnover in almost all major programs. Between FY 2023 and FY 2024, CPI investigator turnover reduced from 37 percent to 33 percent. APS caseworker turnover reduced from 33 percent to 29 percent. SWI turnover reduced from 17 percent to 12 percent. CPS experienced a slight increase in turnover from 26 percent to 28 percent.

Turnover: All Caseworkers



Turnover across all programs, except CPS, dropped in FY24. CPI had one of their lowest turnover rates in the last five fiscal years.

Data source: Turnover and HR-Related Data

Note: Uses SAO methodology and CPI excludes SI. CPS turnover will not match LBB submission due to exclusion of CBC transfers.

Recruitment

DFPS intends to increase the pool of qualified candidates by developing strategies to attract a diverse group of people with the necessary skills, education, and passion for child and adult welfare caseworkers.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- DFPS streamlined its hiring process, resulting in a 56 percent decrease in the number of days it takes the agency to select an applicant and finalize the offer.
- Held numerous hiring fairs using standardized processes and resulting in hundreds of conditional offers.
- Conducted a recruitment campaign plan for CPI that included personalization of target audience and marketing strategy.
- Subscribed to additional technology tools to improve and increase communication with applicants, particularly graduating university students.
- Partnered with the Texas Workforce Commission and participated in the TXWORKS Program, which provides students with opportunities to build their resumes through paid and professional work experiences (internships) aimed at strengthening their career readiness.
- Surveyed applicants regarding their experience with the hiring process. Preliminary data show that applicants are satisfied with the professionalism and courteousness of their interviewers and that interview scheduling was flexible and convenient. For those applicants who were offered positions but declined, 28 percent indicated that the compensation was unsatisfactory.

Key Actions

Fiscal year 2025

- Continue collaborating with colleges, universities, and social work programs to establish partnerships and recruit candidates.
- Implement the nationally recognized Child Advocacy Studies (CAST) program, which is an evidence-based academic associates and certificate program that focuses on child maltreatment. DFPS hopes to recruit students from a variety of disciplines who have completed participation in a child-welfare-focused curriculum.

- Work with Tyler ISD to develop a program where high school students interested in pursuing a human services degree could participate in high school practicums to gain relevant experience and knowledge.

Retention

The time, stress, and cost of hiring and training new employees are significant, and turnover can have a negative impact on outcomes for clients. To improve retention rates, DFPS will create and sustain a supportive work environment that reduces turnover and promotes safety among DFPS caseworkers.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Increased opportunities for staff to engage in peer support to facilitate knowledge-sharing and emotional support.
- Developed a timeline for new employees on what to expect in the first year, as well as helpful videos.
- Completed a review of policies and practices that impact work-life balance. Policy changes have been suggested and are in review related to wellness leave, flex time for physical activity, educational leave, safety policy, driver fatigue policy, and so on.
- Created a Texas CPI Supportive Supervision Model for staff from the day they are onboarded and throughout their tenure with the agency, to include supporting staff well-being, staff recognition and celebration, and work-life balance.
- Continued conducting in-person promotion, graduation, and tenure ceremonies within the regions.
- Hosted workshops with new supervisors within the first three months of their promotion to provide them with information on the Mentor Program and the roles and responsibilities for the mentor, the supervisor, and the new employee.
- Distributed the one-time merit funding provided by the 87th Texas Legislature to direct delivery staff in July 2024.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Sustain and monitor outcomes from task force strategies implemented in late FY 2024.
- Implement revised policies that promote work-life balance.

- Conduct a comprehensive inventory of current safety and wellness services to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Distribute the one-time merit funding provided by the 87th Texas Legislature to direct delivery staff in 2025.

Professional Development

DFPS will focus on enhancing professional development opportunities by providing ongoing training, mentorship programs, and career advancement opportunities to enhance the skills and expertise of staff, enabling them to deliver effective services.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Developed and implemented a new CPI training model in December 2023, which included requirements from SB 1447.
- Released a microlearning series consisting of four-to-five-minute videos that provide guidance on completing specific tasks in various applications.
- Standardized the certification model across agency programs and revised the model to eliminate barriers to certification.
- Developed new reports to track the percentage of staff who are certified.
- Hosted a CPI Mentor Conference to provide professional development and recognition to mentors for their role in providing leadership to protégés and peers.
- Expanded Leadership Challenge training to agency staff to promote development of leadership skills.
- Expanded Leadership for Advanced Management (LAM) workshops agencywide.
- Launched the *Leader Speak* video and audio podcast, exposing staff to agency executives and their perspectives on leadership.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Enhance reporting of certification levels to regional leadership.
- Increase communication to staff on certification opportunities and technical assistance to enroll and achieve certification.

- Enhance training opportunities for staff focused on emotional intelligence, communication styles, and creating a healthy culture.
- Pilot an individualized training plan for support staff in Regions 4 and 5.
- Pilot a CPI New Worker University in Region 8.
- Pilot a Middle Management Leadership Academy to enhance retention and equip managers with best practices in leadership.

Wellness and Organizational Culture

Strengthen the organizational culture by fostering a positive and supportive work environment that values the contributions and well-being of staff, promotes teamwork, and recognizes their achievements to promote job satisfaction and stabilize the workforce.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Conducted a comprehensive inventory of current safety and wellness services to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement.
- Piloted the Resilience Alliance in Region 8. It is a six-month intervention designed to mitigate secondary trauma symptoms experienced by child protection staff and secondary trauma's impact on unit and agency functioning. Created a training for managers about proactive and responsive plans for units when a trauma occurs. Presented the training at a CPI Mentor Program Monthly Manager's Meetup.
- Held a Catapult Wellness Clinic at State Office. The clinic provides an opportunity for an annual wellness checkup virtually or in person.
- Created a *Check Points* model for special investigators and the Office of Child Risk and Safety staff, building in "check-ins" on staff working child fatality cases to ensure awareness about resources and peer support. The model will also be used for any additional staff from divisions attached to child fatality cases.
- Launched *Got Emotions?* marketing campaign for all DFPS staff to increase awareness about emotional wellness.
- Conducted presentations about peer support groups and secondary trauma to increase awareness about emotional support.

- Procured a new Employee Assistance Program (EAP) contract. Numerous changes were made to the current EAP program that includes a dedicated DFPS phone line staffed by trauma specialists.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Create an advisory council to identify gaps and recommend enhancements based on the comprehensive inventory results.
- Develop a dedicated Safety and Wellness Strategy that expands and unifies existing safety and wellness services, ensuring more timely, accessible, and appropriate interventions for employees, particularly those in high-stress roles.
- Conduct regular employee engagement surveys to assess job satisfaction levels, identify areas for improvement, and proactively address concerns.
- Create a practice for checking on staff after traumatic events related to child fatality cases and provide access to resources such as EAP and peer support.
- Expand resilience and secondary trauma trainings to computer-based trainings and include a module for caseworkers to receive the information throughout their tenure.
- Expand Catapult Wellness Clinics into regional locations.
- Develop and enhance tools available to staff addressing secondary trauma and mental well-being.

APS Retention Effort: Training While Working Pilot

Initiative

Build Adult Protective Services (APS) caseworker competence and confidence by ensuring new workers are equipped with the right skills using the redesigned field-based and competency-focused training pilot.

Lead Division

Adult Protective Services

Background

The APS training program had remained relatively unchanged since 2004. Since then, APS has experienced a sharp increase in turnover among APS Specialist I positions. In FY 2020, turnover among new caseworkers was 40 percent. In FY 2023, turnover increased to 60 percent.

In FY 2022, a dedicated project manager and project team was assigned to develop *Training While Working*, the redesigned training pilot. Implementation included the creation of 17 Training Supervisor positions and a centralized Manager V position. All positions were filled in March 2023. *Training While Working* compartmentalizes new employee training in three phases:

- Case initiation contact
- Initial face-to-face contact
- All other training topics

One competency must be reached before moving on to the next phase. Each phase has a calendar day time frame that cumulatively totals 130 days. The *Training While Working* pilot was implemented statewide on September 5, 2023. It has enrolled more than 245 new trainees and received positive feedback.

The new model emphasizes the importance of field-based training, reducing the amount of time a trainee spends in the classroom while increasing the time a trainee spends in the field one-on-one with a training supervisor. Trainees complete case-related activities repeatedly to determine competence, which expands their exposure to APS casework. The three phases of competency enable APS to quickly identify if a trainee is not a good fit for the position. Trainees begin to contribute to unit productivity starting on day 30 of employment, providing quicker relief to the tenured staff in the field. *Training While Working* focuses on thoroughly learning one component at a time while completing related activities in the field, reducing trainees feeling overwhelmed once they complete training and receive their own caseloads.

In FY24, the APS turnover for employees trained under the *Training While Working* model was 51.8% compared to 59.5% from FY23 before the new model was implemented. The change also resulted in new staff in FY 2024 initiating 12,353 contacts with clients during training rather than afterward.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Presented information about *Training While Working* pilot at the 40th APS Annual Conference.
- Launched *Training While Working* pilot.
- Developed performance metrics for *Training While Working* pilot.
- Monitored implementation of *Training While Working* pilot to ensure it is performing as planned.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue to operationalize *Training While Working* pilot.
- Continue developing long-term performance metrics to evaluate the training model.
- Integrate new enhancements to *Training While Working* pilot, such as expanding the training to include responsibilities outside of the current Case Initiation Contact (CIC) and Face-to-Face (FTF) focus and adding more workload volume on staff in training.
- Add administrative support for the *Training While Working* pilot program where possible.

APS Retention Effort: Enhanced Support for APS Supervisors

Initiative

Provide additional support and resources for APS supervisors to enhance their professional development.

Lead Division

Adult Protective Services

Background

APS supervisors are essential to ensuring APS clients receive quality services and are keystones in staff retention. Supervisors guide, support, and develop their staff to become experts in interventions and resources for APS clients. Knowledgeable and supportive supervisors build strong teams and generally experience lower turnover, which benefits both the community and the agency. The supervisor sets the tone and expectations for a team and develops the agency's strongest asset: the caseworker. Having well-trained, well-supported, and well-tenured supervisors leads to better outcomes for APS clients.

During the 2024 Survey of Employee Engagement, APS staff identified additional training and support for supervisors as an area of need. Supporting our frontline managers will improve protective services and lead to increased caseworker retention through the support they receive. Providing these additional supports will also attract qualified candidates to apply for supervisor positions.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Host an "all managers meeting" to provide training on topics including leading with excellence, performance improvement, critical conversations, effective meeting facilitation, and overviews on agency support for supervisors. Implement a supervisor advisory group that will meet with a district director, program administrator, or the director of field operations regularly to discuss supervisor topics and needs.
- Implement new tools and resources developed to support APS supervisors.
- Provide seminars on intentional leadership, crisis management, and developing your career within DFPS.
- Implement enhancements to the APS supervisor mentor program.
- Partner with Leadership for Advanced Management to strengthen mid-level management positions in the support they offer frontline supervisors and staff.

Statewide Intake Retention Effort: Retention Initiative Steering Committee

Initiative

Engage Statewide Intake (SWI) staff in all divisions and levels of program in planning, developing, and implementing initiatives to support retention and improve morale.

Lead Division

Statewide Intake

Background

Since FY 2020, the SWI Intake Specialist position has increased in turnover rate. The turnover in FY 2022 increased to 15 percent from 11 percent in FY 2021, and 7 percent in FY 2020. The Retention Initiative Steering Committee (RISC) provides a mechanism for continuous

improvement of the workplace for SWI employees and leadership by fostering communication and collaboration.

RISC solicits employee feedback via the SWI Satisfaction Workplace Survey in the following areas:

- Connection with the SWI mission and vision.
- Level of comfort in offering feedback and suggestions to management and leadership.
- Perception of the value of diversity, fairness of pay, and availability of tools and resources to complete work.
- Understanding what is expected of performance, conduct, and adherence to policy.

Accomplishments

Fiscal Year 2024

- Conducted an SWI Satisfaction Workplace Survey to determine current patterns or trends and learned that communication, appreciation, recognition, and connection with peers are improving.
- Created RISC workgroups to develop and propose innovative ideas to the SWI leadership team.
- Based on survey results, SWI developed several awards for staff:
 - » Anniversary Award: Appreciates and recognizes employees on the anniversary of their hire date.
 - » No Unplanned Leave Award: Awards employees who have no unplanned leave for the month.



- » Golden Ticket Award: Gives employees the opportunity to meet and shadow leadership.

Key Actions

Fiscal Year 2025

- Continue supporting the RISC workgroup as it generates ideas for retention and improving morale.
- Implement the solution initiatives identified and approved in the 2024 SWI Retention Initiative cycle.
 - » **SWI Connections**
 - A mentoring program that focuses on building additional skills in a telework environment and helps maintain the SWI culture, which staff report is vital to job satisfaction.
 - » **Get to Know Leadership Project**
 - Development of profiles to help staff “get to know” supervisors and leadership, including photographs and professional biographies.
 - » **Supervisor Introductions**
 - Implementation of video meeting to welcome new employees to the supervisors.
- Begin the 2025 SWI Retention Initiative cycle to include the SWI Workplace Satisfaction Survey, identification of top topics to address, identification of recommended solutions, and SWI leadership review and approval of the solutions.

General Information and Resources

DFPS HOTLINES

Hotlines and Information Lines

Texas Abuse/Neglect Hotline:
1-800-252-5400

Report abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children, people who are 65 or older, and people with disabilities, or violations of minimum standards in a child care operation. Available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Foster Care and Adoption Information:
1-800-233-3405

Learn how to become a foster or adoptive parent and receive information for current foster or adoptive parents.

Child Care Information:
1-800-862-5252

Information about child care in Texas.

Texas Youth Helpline:
1-800-989-6884

(chat and texting also available)

Provides peer counseling to youth and family members for family conflicts, delinquency, truancy, abuse, neglect, and running away.

Texas Parent Helpline:
1-833-680-0611

(chat and texting also available)

Assists parents with their individual needs for mental health, family conflict, spouse/partner relationships, and any other parental challenge affecting them.

Office of Consumer Relations:
1-800-720-7777

Make an inquiry or complaint about an existing DFPS case.



DFPS Kinship Facebook Page



DFPS Kinship Website



DFPS TARE Website



DFPS Kinship Support Groups

DFPS WEBSITES

- dfps.texas.gov** Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS)
- TxAbuseHotline.org** Report abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- AdoptChildren.org** Adopt children through the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange
- GetParentingTips.com** Child abuse prevention and positive parenting
- TexasYouth.org** Texas Youth and Runaway Hotline
- EveryonesBusiness.org** Adult Abuse Prevention

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