

DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY



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

Report Date: September 30, 2021
Reporting Period: SFY2021, Quarter 4

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 quarterly for data through June 2021. This will be the final report under this requirement. Pursuant to Laws 2021, First Regular Session, Chapter 408, Section 15, the Department is required to provide this report by February 2022 for the period covering July 2021 through December 2021 and again in August 2022 for the period covering January 2022 through June 2022.

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 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. As of June 2021, modifications to guides involving meetings and personal contact were updated. DCS Specialists and other staff were able to meet with families and children in person but with precautions to ensure the safety of children, families and staff. Guidance on vaccinations for youth were issued in May and June 2021.

PROGRESS SUSTAINING OPEN REPORTS, INACTIVE CASES, & IMPROVING CASELOADS

DCS maintained the inactive cases well below the legislative benchmark of 1,000 since April 2017. Regrettably, the inactive cases rose above the benchmark during this period, mostly attributable to barriers in Guardian closing assessments. 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 had only 303 inactive cases as of March 31, 2021, representing a 98 percent decrease. As of June 30, 2021, there were 1,879 inactive cases. While this still represents a significant decrease from March 2017 (88.3 percent), the Department is addressing this trend. To address 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 10,968 as of June 2021 (see Table 1) representing a 67 percent decrease. The benchmark was decreased to 8,000 starting the first quarter of SFY19 below which the Department has remained each reporting period until the third quarter of SFY21. This is primarily attributed to the transition from the previous child welfare information system (CHILDS) to the new system (Guardian) on February 1, 2021. Additionally, the Department has experienced an increase in reports to the Arizona Child Abuse Hotline as children returned to school and other settings in which mandated reporters now have more contact with potential victims. There were 3,013 reports of abuse or neglect in January 2021, which increased to 4,047 in May 2021. During the previous seven quarters, the Department averaged approximately 6,900 open reports; well under the benchmark. The challenges experienced during the transition to Guardian is multi-faceted. Data migration from CHILDS to Guardian

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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 was resolved by June 2021 but still had an impact on reports. Beyond technical issues, DCS staff continue 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 its efforts 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 (335) in OOH care in the fourth quarter of SFY21 compared to the third quarter of SFY21. The total OOH population includes all youth ages zero (0) through the age of twenty (20). As mentioned above, the Department has experienced an increase in the number of reports made to the Hotline. When compared by month year over year, this has increased from 3,015 in April 2020 to 4,158 in April 2021. The number of children entering OOH care in the fourth quarter of SFY21 (2,107) exceeded the number of children exiting care (1,845) during the same period. 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 1,170 in June 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 14,683 in June 2021 representing a 23% decrease. The reduction in the number of children in 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, 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

	Q1FY20	Q2FY20	Q3FY20	Q4FY20	Q1FY21	Q2FY21	Q3FY21	Q4FY21
Inactive Cases ^{1, 2}								
<i>Benchmark (less than)</i>	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000	1,000
<i>Actual</i>	177	308	216	95	93	237	303	1,879
Inactive Cases by disposition								
<i>Investigation Phase</i>	149	271	188	81	78	208	261	984
<i>Out-of-Home Cases</i>	3	5	3	0	0	1	3	294
<i>In-Home Cases</i>	25	32	25	14	15	28	39	601
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>	7,569	7,326	6,973	4,804	6,457	6,290	9,153	10,968
Number of Out-of-Home Children								
<i>Benchmark (less than)</i>	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964	13,964
<i>Benchmark (% reduction)</i>	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Actual</i>	14,223	14,142	14,209	14,152	14,367	14,475	14,600	14,683
Footnotes								
¹ Number of inactive cases is the actual figure as of the last day of the reporting period.								
² The Department is examining the methodology used to identify inactive cases in Guardian to validate the accuracy of this data. This element will be updated and resubmitted in future iterations of this report.								

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-Third Quarter)(updated)

			Quarter 3 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	12	12	391	---	570	31	---	46
	4	In Home	---	41	16	384	23	0.4	9	0.6
	5	Mesa	16	16	296	---	565	18	---	34
	6	Gilbert	15	15	603	---	496	41	---	33
	7	Tempe	14	14	429	---	466	31	---	33
	8	South Mountain	15	15	343	---	450	23	---	30
	9	North Central	16	16	529	---	509	33	---	32
	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
	11	Yuma	13	13	212	88	262	17	22	21
Northwest (30)	0	Regional Office	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	13	13	227	69	161	17	17	12
	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 SFY 2019, 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, Investigations 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.

- Data for the fourth quarters of SFY 2021, will be updated in the next version of the report due in February 2022 which will be a semi-annual report pursuant to Laws 2021, First Regular Session, Chapter 408, Section 15. The Department continues to diligently address data quality issues and will continue to update data as issues are identified and resolved. This data element will be updated and resubmitted in future iterations of this report.

- With the implementation of Guardian, in the fourth quarter of SFY 2021, high profile investigations in Northwest Region are assigned to Specialists in the Regional Office. Data for prior periods will not include regional office assignments.

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

Region ¹ Section # Section name			Quarter 4 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	14	14	530	---	440	37	---	31	
	4	In Home	---	40	78	322	26	2	8	1	
	5	Mesa	14	14	323	---	592	22	---	41	
	6	Gilbert	17	17	719	---	540	41	---	31	
	7	Tempe	11	11	599	---	317	53	---	28	
	8	South Mountain	14	14	373	---	494	27	---	35	
	9	North Central	16	16	747	---	485	47	---	31	
	10	Permanency - South Mountain	---	42	---	---	1459	0	---	35	
	South (20)	1	Eastside Loop	8	16	248	---	314	30	---	20
		2	Tucson North - Oracle	15	15	411	---	416	27	---	27
3		Tucson South - Valencia	8	15	192	---	423	24	---	28	
5		Madera A - 4th Ave.	17	17	145	---	272	9	---	16	
6		Permanency - Alvernon	0	32	1	---	694	---	---	21	
7		Alvernon	15	15	246	---	400	16	---	26	
8		Cochise County	10	10	192	---	210	18	---	20	
9		Madera C / Nogales	13	17	251	---	361	19	---	21	
10		In Home	0	31	22	218	96	0	7	3	
11		Yuma	13	13	244	71	260	19	18	20	
Northwest (30)		0	Regional Office	1	1	4	58	0	4	---	0
	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	11	11	278	58	195	24	13	17	
	3	Coconino County / Cottonwood	12	12	248	---	297	20	---	24	
	4	Bullhead City/Lake Havasu	10	10	181	46	181	19	8	19	
	5	Kingman	9	17	116	---	554	13	---	32	
Northeast (40)	3	Globe / Payson / Safford	5	10	173	25	241	33	13	24	
	4	St. Johns/Winslow/Show low	4	8	161	8	128	40	8	16	
	5	Apache Junction/Kearney	14	14	464	84	555	33	21	39	
	6	Casa Grande/Coolidge	18	18	505	21	594	29	7	34	
Maricopa-West (50)	1	AHIT	25	---	2	---	3	0	---	---	
	3	In Home	0	38	26	431	20	1	11	1	
	4	Thunderbird	15	15	515	---	439	34	---	29	
	5	Peoria	16	16	392	---	426	25	---	27	
	6	Glendale/Durango	19	19	219	---	599	11	---	31	
	7	Avondale/Advocacy	19	19	284	---	473	15	---	25	
	8	Permanency	---	46	---	---	1258	---	---	28	
	12	West 101	16	16	404	---	485	25	---	30	
	13	Pinnacle Peak	13	13	267	---	402	20	---	31	
105, 106 - Other	various	OCWI, GH/FH, Other	63	---	1408	---	34	22	---	---	

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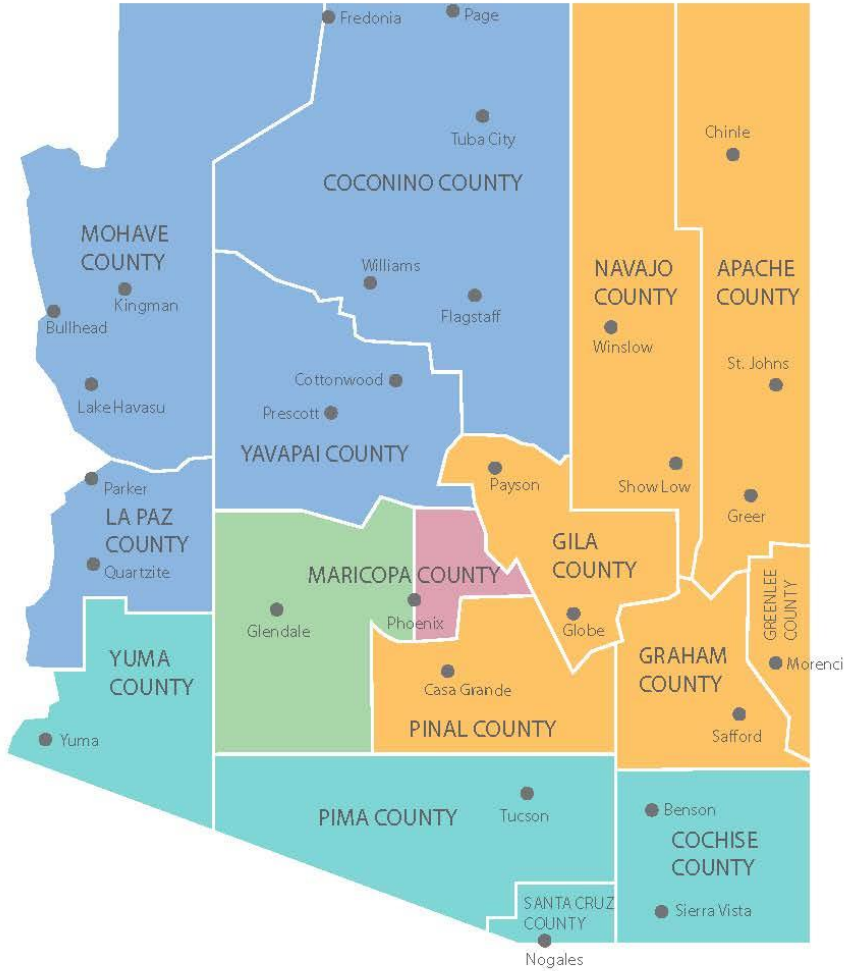
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Regional Map

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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