

Child Protective Services



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Responsibilities

- ◆ Conduct civil investigations of reported 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.

2004 Child Protective Services Reform

In 2004, Child Protective Services came under increased scrutiny from elected officials and the news media because of several serious cases of child abuse. In response, the Governor issued Executive Order RP 35 on July 2, 2004. The order called for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC) to review and reform Child Protective Services. This effort continued into the next fiscal year.

Accomplishments

- ◆ In fiscal year 2004, CPS continued to work on process improvements as dictated by the federal Child and Family Services Review. Conducted by the Administration for Children and Families, this federal oversight helps state child welfare systems improve the safety, permanency, and well being of children in their care. In fact, many of the major initiatives begun in fiscal year 2004 were designed to address some of the improvements identified in the federal review.
- ◆ In 2004, the Child and Family Services Review team completed six reviews in the agency's Amarillo, Austin, Houston, Midland, and San Antonio regions. Staff reviewed and rated 1,050 cases.
- ◆ In 2004, CPS worked with the American Public Human Services Association and the Casey Family Program to articulate and reinforce the program's vision and values. The vision statement, "Children First: Safe and Secure," focused on the values of compassion, respect, integrity, inclusiveness, and commitment. Statewide training on the CPS vision and values heralded the year's initiatives and strengthened leadership development.
- ◆ For many generations, extended families have raised children in their homes when the birth parents were unable. Kinship care helps reduce the psychological trauma experienced by children when they are removed from their homes and families due to child abuse and neglect. In 2004, CPS launched the Supporting and Educating Relatives As

Placements (SERAPE) initiative in five South Texas Counties. Additionally, as a component of the CPS Family Group Decision-Making Initiative, CPS expanded the Comprehensive Relative Enhancement, Support, and Training (CREST) kinship care initiative that began in Bexar County seven years ago. The SERAPE and CREST initiatives provide extended families with services, which include case management, training and support groups, family counseling, and day care. The SERAPE initiative also provides limited financial assistance.

- ◆ In December 2003, CPS implemented the Family Group Decision-Making Initiative in several cities across the state to strengthen the participation of extended family members in planning for the safety, permanency, and well being of children in substitute care. After CPS intervenes to protect a child from abuse, the child's family is invited to participate in a facilitated conference along with the extended family and trusted friends. The conferencing process focuses the family on the needs of the child and community resources available so that decision-making is more inclusive and responsive to each child's needs. The process includes identifying the strengths of the family, as well as the family's goals, hopes, and dreams for the children. Family Group Conferencing also addresses the need for CPS involvement, any continuing concerns, and the tasks required for the family to attain their goals related to child safety, permanency and wellbeing.

- ◆ In 2003, CPS created parent collaboration groups in the agency's El Paso, Houston, and San Antonio regions. In 2004, the groups expanded to the agency's Arlington, Austin, and Midland regions. The groups are designed to give parents involved in the system more of a voice in improving overall services. The goals of these groups are to identify gaps in services, what services should continue, and policies that need improvement. They provide an avenue for parents to make recommendations and help social workers improve their skills.

- ◆ In response to Senate Bill 1489, which was passed in the regular session of the 78th Texas Legislature, Child Protective Services began a unique collaboration with Texas' faith-based communities. Through this partnership, which is called Congregations Helping in Love and Dedication (CHILD), CPS has increased its collaborations with the faith community to find loving homes for children who have come into the state's care due to abuse and neglect. Through CHILD, CPS hopes to recruit and approve at least two families per congregation who can provide foster and adoptive care services and to help congregations develop supportive services for the approved foster and adoptive families and the placed children. The support services may



Being a parent hasn't always been easy for Dana Rodriguez. A single mom of four children ages 8, 6, 4, and 2 (she is pictured with Daniel, age 4 and Emily, age 2), she was hit by two life-changing events last year: a physical illness and a separation from her boyfriend. As a result, Dana says she became depressed and in her words turned into a "couch parent," which led to her leaving the children in a state of neglect and eventually required intervention by Child Protective Services.

Dana worked with Kristyn Gonzales, a CPS worker in Amarillo, to develop a plan of service. The plan included parenting classes, psychological and psychiatric evaluations, family assessment, and counseling to address self-esteem and depression.

"My work with CPS did not start immediately," Dana says. "After my children were placed in protective care, I was so depressed I basically slept for two weeks. Then, things got even worse. I was arrested, spent time in jail, lost my apartment and all my possessions, and became homeless. Rather than feel even more depressed, I tried to remember that I needed to never give up. I had to keep trying."

According to Kristyn, that is when Dana started to turn her life around. "Dana got a job, found a trailer house that appealed to her, and spoke to the owner about renting it. She discovered it was for sale and that if she fixed it up, she could move in immediately. Dana paid off the home last February."

Kristyn says Dana continued to overcome her issues. After 12 months in care, Dana was reunited with Daniel and Emily. Her two older children remain with their paternal grandparents. "Dana visits them on a regular basis," says Kristyn. "She has had to overcome a lot to establish a positive relationship with the grandparents. Dana knows this is the best place for her children to be right now, as they have behavioral and emotional needs."

Dana appreciates what Kristyn has done to help her. "I was not always fond of Kristyn, however, she told me things that I needed to hear, even though I didn't always like to hear them. My advice for other parents working with CPS is to work your service plan. If you think you have hit the bottom, there is only one way to go, UP! Sure, I worry about backsliding. But I have learned much during the past year, including the skills needed for positive parenting, and the confidence to ask for help if needed. Look how much I accomplished in the past year—I'm looking forward to years to come."

include respite care, tuition for day care services, tutoring, and after school programs.

- ◆ In January 2004, CPS centralized its process of placing children in residential treatment. The goal of centralization was to reduce the average number of children in such placements and improve the lives of those children by placing them in the most appropriate settings. The new process gave residential treatment providers a centralized point of contact.

- ◆ In 2004, CPS received federal funding to create a new program that helps youth who age out of the state's care to reach their educational goals. The Education and Training Voucher (ETV) program began providing additional money for youth who have left CPS care and are going to school to help cover expenses such as rent, computer, day care, and transportation. The program supplements the state's Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, and the state's tuition waiver program at state funded universities, colleges, junior colleges, and vocational schools.

- ◆ In 2004, CPS placed in each administrative district a Best Practice Specialist who has worked closely with each respective district director to identify and promote best practices in all areas of delivering services. Best Practice Specialists have provided local leadership on several of the major initiatives, as well as a variety of topics including revitalizing permanency planning, enhancing child and family visitations, accessing substance abuse treatment services, and assessing family reunification readiness.

CPS Services

Intake

State law requires that anyone who believes that a child is being abused or neglected report the situation to the DFPS abuse hotline. DFPS administers a toll-free, 24-hour statewide hotline for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children, and people who are elderly or have disabilities at 1-800-252-5400. Anyone needing to report abuse or neglect (in English or Spanish) can reach a professional intake worker. All reports meeting 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 regarding children. The agency received 206,978 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2004. During 2004, an increasing number of professionals took advantage of a new option, reporting suspected abuse and neglect through a secured web site. In 2004, 20,883 web-based reports of abuse or neglect were received through this Internet reporting option.

In September 2003, the statewide hotline received an unprecedented number of phone calls, which resulted in

delays. The increase in calls, which averaged more than 700 a day, coincided with the start of the school year when the agency historically receives more calls. As a result, the agency shifted manpower, authorized overtime, hired temporary workers, and implemented flexible hours to handle the increased call volume.

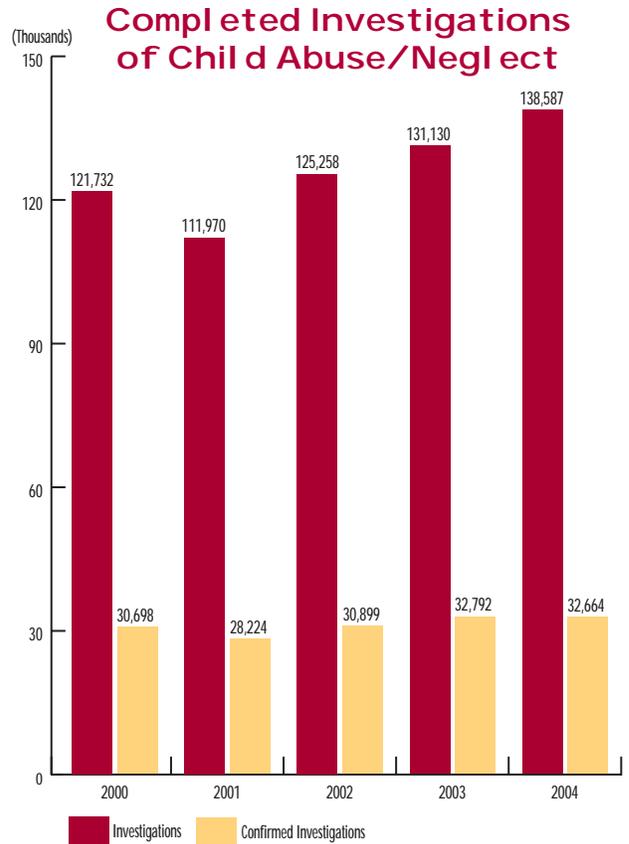
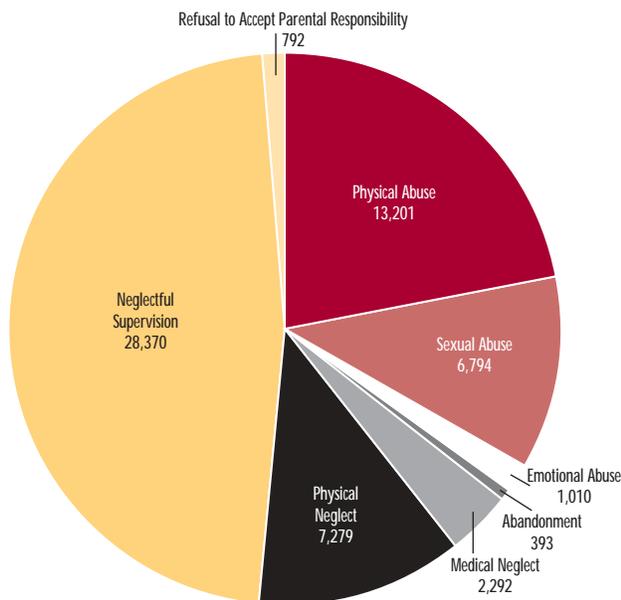
Investigations

When an intake report is assigned, CPS workers interview children, parents, and others with 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. In 2004, CPS completed 138,587 investigations. 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.

Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS)

When child safety can be reasonably assured, CPS provides in-home services to help stabilize the family and reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect. Services provided include

Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect by Type FY 2004



family counseling, crisis intervention, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment, and childcare.

Most children served by 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 2004, an average of 9,029 families per month received in-home services.

Foster Care

When it is not safe for children to live with their own families, CPS petitions the court to remove the children from their homes. They may be placed temporarily with relatives, a verified foster family, or an emergency shelter. Verified 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 home. These children may be placed in specialized group homes, residential treatment centers, or other facilities.



The Olympic Games in Athens, Greece are a long way from Oliver Wendell Holmes High School in San Antonio. But that's exactly where Darold Williamson found himself in the summer of 2004. As a member of the U.S. Men's Track and Field team, the 6 foot 2 inch, 170 pound athlete won a gold medal in the 4 by 400 meter relay.

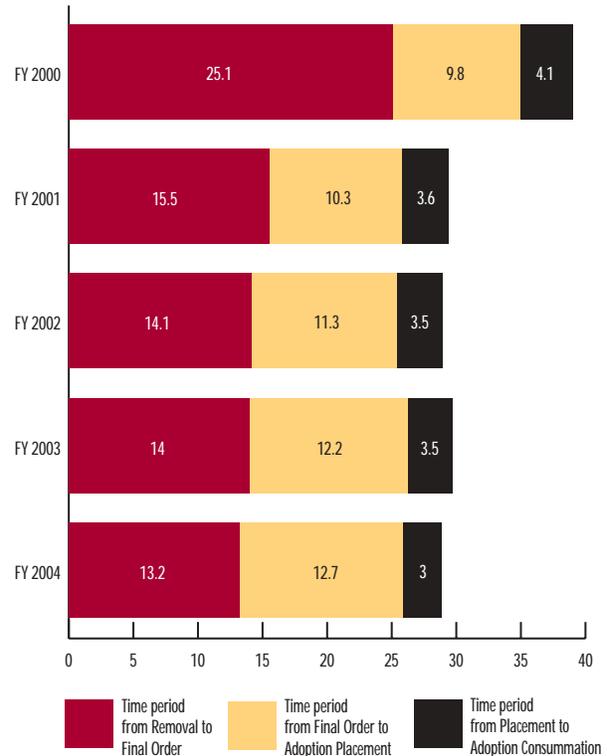
Williamson began his career as an athlete as a teen about the same time he came into the state's foster care system. Fortunately, his grandmother became a foster parent through Casey Family Programs in San Antonio and was there to help coach him on. Now Williamson is at Baylor University, where he helped win Big 12 track and field championships in 2002, 2003, and 2004, Williamson still keeps in touch with Liz Cruz, his caseworker at Casey (pictured above).

"It's been a long road, but I've always been one to focus on the positive things in life," says Williamson. "If you hold onto the bad things, you won't get anywhere. I always strive to do my best, to work hard."

Williamson is an alumnus of the DFPS Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program and was an Education and Training Voucher scholarship recipient. While in foster care, Williamson also received support from Mark Feichtinger, his permanent managing conservatorship caseworker and Nadine Terry, his PAL worker. "Preparation for Adult Living was helpful to get me prepared for life on my own, how to do things right," says Williamson.

As for the future, Williamson hopes to represent the United States in the 2008 Olympics in Beijing. When he retires from competition, he is contemplating a career in coaching because he'd like to give back to the sport. His message to foster youth: "Always work hard and don't let the negative things in life hold you down. Set high goals—it will get you something to work toward. Never give up."

Months Spent in State Care for Children Whose Adoptions Were Consummated



Permanency Planning Teams

When children are removed from their home and placed in the state's custody, CPS caseworkers, parents, and caregivers work together to develop a written case plan and address the factors that caused abuse or neglect. They also review 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 living arrangement for the child—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 permanency. In sites where Family Group Decision-Making has been initiated, the family group conference replaces a Permanency Planning Team meeting.

Adoption

When it is not possible for a child to return home, the court may terminate the parents' rights and legally make the child available for adoption. DFPS completed 2,512

adoptions in 2004. DFPS contracts with licensed private child-placing agencies to increase the number of adoptive homes available to adopt foster children. At the end of 2004, there were 3,422 children in the agency's custody waiting for adoption.

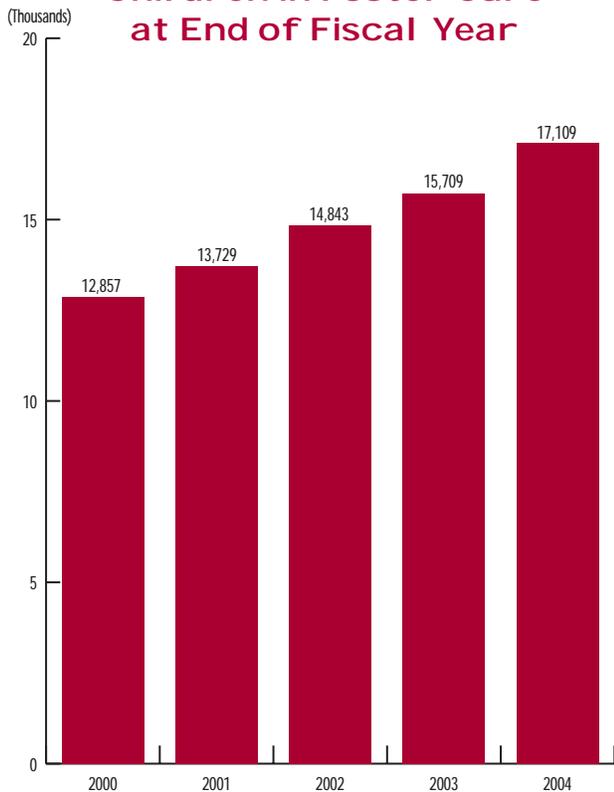
Dual-Licensed Homes

In 2004, 51.5 percent of adoptions were by foster parents. National studies indicate greater opportunities for successful adoptions in these situations because children and their new parents form a bond during the foster care placement. CPS makes a concerted effort to "dually license" homes for both foster care and adoption.

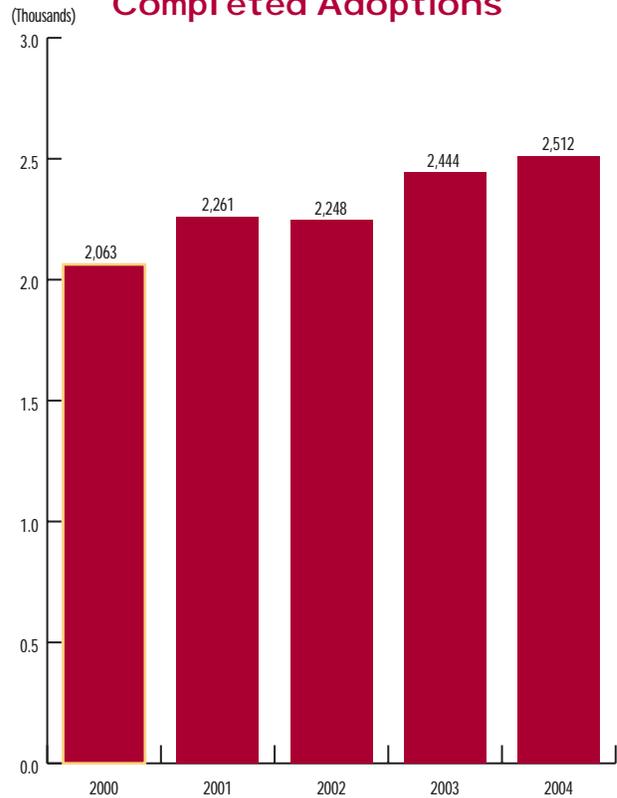
Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families

CPS actively recruits foster and adoptive families through national, state, and regional campaigns and through the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange web site. Examples include the statewide Foster Care Month in May, Adoption Awareness Month in November, the CHILD initiative, and the One Church, One Child programs currently in place in Dallas/Fort Worth, Beaumont, Tyler, and Houston.

Children in Foster Care at End of Fiscal Year



Completed Adoptions



Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) provides information on children waiting for adoption. Photos, profiles, videos, and inquiry forms are on the Internet at www.adoptchildren.org. TARE participates with other adoption organizations during national recruitment campaigns and promotes children on TARE in the AdoptUSKids national web site as well as other web sites.

TARE had 1,131 children registered in 2004:

- ◆ 339 children were placed or are pending placement;
- ◆ 170 children were removed from TARE due to numerous inquiries (more than 20);
- ◆ 75 children were removed due to changes in their permanency plan or changes in medical/therapeutic needs; and
- ◆ 547 children registered in 2004 are still waiting.

TARE offers a toll-free Statewide Adoption and Foster Care Inquiry Line--1-800-233-3405--and the Adoption Family Network (AFN). AFN is a free, self-registration listing of adoptive families and individuals across the United States who have been approved for adoptions. Through AFN, families may list their preferences on children they



Country music fans around Plainview may know Brandy Haines because of the “Wake Up Kickin’ Morning Show With Tom and Brandy” on KKYN FM, The Bulldog. But around the house, she’s just known as, “Mom.”

After having one biological child, Jared (left), Brandy and her husband Michael decided they had a lot more room in their home and in their hearts. As a result, they decided to become foster parents through DFPS in 2001. “Mike was the one who had the idea to become foster parents,” says Brandy. “We always loved kids, and worked with the children’s ministry at our church.”

While being trained to become foster parents, they were approached about becoming licensed to adopt children as well. “At the time, this was something we had never considered,” said Mike. “We were told there could be instances when children in our home would become available for adoption, and since we would already have a relationship as foster parents, we might want to adopt. So we decided to do it.”

Soon after her birth mother abandoned her, the Haines became foster parents to a newborn named Brianna. Mike and Brandy were glad that they had been dual licensed! Although they began with the intentions of fostering, they decided to legally add Brianna to their family.

Mike and Brandy encourage other families to consider becoming foster/adoptive parents because it is very rewarding. “The hugs, I Love Yous, and witnessing the change and development of the children is incredible,” says Brandy. “DFPS provides a reimbursement for the care of children, and the kids qualify for Medicaid and often other services. You’ll need to have patience, time, and love to share. It is a great reward and there is a great need in our community.”

are willing to parent and this information is available to CPS adoption staff through a searchable database. More than 600 approved adoptive families were registered in AFN in 2004.

The toll-free statewide inquiry line receives about 150 to 200 calls a month from prospective foster care and adoptive families across the state. These calls are entered into the Internet inquiry forms and forwarded to their respective regions as soon as they are received.

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 CPS region contracts with private agencies to provide post-adoption services to adopted children and their families. Those services include case management, mental health services, therapeutic services to children and families, parent training, support groups, and respite care for adoptive parents. Post-adoption services were provided to 1,592 children and families in 2004.

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 DFPS Council and other decision-makers to improve services to children and youth.

In 2004, 5,341 youths ages 16 through 20, participated in the PAL program. In addition, 534 teenagers ages 14 and 15 received PAL services. Funds from the federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act enabled CPS to provide aftercare room-and-board assistance for 891 young adults and case management services for 1,599 young adults ages 18 through 21 who exited foster care.

Working With Partners

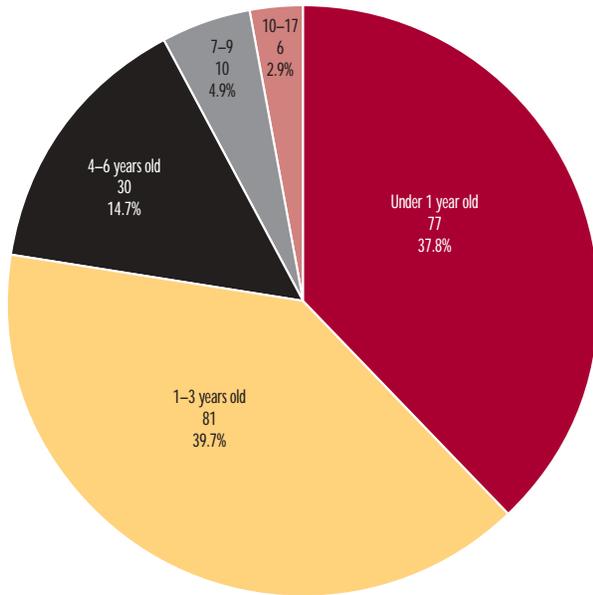
Children's Justice Act

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 collaborative projects throughout the state.

Mediation:

- ◆ Reduces trauma to the child victim;
- ◆ Provides an alternative to often lengthy, hostile, and costly litigation;

Age of Fatality Victims Due to Abuse/Neglect FY2004



- ◆ Provides better outcomes for children and families; and
- ◆ Achieves prompt permanency for children.

CJA also:

- ◆ Funds a telemedicine project for a network of medical professionals who evaluate cases of sexual abuse, and more recently, physical abuse;
- ◆ Sponsors training for attorneys ad litem for children and an annual conference to train prosecutors across the state;
- ◆ Provides funding for training physicians, nurses, and law enforcement personnel;
- ◆ Started family group conferencing in Texas, a mechanism to address cultural differences, allow for more extended family involvement, and reduce lengthy court proceedings; and
- ◆ Funds Texas Lawyers for Children, a statewide web-based resource for attorneys representing parties in CPS cases.

In 2004, CJA also provided funding for training law enforcement, prosecutors, legal personnel, social workers, and medical personnel on recognizing and investigating child abuse.

Law Enforcement

In an effort to monitor legislation requiring that law enforcement and CPS conduct joint investigations of Priority 1 reports, CPS is reviewing the availability of law enforcement involvement in these cases, as well as the impact on victims and parents when law enforcement is present. The agency made changes to its automated information system to more accurately capture cases in which law enforcement was involved.

Texas Court Improvement Project

The Texas Court Improvement Project (CIP) is a federal grant to the Texas Supreme Court to improve judicial proceedings in foster care and adoption cases. Through an interagency agreement, the grant is administered by DFPS. Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) continues to expand with financial help from CIP. This funding also has piloted 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 last biennium for 15 such courts throughout the state. CIP continues to work closely with the Office of Court Administration.

CIP also helps fund several judicial trainings and training tools on child abuse and neglect. CIP monies:

- ◆ Maintain the judicial web site, a tool for judges and DFPS attorneys to check on the status of any child abuse or neglect case filed in Texas;
- ◆ Fund several court-driven local projects to recruit foster and adoptive homes; and
- ◆ Fund 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.

In 2004, CIP also funded a "Cluster Prosecutor" to handle cases in the northern Panhandle child protection Cluster Court of Judge Phil Vanderpool in Pampa.

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 local, multidisciplinary, 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 46 teams that cover 150 counties. Through CPS, DFPS provides technical assistance to the teams and is the state agency charged with maintaining public information associated with the teams.

Abuse/Neglect Fatalities

CPS has developed both internal and external mechanisms to review child fatalities due to abuse/neglect. Citizen Review Teams, Child Fatality Review Teams, CPS Risk Directors, Regional CPS Child Death Review Committees, and the state Child Safety Review Committee review child deaths. While each entity reviews child deaths for unique purposes, a common goal is to help CPS and the broader community identify the causes of child fatalities and develop strategies, programs, and training to reduce the rate of preventable child deaths, as well as provide intervention services to families and children at risk.

In 2004, of the children who died due to abuse or neglect, 37.8 percent were less than one year old, and nearly 77.5 percent were age three or younger. Of 616 child deaths reported in 2004, CPS confirmed abuse/neglect as the cause of death for 204 children.

Racial Disparity

CPS began to tackle the problem of over the representation of African American children in the Texas foster care system. While African American children made up only 12.8 percent of the Texas population, they made up 27 percent of the children entering foster care in 2003.

In an effort to address this issue, CPS entered into a partnership with the Casey Family Programs. Based in Seattle, Washington, Casey Family Programs is a national organization that provides direct services to foster, kinship, and adoptive parents and promote advances in child-welfare practice and policy. The goal of the partnership is to work with community members to find better ways of keeping families intact and keep children out of foster care, while still protecting children from neglect and abuse. The Casey Family Program/CPS partnership began to build community advisory committees in Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston.

Some of CPS' other strategies such as family group decision-making, kinship care, and CHILD will help mitigate disparities that arise among children in CPS care. These disparities arise from African American children remaining in care longer than Anglo children and exiting less often to permanent homes.

Transitioning Youth

In 2004, the Texas Workforce Commission, in collaboration with DFPS, the Texas Juvenile Probation Commission, and the Texas Workforce Commission, received a U.S. Department of Labor demonstration grant to develop a one-stop transition services center in the Houston area. Once completed, the center will offer a wide range of services to youth (ages 16 to 21) who are transitioning from foster care to adulthood. The transition center, scheduled to begin operation in fiscal year 2005, will assist youth in gaining employment, stable housing, and self-sufficiency.

Texas State Strategy

The Texas State Strategy is a collaborative systems improvement effort of Casey Family Programs and DFPS. The strategy addresses challenges in the areas of kinship services and foster care transition services in Texas. In 2004, Casey and DFPS addressed the increase in kinship care referrals and began evaluation of a kinship pilot in South Texas.

As part of the Texas State Strategy, a foster care alumni leadership forum brought alumni together with state agency leaders to work on strategies for improving services to children and youth. "Better Together" training was held for foster care alumni and adult partners to work together in communities. Technical assistance was provided for ongoing training of caseworkers, care providers, alumni, and other stakeholders on life skills tools. The web-based Chafee Assessment Supplement moved to the pilot stage. 🌸



Volunteers like Patty Gonzales of Austin play an important role at DFPS. In 2004, she and her friend Aida Douglas had a casual chat—little did they know at the time where it would lead.

"I was speaking with Aida one night about how we get to go to annual galas but don't know what to do with the dresses afterward," says Gonzales, who works for Time Warner Cable. "Aida, who at the time, was chair of the Travis County Child Welfare Board, suggested we help girls in foster care because they have difficulty getting ready for the prom."

After pulling together additional friends and contacts from *Las Comadres*, a social group, and the Association for Women in Communications, the program was able to get dresses and a team of volunteers to provide youth with a complete "prom prep" experience. "Initially, I sent out two e-mails to my contacts and in turn, those people sent e-mails to their friends and organizations. As a result, we collected close to 400 dresses in a matter of two or three weeks."

In a short time, Gonzales' house was transferred into a "boutique" where volunteers for the young ladies gave them manicures, pedicures, facials, make-up lessons, refreshments, and gift bags containing perfume and make-up. Young men were treated to a complimentary tuxedo rental and a "gentlemen's lunch" at the Hula Hut restaurant where they brushed up on table etiquette and manners suitable for escorting a princess. Estrada Cleaners provided dry cleaning for the dresses and tuxedos.

"It was great fun and it's an event we plan to continue doing," says Gonzales. "Having the opportunity to put a smile on someone else's face is well worth it and educating volunteers about the plight of foster children is an added bonus."

In 2003, DFPS centralized management and coordination of its volunteer programs to increase its effectiveness. In 2004, more than 3,600 groups and individuals contributed almost 170,000 hours of their time to assist DFPS caseworkers deliver important services to our clients.