



Child Protective Services (CPS)

Child Protective Services



Responsibilities

- ◆ Investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Protect children from abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Promote the safety, integrity, and stability of families.
- ◆ Provide permanent placements for children who cannot safely remain with their own families.

Advances

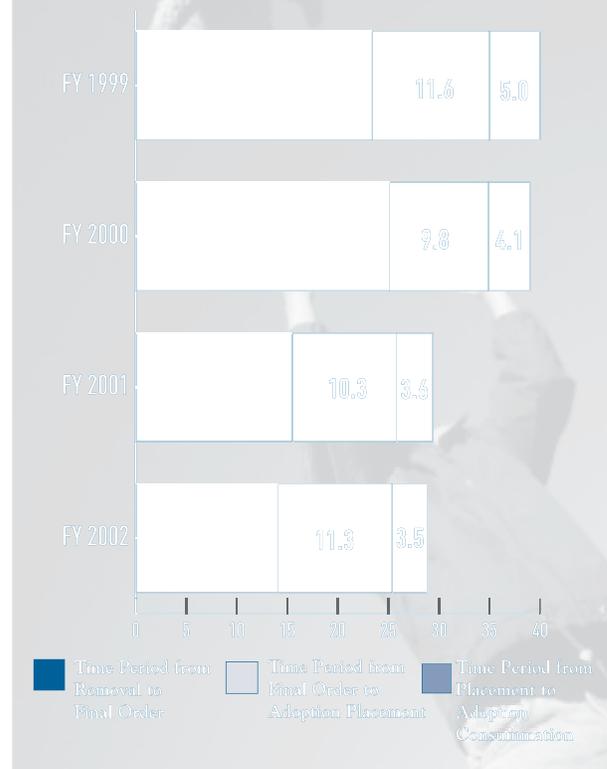
In 2002, CPS continued with a project begun in 2001 for improving the way workers assess prospective adoptive parents. The agency contracted with DePelchin Children's Center to develop a new assessment tool. In 2002, CPS began training staff to assess families using the new tool, which is known as the Texas Summary Adoption Assessment Scale (TSAAS). The collaboration has received positive feedback from federal staff, as well as child welfare professionals from other states.

In 2001, PRS collaborated with the Texas Education Agency to implement a special web site for teachers and school professionals to report child abuse and neglect online. During 2002, the site continued to receive increased use and helped PRS staff process reports faster than if they had received them by telephone. Staff received positive and constructive feedback from those who used the site.

In 2002, PRS updated its policies to implement a Flexible Response System for CPS investigations. Originally introduced as a pilot project in 1997, the system allows CPS to use a flexible approach to child abuse/neglect investigations and related delivery of services. The new system is more efficient for staff in terms of workload management. It also encourages services for clients as soon as possible during investigations and enhances the focus on risk assessment as the basis for case decision-making.

Child safety is a primary focus for CPS. By using a risk-based approach to assess families and analyzing input from internal and external case reviews, CPS identified domestic violence, substance abuse, and frequent moves by families involved with CPS as dynamics associated with serious injuries to children. During 2002, these issues were brought to the forefront in CPS policy and training.

Months Spent in State Care for Children Whose Adoptions Were Consummated



PRS also updated policies concerning foster parents. One policy ensures foster parents are properly trained in administering and knowing the side effects of psychotropic medications since many of the children in care are prescribed these medications. Another policy now allows foster parents, with special regional approval, to provide driver education to foster children in cases where a certified driver education course outside the home is not available.

In 2002, PRS created the positions of developmental disability specialists and education specialists in each region. Developmental disability specialists assist caseworkers to find the least restrictive placement settings for children, with an emphasis on removal from institutional settings, and coordinate with the Texas Health and Human Services Commission on de-institutionalization efforts. Educational specialists help PRS staff and foster families ensure children get their educational needs met.



CPS, UT Arlington Collaborate to Treat Medically Fragile Children

The University of Texas at Arlington Undergraduate and Graduate Schools of Nursing and Dallas Region Child Protective Services recently began a collaborative project that allows nurses to work with CPS workers, families who enter the CPS system, and foster families treating medically fragile children.

“The program is a wonderful idea,” says Rebecca Daniel, a foster care worker (third from the left). “It’s helpful to have someone right there who can provide medical information. Normally, we get that sort of information second hand.”

Bernadette Bartholomew, a graduate student in nursing at UT Arlington (far left), says the program helped her learn a lot of things she didn’t know. “I think it’s something other nursing programs would benefit from. Not only did I get to work with medically fragile children, but also the program made me more aware of child abuse and neglect. Next time I see bumps and bruises on a child, I will be more cognizant.”

Roy, the medically fragile child pictured, has since been placed with an adoptive family in Michigan who learned about him through an adoption photolisting web site.

The PRS Board accepted a gift from Board member Catherine Mosbacher to establish the C. Ed Davis Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Scholarship. The scholarship will be awarded annually to a young adult who is at least a junior in college and aspiring to pursue a career in the field of law. The PAL program helps foster youth who leave the state’s care make the transition to adulthood.

In May 2002, PRS and Texas Mentor, a child-placing agency, began a pilot project to benefit PRS foster children who have a high level of physical, medical, and emotional needs – Level of Care 5/6 – and might otherwise be placed in institutional settings. Texas Mentor started with a handful of families who have helped to recruit and license more foster families. This project is devoted to moving children out of institutions and into family settings in their community.

Response to Legislation

CPS staff participated with the Texas Health and Human Service Commission (HHSC) to implement Senate Bills 367 and 368. This legislation concerns moving children with developmental disabilities from institutions to family-type settings, and specifies the content of permanency plans for children with developmental disabilities in identified institutional settings. PRS also worked with HHSC and the Texas Department of Human Services on a Memorandum of Understanding to implement the legislation.

Senate Bill 51, effective Sept. 1, 2001, allows the state to provide Medicaid coverage for youth who age out of foster care until they reach their 21st birthday. As a result, PRS worked with the Texas Department of Human Services to establish a process for these youths to seamlessly move from Foster Care Medicaid to Transitional Medicaid.

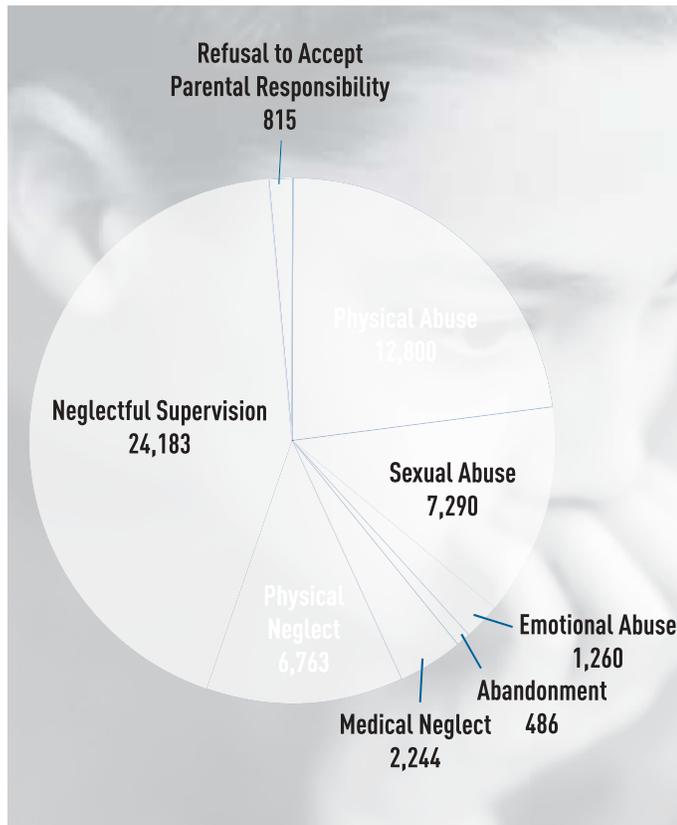
Ongoing Initiatives

In 2002, PRS continued to implement the Collaborative Adoption Project, a federal grant to improve collaboration between the public and private sectors. The grant created an innovative partnership between PRS and the Texas Collaborative Adoption Network of private child-placing agencies. During 2002, PRS established formal agreements with private adoption agencies in PRS’ Abilene, Austin, Edinburg, and Midland Regions.

CPS is working with Governors State University in Illinois and the Child Welfare League of America to develop the Foster PRIDE (Parents’ Resource for Information, Development and Education) Digital

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Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect by Type FY 2002



Curriculum. The project addresses the training and education of foster parents who care for the nation's foster children. It involves developing technology-rich systems for converting the current Foster PRIDE in-service curriculum to a Learning Anytime, Anywhere option, which will increase foster parents' knowledge and skill levels. The first module has been completed and Texas is the test state for the product.

During 2002, PRS staff participated in the national Child and Family Services Review (CFSR), conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The goal of the review was to help states improve child welfare services and achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for children and their families. PRS was praised for a number of initiatives including the Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS); responsiveness to the community particularly through the Strength Through External Partners (STEP) initiative; the Case Review System, which includes administrative and

judicial reviews; and the CPS Quality Assurance System. The federal review also noted some deficiencies, many of which were already identified in the Texas statewide assessment. As a result, Texas joins all other states in implementing a plan that improves outcomes to children and families.

During 2002, the newly developed Parent Collaboration Group increased parent representation to include most regions. The group consists of parents who received services through CPS and gives them the opportunity to provide input to the program. Parents identified the need for enhancing services in the areas of parental involvement in case planning and transition from foster care. Parents also identified strengths in the state's child welfare system and voiced support of the collaboration being championed by this initiative.

What CPS Does

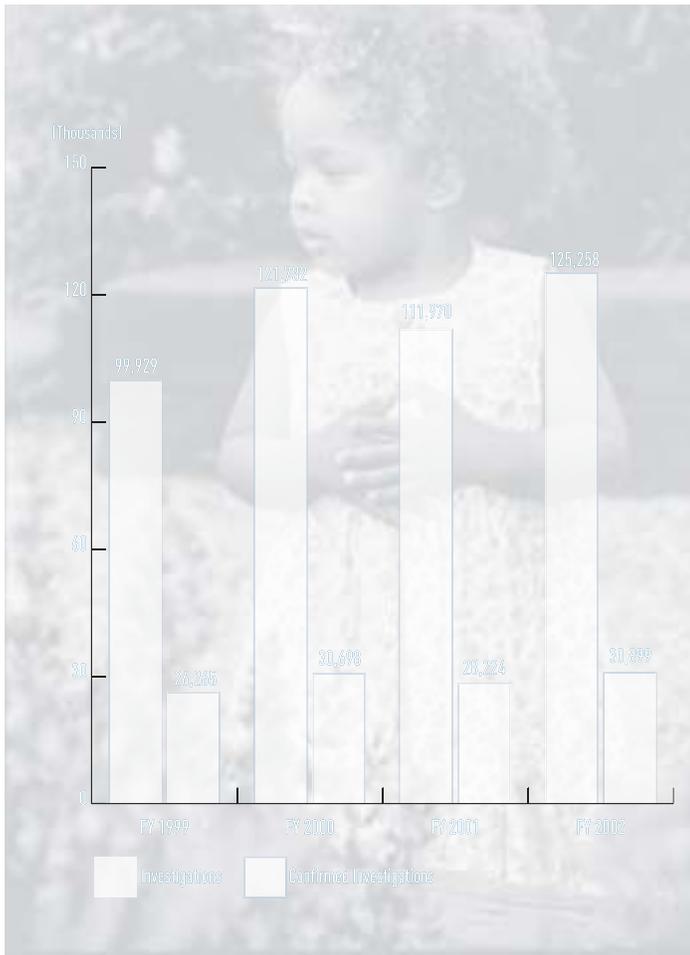
Intake

PRS administers a toll-free, 24-hour, statewide hotline for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children or the elderly at 1-800-252-5400. Anyone needing to report abuse or neglect in English or Spanish can reach a professional intake worker. All reports that meet the statutory definitions of abuse and neglect are assigned a priority based on the level of risk to the alleged victim. Law enforcement agencies are also notified of reports. The agency received 183,057 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2002. The statewide call center continued to serve as an international model for social services reporting.

Investigations

When an intake is assigned, CPS workers interview children, parents, and others who have knowledge of the family. These interviews help determine if child abuse or neglect has occurred and assess the risk of further harm to the child. If criminal conduct is involved, law enforcement may investigate at the same time to determine if criminal charges will be filed. CPS completed 125,258 investigations in 2002. Even if evidence of abuse or neglect is not found, caseworkers may refer families to services in the community, such as individual or family therapy; parenting classes; or programs offering financial assistance for utilities, rent and child care.

Completed Investigations of Child Abuse/Neglect



Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS)

When child safety can be reasonably assured, PRS provides in-home services to help stabilize the family and reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect. Services provided include family counseling, crisis intervention, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment and child care.

Most children served through FBSS continue to live at home while the agency works with their families. In other cases, children may live elsewhere temporarily, usually with relatives or family friends, until the home becomes safe enough for them to return. In 2002, an average of 9,000 families per month received in-home services.

Foster Care

When it isn't safe for children to live with their own families, PRS petitions the court to provide for their safety. They may be placed temporarily with relatives, a verified foster family, or an emergency shelter. Certified foster families provide a safe, nurturing environment for most children in CPS care. Foster families receive reimbursements for the cost of caring for children. CPS is required to arrange all medical, dental and therapeutic services needed by the child. Some children have special emotional needs or other disabilities that can be difficult to address in a foster care home. These children may be placed in specialized group homes, residential treatment centers, or other facilities.

Permanency Planning Teams

When children are removed from their home and placed in the state's custody, the CPS caseworker, the parents, and the children's temporary caregivers work together to develop a written case plan and address the factors that caused abuse or neglect. They also review the progress made in the case plan on a regular basis with the input of the other professionals involved in the case. The goal is to ensure that children live in a stable, nurturing environment and do not remain in foster care. This coordination helps all parties concerned to determine a permanent solution for the child – or what is known as a “permanency plan.” Whether the plan is for a child to return home or be adopted, the team works to avoid unnecessary delays in the process.

Adoption

When it is not possible for a child to return home, the court may terminate the parents' rights and legally free the child for adoption. PRS completed 2,248 adoptions in 2002. PRS contracts with licensed private child-placing agencies to increase the number of adoptive homes available to adopt foster children. At the end of 2002, there were 3,821 children in the agency's custody waiting for adoption.

Dual-Licensed Homes

The number of foster parents who adopt children placed in their homes continues to increase. In 2002, 54.3 percent of adoptions were by foster parents. National studies

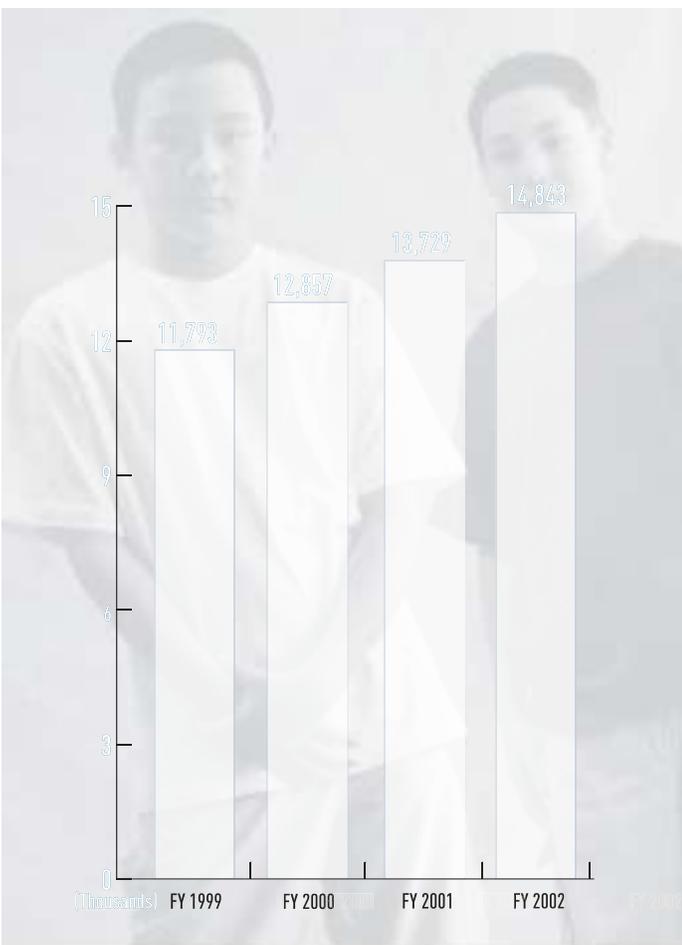
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indicate greater opportunities for successful adoptions in these situations because children and their new parents form a bond during the foster care placement. PRS has made a concerted effort to “dual license” homes for both foster care and adoption services.

Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families

PRS actively recruits foster and adoptive families through national, state, and regional campaigns. Examples include the statewide Foster Care Month in May, Adoption Awareness Month in November, and the One Church, One Child programs currently in place in Fort Worth/Dallas, Beaumont and Houston. Our partnership with faith-based organizations has helped PRS find numerous adoptive homes for children. The agency is planning to expand this partnership.

Children in Foster Care at End of Fiscal Year



Child Available for Adoption Telling His Own Story

Twelve-year-old Taimek is a loving child who enjoys basketball and computer games. He gets along well with others and will lend a helping hand to anyone. Because he is somewhat older and a member of an ethnic minority, Taimek is one of hundreds of children across Texas who is having trouble finding an adoptive family.

PRS staff have worked with other agencies to include Taimek in recent community awareness presentations so he can tell his story directly. “Sometimes, I’m afraid of going in front of a room full of people, but I am thankful that I am allowed to represent other African American boys,” says Taimek. “I have been in foster care for six years. Being in foster care is OK, but there’s nothing like having your own loving home.”

So far, Taimek’s approach may be working. “People have said they want to adopt me. All I want is a family who will take care of me, play with me, and help me with my homework. I wouldn’t mind brothers and sisters. And I’d really like to have a pet dog.”



Former Foster Youth is Giving Back to Children in Care

Michelle Sosa-Lopez is a CPS worker in Corpus Christi who knows something about the agency's services firsthand. As a youth, she came into the state's care due to abuse/neglect and benefited from the agency's Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program. "A lot of kids want out of the system quickly. They don't understand how difficult being on your own can be. When you fall down, you have to pick yourself up," she says.

While a high school senior, Sosa-Lopez got the opportunity to help represent the interests of Texas foster children before Congress in Washington D.C. After high school, she went on to college and earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from Texas A&M at Corpus Christi. Lopez also was invited to speak to the Governor's Committee to Promote Adoption, which resulted in changing laws to seek and establish permanency for children sooner.

"I really enjoy helping children who are in the same path I was in. When I was dealing with my issues, people used to say they understood where I was coming from, but how could they? I know I can relate to these kids and make that connection." To this day, Lopez gets visits from former clients and PAL youths who have gone on to become adults. "Sometimes, they need help, advice, or someone to just talk to. They tell me it helps them to know I'm there. If I could, I wish I could just give them a hug and take all their pain, suffering, and trauma away."

Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) provides information on children waiting for adoption primarily with photos, profiles, videos and inquiry forms on the Internet at www.adoptchildren.org. TARE participates with national adoption organizations during national recruitment campaigns and promotes children on TARE in other national web sites. TARE had 925 children registered in 2002.

The TARE Family Network (TFN) is another service offered through TARE. TFN is a listing of adoptive families and individuals across the United States who have approved adoptive home studies. The family's adoption preferences on children they are willing to parent are available to PRS adoption staff in a searchable database. More than 275 approved adoptive families were registered in the TFN in 2002.

Adoption Support Services

Adopted children who have suffered abuse or neglect often need help coping with the effects of abuse and the loss of their birth family. Each PRS region contracts with private agencies to provide post adoption services to adopted children and their families, including casework, mental health, therapeutic services to children and families, parent training, support groups, and respite care for adoptive parents. Post-adoption services were provided to 1,606 children and families in 2002.

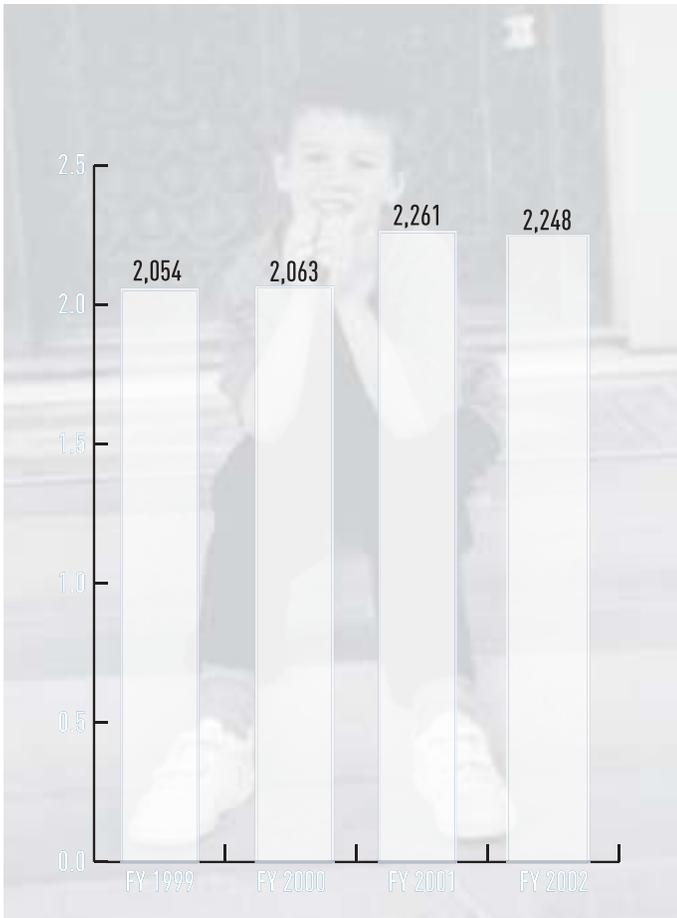
Preparation for Adult Living

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program helps make the transition to adulthood successful for youth in foster care. PAL services include independent living assessment; time-limited financial help; and training in such areas as money management, job skills, educational planning and interpersonal skills. A statewide youth leadership committee meets quarterly to review policies and practices and submits recommendations to the PRS Board and other decision-makers to improve services to children and youth.

In 2002, 4,297 youths, ages 14 through 20, participated in the PAL program. Through funds of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, PRS provided aftercare room-and-board assistance and case management services for young adults ages 18 through 21 who exited foster care.

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Completed Adoptions



Children's Justice Act

The mission of the Children's Justice Act (CJA) is to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases. CJA funds court-based mediation of CPS cases in eight projects throughout the state. Mediation reduces trauma to the child victim; provides an alternative to often lengthy, hostile, and costly litigation; provides better outcomes for children and families; and achieves prompt permanency for children. CJA also funds a telemedicine project that is building a network of medical professionals who evaluate cases of sexual abuse. This project has recently expanded to include a pilot in Bexar County evaluating physical abuse. CJA sponsors training for attorneys ad litem for children and an annual conference to train prosecutors across the state. CJA also provides funding for training physicians, nurses, and law enforcement personnel. CJA funds three family group

conferencing projects – a mechanism to address cultural differences, allow for more extended family involvement, and reduce lengthy court proceedings. In 2001 CJA began funding several innovative local projects, including Texas Lawyers for Children, a resource for attorneys representing parties in CPS cases.

Texas Court Improvement Project

The Texas Court Improvement Project (CIP) is a federal grant to the Texas Supreme Court administered by PRS to improve judicial proceedings in foster care and adoption cases. Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) continues to expand with financial help from CIP. This funding also pilots projects known as "Cluster Courts," where a traveling judge hears only CPS cases for a cluster of counties. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$4 million for the coming biennium for 16 such courts throughout the state. CIP continues to work closely with the Office of Court Administration, which now has responsibility for the project. CIP also helps fund several judicial trainings and training tools on child abuse and neglect. CIP monies maintain the Judicial Web Page, a tool for judges and PRS attorneys to check on the status of any child abuse or neglect case filed in Texas. CIP funds the development of online training software and video conferencing pilot projects, allowing a child to testify from the security and comfort of a remote location. Currently, the CIP main focus is on judicial training on current issues in child abuse and neglect.

Child Fatality Review

Every year, thousands of Texas children die as a result of automobile accidents, accidental drowning, congenital birth defects, accidental shooting, and many other causes. Child Fatality Review Teams are multidisciplinary, multiethnic, multi-agency panels that review all child deaths regardless of how they occurred. The goal of the review team is to decrease preventable child deaths. Members include law enforcement, prosecutors, medical examiners, justices of the peace, health-care professionals, educators and child advocates. These teams are uniquely qualified to understand what no single agency or group working alone can: how and why children are dying in their community. From their findings, review teams help develop prevention and public awareness initiatives. Child Fatality Review Teams have grown rapidly since their inception in 1992. Today there are 43 teams that cover 144 counties. PRS provides technical assistance to the teams and is the state agency



CPS is Taking Proactive Approach in Colonia

Colonia is the Spanish word for neighborhood or community, but in Texas it also means a geographic area whose population is living in poverty. Many colonia residents lack safe, sanitary, and sound housing and are without basic services such as drinking water, adequate sewage systems, drainage, utilities, paved roads, and plumbing. There are about 1,450 colonias in Texas, which are home to more than 350,000 people. More than 36 percent of these residents are children, compared to 29 percent statewide, and many are at risk of being abused or neglected.

In 2001, CPS began a pilot project to work proactively with colonia families before there were any reports of abuse or neglect. “This is a big challenge, a little something extra we do on top of our already existing caseloads,” says Sandra Massey (right), a CPS supervisor in Brownsville. Working with Alma Rendon (left), who is the community resource center coordinator for the Cameron Park Colonia, Massey has been able to teach ongoing parenting classes and make presentations to women who live in the colonia. “People here are used to living by the rule of the street. The classes teach us that we are all responsible for child abuse and neglect as a person, neighbor, family member, or friend.”

PRS is working with community agencies to improve services available through the community center. “We just built a computer lab. We also offer classes in aerobics and arts and crafts, and the Boys and Girls Club is building a swimming pool,” says Rendon. “One of my dreams is to make this colonia self sufficient some day. We’re almost there.”

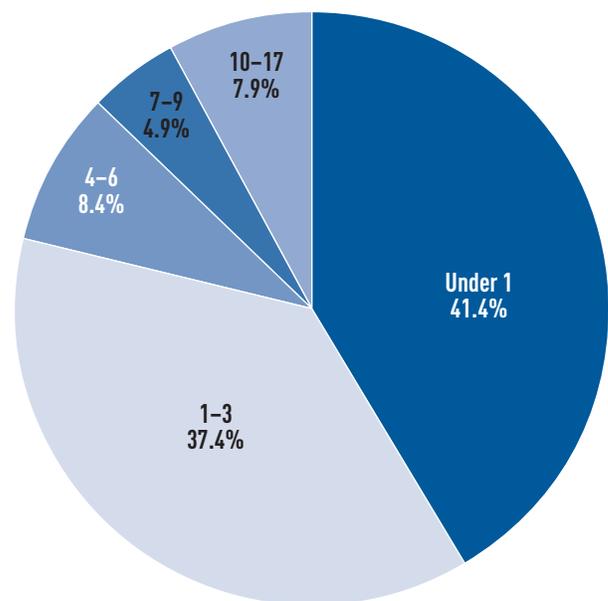
charged with maintaining the public information associated with the teams.

Abuse/Neglect Fatalities

PRS has developed both internal and external mechanisms to review child fatalities due to abuse/neglect. The deaths are reviewed by Citizen Review Teams, Child Fatality Review Teams, CPS Risk Directors, Regional CPS Child Death Committees, and the state Child Safety Review Committee. While each entity reviews child deaths for unique purposes, a common goal is to help CPS and the larger community to identify causes of child fatalities and to develop strategies, programs, and training to reduce the rate of preventable child deaths and to provide intervention services to families and children at risk. For example, an area of emphasis for the CPS risk assessment system is child vulnerability as illustrated by the fact that young children, regardless of their gender or ethnicity, are of the highest risk of abuse and neglect.

In 2002, of the children who died due to abuse or neglect, 41.4 percent were less than one year old, and nearly 78.8 percent were age three or younger. Of 712 child deaths reported to PRS in 2002, CPS confirmed abuse/neglect as the cause of death for 203 children.

Age of Child Fatality Victims Due to Abuse/Neglect FY 2002



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Adoptive Couple Has Love to Share

When it comes to having a loving home, one could say that Brenda and Mike Wollam of Georgetown have aspirations as big as Texas. “We always wanted to have a large family,” says Brenda. “After having two birth children, we hoped for more. Unfortunately, my last pregnancy was very difficult so we didn’t try again.”

Like many couples, the Wollams considered adoption. “We heard lots of stories about people going to orphanages in Romania, but when we looked into that option, we decided it was cost prohibitive. Then one day, we saw an article in the newspaper about children in the state’s custody needing to be adopted, especially children who had special emotional and physical needs as well as being from different ethnic groups.”

After going through the adoptive home certification process, the Wollams were confident they could provide a loving home for any child. “Some of our closest friends are a biracial couple and a Caucasian couple who have adopted African-American children,” says Brenda. “Sure, we had a learning curve, but that would have happened regardless of a child’s ethnicity – every child is different. We read a lot of books and asked a lot of questions.”

The Wollams are also hoping others choose to adopt children like they did. “When we go out into the community, whether it is in church or the grocery store, we get lots of reaction because of our different ethnicities,” says Brenda. “One person even asked us if we ran some sort of day care. We tell them all about the children in the state’s care, answer questions if we can, and address any misconceptions out there about adoption. For example, people think you have to have a lot of money, own your home, or have to stay at home full time. We don’t know if any of them have gone off and adopted children of their own, but we’re planting a seed in their minds, and most of the people seem really excited. We want to encourage everyone to consider fostering or adopting children.”