

DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY



Quarterly Progress Report (Reducing Out-of-Home Children and Inactive Cases)

Report Date: June 30, 2021
Reporting Period: SFY2021, Quarter 3

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Laws 2020, Second Regular Session, Chapter 58, Section 14, the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) is required to continue this report for data through June 2021. In state fiscal year 2019 (SFY19), DCS realigned its five Regions. As a result, comparisons of regional data prior to July 2019 must be taken into account as some staff and cases previously assigned to one Region in SFY19 were reassigned to a new Region in SFY20. The regional realignment resulted in changes in the regional names, reassignment of several counties to new regions; and moving specific sections and units to different regions and/or sections. A map of the DCS Regions is attached to this report (Attachment A).

COVID-19

Beginning the fourth quarter of SFY20 and through June 2021, the Department has been addressing the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this, DCS continued to accept reports of abuse and neglect, respond to those reports and continued to maintain monthly contact by DCS Specialists with children in out-of-home care, families and caregivers. Although the approach to in-person contact has continually adjusted based on recommendations of local, state and federal authorities, DCS ensured it carried out its core mission to successfully engage children and families to ensure safety, strengthen families, and achieve permanency. Virtual visitation with children only occurred during the Governor's Executive Order 2020-18 (aka *Stay Home, Stay Healthy, Stay Connected*) which began in March 2020 through June 2020. However, DCS did extend *Virtual Contact with Parents and Children* on Tribal land at least through March 31, 2021. Revisions to in-person visitation guidelines were issued in January 2021 along with a guide for medical providers regarding children in DCS care. Guidance on vaccinations for youth were issued in May and June 2021.

PROGRESS SUSTAINING OPEN REPORTS, INACTIVE CASES, & IMPROVING CASELOADS

DCS has maintained the inactive cases well below the legislative benchmark of 1,000 since April 2017. In March 2017, DCS fell below the legislatively required benchmark of 1,000 inactive cases. From a peak of 16,014 in January of 2015, the Department now has only 303 inactive cases as of March 31, 2021, representing a 98 percent decrease. To avoid a return to higher numbers of inactive cases and to help improve caseloads, the Department uses performance management and other elements of the management system. DCS employed several sustainment measures to ensure inactive cases remain well below the benchmark. These include the implementation of performance management metrics to monitor and control the total number of open reports and the percentage of those reports that are overdue for investigation, completion and closure and the implementation of leader standard work to ensure routine follow-up.

The Department achieved the initial benchmark of less than 13,000 open reports six months ahead of the established target date in December 2016 when it reduced the number of open reports to 9,611. From a peak of 33,245 open reports in April 2015, the Department reduced that to 9,153 as of March 2021 (see Table 1) representing a 72.5 percent decrease. The benchmark was decreased to 8,000 starting the first quarter of SFY19 below which the Department has remained each reporting period since. Despite the reduction in open reports, the Department experienced an increase during this reporting period, which is primarily attributed to the transition from the previous child welfare information system (CHILDS) to its new system (Guardian) on February 1, 2021. During the previous seven quarters, the Department averaged approximately 6,500 open reports; well under the benchmark. The challenges experienced during the transition to Guardian is multi-faceted. Data migration from CHILDS to Guardian resulted in some reports being migrated as "open" when in fact they were closed in CHILDS. There were also technical problems blocking the closure of reports in Guardian; this has been resolved at the time of the writing of this report but after the end of the reporting period. Beyond technical issues, DCS staff were adjusting to a new system

and their proficiency in using Guardian was not optimal during the first eight weeks following the go-live date.

DCS HR continues its efforts to hire and place DCS Specialists at a rate equal to or greater than departures from the Department. Sustained staffing levels help contribute to the reduced number of inactive cases, total open reports, and foster care population. Despite these efforts, DCS had a significant lack of resumes during the reporting period until Governor Ducey rejected the extra \$300 a week in federal unemployment benefits. Employers across the state are reportedly experiencing the same challenge with a lack of candidates for open positions. This lack of applicants for DCS Child Safety Specialists has created an increase in the average caseload as exiting staff are outpacing new applicants and new hires and thus the number of investigations or out-of-home children per worker has increased.

PROGRESS MADE REDUCING THE OUT-OF-HOME POPULATION

The Department continues to maintain a safe reduction in the historical out-of-home foster care population. The Department experienced a slight increase in the number of children (125) in OOH care in the third quarter of SFY21 compared to the second quarter of SFY21. The total OOH population includes all youth ages zero (0) through the age of twenty (20). During the fourth quarter of SFY20, DCS experienced a significant decrease in the number of reports of abuse and neglect to the Child Abuse Hotline. This has considerably increased from 3,015 in April 2020 to 4,158 in April 2021. The decrease in calls was presumptively influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic as school setting mandatory reporters were not in contact with potential victims. The number of children entering OOH care increased again in the third quarter of SFY21. While the Department is over the established legislative benchmark of 13,964, for the number of children in OOH care, it is important to note the number of youth in extended foster care (i.e. 18-20 year olds) continues to increase from 805 in March 2019 to 1,158 in March 2021. The Department has been intentionally seeking this increase for this particular population. A strategic initiative was implemented to increase the successful transition of youth to adulthood, which includes providing more youth over the age of eighteen with independent living services and supports. Additionally, the Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act passed in 2020 permits states to allow qualified young adults to utilize Title IV-E funds on housing, education, employment and other needs. Additionally, Youth who are currently in the Extended Foster Care program and will be turning 21 can continue to stay in the program after age 21 until September 30, 2021. For youth who exited foster care at age 21 as of January 27, 2020 and through April 20, 2021, they are eligible to re-enter the program until September 30, 2021.

By slowing the entry rate and sustaining performance for children exiting care, the Department has been able to maintain a safe reduction of the foster care population since its historical high of 19,044 in 2016 to 14,600 in March 2021 representing a 23% decrease. The reduction in the number of children entering out-of-home care is the result of several factors, including but are not limited to, additional standardized process tools including supervisory administrative and case progress review checklists, standardized safety discussion guides, and training staff to better engage a family's network to maintain children safely in the home. Improved response times contribute to the reduction of children entering care as this enables DCS Specialists to make decisions that will help support families, provide services in a timely manner and avoid entry into care. In addition, this safe reduction in the number of children in out-of-home care is highlighted by no significant change in the re-entry rate for children who left care within the past 12 months.¹

Through the continued application of monthly clinical staffings on reunification cases using a standardized process, ongoing workers have been able to maintain the rate of children exiting care. By way of these standard process activities, paired with the continued use of cursory case reviews and Fostering Sustainable Connections, the Department has safely maintained a reduction of the out-of-home care population during SFY2020 and SFY2021.

¹ DCS Monthly Operational and Outcome Report (MOOR): <https://dcs.az.gov/news-reports/performance-measures>

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Table 1 – Benchmark Performance

	Q4FY19	Q1FY20	Q2FY20	Q3FY20	Q4FY20	Q1FY21	Q2FY21	Q3FY21
Inactive Cases ¹								
<i>Benchmark (less than)</i>	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
<i>Actual</i>	179	177	308	216	95	93	237	303
Inactive Cases by disposition								
<i>Investigation Phase</i>	155	149	271	188	81	78	208	261
<i>Out-of-Home Cases</i>	2	3	5	3	0	0	1	3
<i>In-Home Cases</i>	22	25	32	25	14	15	28	39
Number of Open Reports								
<i>Benchmark (less than)</i>	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000	8,000
<i>Actual</i>	6,586	7,569	7,326	6,973	4,804	6,457	6,290	9,153
Number of Out-of-Home Children								
<i>Benchmark (less than)</i>	14,299	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964
<i>Benchmark (% reduction)</i>	2%	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Actual</i>	14,205	14,223	14,142	14,209	14,152	14,367	14,475	14,600

Footnotes

¹ Number of inactive cases is the actual figure as of the last Monday of the reporting period.

² As a result of Laws 2019, 1st Regular Session Ch. 263, Sec. 141 which continued this report, the benchmark established by the Legislature for number of out-of-home children was no longer based on a 2 percent reduction but a static number of 13,964.

Tables 2 and 3 show the caseload by section (field office) for investigations, out-of-home children, and in-home cases. Investigations are the number of open reports assigned to each office. Out-of-home represents the number of children in ongoing cases assigned to each office. In-home cases represents the number of cases assigned to each office.

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Table 2 – Headcount and Caseload Performance (SFY21-Second Quarter)(updated)

			Quarter 2 FY 2021							
			FTE		Workload					
Region ¹	Section #	Section name	Investigators	Case Managers	# Open Reports (investigations)	# of In home cases	# of Out-of-Home Children ²	Investigation (reports per worker)	In Home (cases per worker)	Out of Home (children per worker)
Maricopa-East (10)	3	Osborn	15	15	287	---	513	19	---	34
	4	In Home	---	41	29	422	7	1	10	0
	5	Mesa	18	18	212	---	521	12	---	29
	6	Gilbert	15	15	316	---	505	20	---	33
	7	Tempe	16	16	267	---	474	17	---	30
	8	South Mountain	17	17	285	---	508	17	---	31
	9	North Central	16	16	225	---	478	14	---	30
	10	Permanency - South Mountain		45	9	---	1482	0	---	33
South (20)	1	Eastside Loop	8	16	140	---	282	17	---	17
	2	Tucson North - Oracle	16	16	339	---	415	22	---	27
	3	Tucson South - Valencia	8	16	134	---	400	16	---	25
	5	Madera A - 4th Ave.	19	19	98	---	286	5	---	15
	6	Permanency - Alvernon	0	33	1	---	615	---	---	19
	7	Alvernon	15	15	179	---	444	12	---	29
	8	Cochise County	10	10	135	---	167	13	---	16
	9	Madera C / Nogales	15	20	166	---	308	11	---	15
	10	In Home	0	31	18	210	76	0	7	2
	11	Yuma	12	12	147	67	242	12	17	20
	Northwest (30)	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	13	13	215	59	163	17	15
3		Coconino County / Cottonwood	11	11	104	---	257	9	---	23
4		Bullhead City/Lake Havasu	11	11	114	24	211	11	4	20
5		Kingman	9	17	95	---	537	11	---	31
Northeast (40)	3	Globe / Payson / Safford	8	15	135	31	243	18	12	16
	4	St. Johns/Winslow/Show low	5	9	78	1	121	17	1	13
	5	Apache Junction/Kearney	16	16	241	44	523	15	10	32
	6	Casa Grande/Coolidge	18	18	255	37	529	14	12	29
Maricopa-West (50)	1	AHIT	25	---	4	---	1	0	---	---
	3	In Home	0	43	27	481	12	1	11	0
	4	Thunderbird	17	17	286	---	590	17	---	34
	5	Peoria	15	15	208	---	360	13	---	23
	6	Glendale/Durango	19	19	141	---	408	7	---	21
	7	Avondale/Advocacy	18	18	239	---	541	13	---	30
	8	Permanency	---	47	0	---	1230	---	---	26
	12	West 101	18	18	241	---	609	13	---	34
13	Pinnacle Peak	16	16	197	---	384	12	---	24	
105, 106 - Other	various	OCWI, GH/FH, Other	70	---	723	---	33	10	---	---

- As of Q1 FY2019, Specialists in a trainee status are accounted for in FTE figures in each section with an equal distribution of 66% caseload.

- In Home (IH) cases are based on a hand count of cases actively managed in each respective Region.

- IH cases assignments differ Regionally. Maricopa East, Maricopa West and South Regions employ specific IH units who manage IH cases only. Northwest Region has two units assigned to manage IH cases, Northeast Region has mixed units that may carry IH and/or OOH cases. Section 11 in South Region (Yuma) has workers assigned to carry IH cases.

- FTE assignments to investigations or case management are based on assignment of 50% investigative and 50% ongoing in all Regions, except for Sections 3 and 4 in Northeast Region, Section 5 of Northwest Region, and Sections 1, 3 and 9 of the South Region which employ a distribution of 34% Investigations and 66% ongoing. The South distribution was updated the first quarter of SFY 2021.

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Table 3 – Headcount and Caseload Performance (SFY21-Third Quarter)

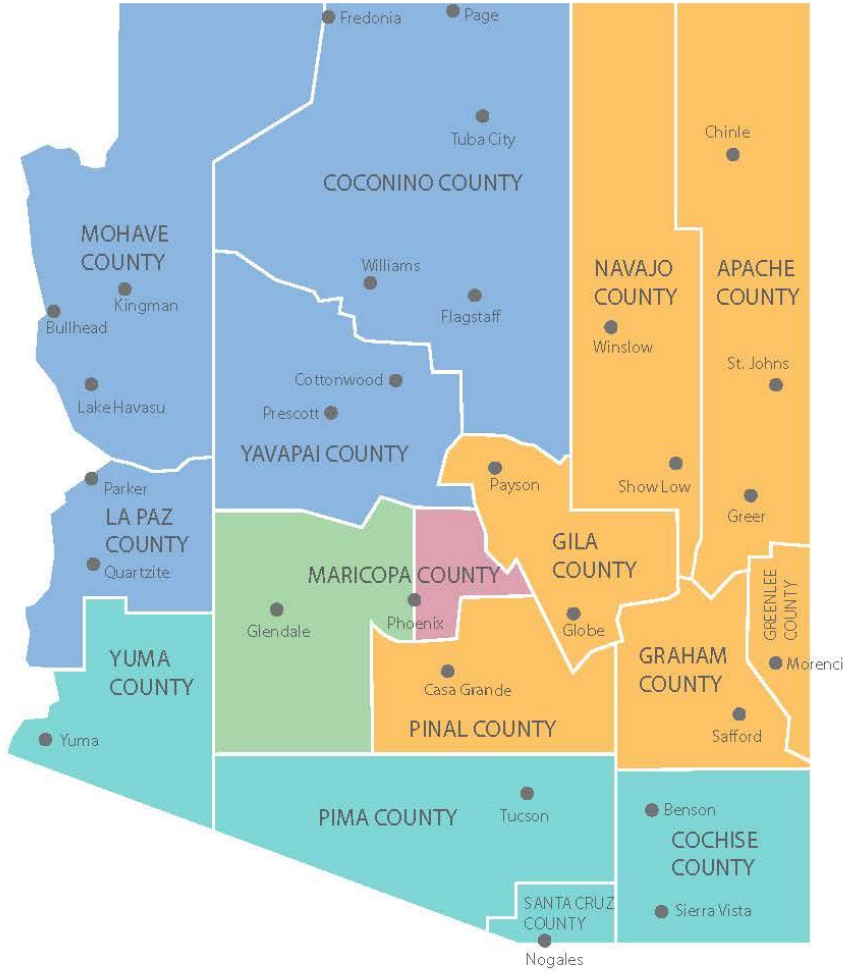
Region ¹ Section # Section name			Quarter 3 FY 2021							
			FTE		Workload					
			Investigators	Case Managers	# Open Reports (investigations)	# of In home cases	# of Out-of-Home Children ²	Investigation (reports per worker)	In Home (cases per worker)	Out of Home (children per worker)
Maricopa-East (10)	3	Osborn	12	12	391	---	570	31	---	46
	4	In Home	---	41	16	384	23	0.4	9	0.6
	5	Mesa	16	12	296	---	565	18	---	45
	6	Gilbert	15	12	603	---	496	41	---	40
	7	Tempe	14	12	429	---	466	31	---	37
	8	South Mountain	15	12	343	---	450	23	---	36
	9	North Central	16	12	529	---	509	33	---	41
	10	Permanency - South Mountain	---	43	1	---	1365	0	---	32
South (20)	1	Eastside Loop	9	17	202	---	273	23	---	16
	2	Tucson North - Oracle	14	14	412	---	436	30	---	32
	3	Tucson South - Valencia	8	16	173	---	418	21	---	26
	5	Madera A - 4th Ave.	17	17	128	---	309	7	---	18
	6	Permanency - Alvernon	0	34	0	---	614	---	---	18
	7	Alvernon	15	15	254	---	411	17	---	27
	8	Cochise County	11	11	178	---	171	16	---	15
	9	Madera C / Nogales	14	18	203	---	328	15	---	18
	10	In Home	0	30	13	227	74	0	8	2
	11	Yuma	13	13	212	88	262	17	22	21
	Northwest (30)	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	13	13	227	69	161	17	17
3		Coconino County / Cottonwood	13	13	212	---	276	16	---	21
4		Bullhead City/Lake Havasu	12	12	114	38	242	10	7	21
5		Kingman	9	18	134	---	516	15	---	29
Northeast (40)	3	Globe / Payson / Safford	8	15	113	36	246	15	18	17
	4	St. Johns/Winslow/Show low	5	9	104	1	131	22	2	15
	5	Apache Junction/Kearney	16	16	297	59	526	18	13	32
	6	Casa Grande/Coolidge	18	18	363	48	547	20	14	30
Maricopa-West (50)	1	AHIT	26	---	9	---	2	0	---	---
	3	In Home	0	41	33	462	27	1	11	1
	4	Thunderbird	14	14	480	---	422	33	---	29
	5	Peoria	15	15	358	---	432	24	---	28
	6	Glendale/Durango	19	19	167	---	557	9	---	29
	7	Avondale/Advocacy	18	18	232	---	591	13	---	33
	8	Permanency	---	48	0	---	1129	---	---	24
	12	West 101	18	18	314	---	527	18	---	30
13	Pinnacle Peak	13	13	340	---	403	26	---	30	
105, 106 - Other	various	OCWI, GH/FH, Other	61	---	1273	---	125	21	---	---

- As of Q1 FY2019, Specialists in a trainee status are accounted for in FTE figures in each section with an equal distribution of 66% caseload.

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- IH cases assignments differ Regionally. Maricopa East, Maricopa West and South Regions employ specific IH units who manage IH cases only. Northwest Region has two units assigned to manage IH cases, Northeast Region has mixed units that may carry IH and/or OOH cases. Section 11 in South Region (Yuma) has workers assigned to carry IH cases.

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Regional Map

NORTHWEST REGION
Coconino, Mohave, La Paz and Yavapai Counties
NORTHEAST REGION
Apache, Graham, Greenlee, Gila, Navajo and Pinal Counties
MARICOPA - WEST
Maricopa County - West of 7th Avenue
MARICOPA - EAST
Maricopa County - East of 7th Avenue
SOUTH REGION
Cochise, Pima, Santa Cruz, and Yuma Counties
OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE INVESTIGATIONS
Statewide
CHILD ABUSE HOTLINE-1-888-SOS-CHILD
1-888-767-2445

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