

DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY



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

**Report Date: February 28, 2022
Reporting Period: SFY2022, December 2021**

INTRODUCTION

Pursuant to Laws 2021, First Regular Session, Chapter 408, Section 15, the Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS) is required to continue this report semi-annually for data through August 2022. The Department is required to provide this report by February 28, 2022 for the period ending December 2021 and again in August 2022 for the period ending June 2022.

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 the prior period, largely attributable to barriers in Guardian with 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 December 31, 2021, there were 3,089 inactive cases. While this still represents a significant decrease from March 2017 (81 percent), the Department is addressing this trend. 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.

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 12,115 as of December 2021 (see Table 1) representing a 62 percent decrease. The benchmark was decreased to 8,000 starting the first quarter of SFY19 below which the Department 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 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 4,364 in August 2021 and 4,309 in September 2021. During the previous eight quarters, the Department averaged approximately 7,400 open reports; 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 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.

Like most other industries, DCS has struggled with the “Great Resignation”. As employers across the state and nation struggle to not only retain employees but also recruit and hire staff in the current environment, DCS has sought to strategize actions that might help address this challenge and minimize its impact. DCS offers telecommuting and/or a virtual work environment for staff for whom it is appropriate given their work duties. Additionally, DCS implemented a practice of offering staff who resign the ability to become temporary workers who are called to work on targeted activities or specific shift work (e.g. Hotline, after-hours investigation, or placement administration). This helps to reduce the impact of resigning staff and still have experienced resources willing to assist with critical duties.

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

Semi-Annual Benchmark Progress Report December 2021

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 decrease in the number of children (233) in OOH care in the first and second quarters of SFY22 compared to the fourth quarter of SFY21. The total OOH population includes all youth ages zero (0) through the age of twenty (20). As mentioned previously, 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 3,318 in December 2020 to 3,627 in December 2021. The number of children entering OOH care in the first half of SFY22 (3,943) was slightly less than the number of children exiting care (4,037) during the same period. The number of children entering OOH care in the first half of SFY22 (3,943) was significantly less than the number of children entering care for the same period in the prior fiscal year (5,587). 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 1,247 in December 2021. The Department has been intentionally seeking an increase for this particular population. A strategic initiative was implemented to expand 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 permitted states to allow qualified young adults to utilize Title IV-E funds on housing, education, employment and other needs.

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 14,450 in December 2021 representing a 24 percent decrease. The reduction in the number of children in out-of-home care is the result of several factors, including but 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. Additionally, The Department received technical assistance from Action for Child Protection and the Capacity Building Center for States for development and implementation of the Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center coaching model. DCS developed a Supervision Coach program that supports practice fidelity in safety assessment and clinical case management. 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, SFY2021 and the first half of SFY2022.

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

Semi-Annual Benchmark Progress Report
December 2021

Table 1 – Benchmark Performance

	Q2SFY20	Q3SFY20	Q4SFY20	Q1SFY21	Q2SFY21	Q3SFY21 ³	Q4SFY21 ³	Q2SFY22
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>	308	216	95	93	237	303	1,879	3,089
Inactive Cases by disposition								
<i>Investigation Phase</i>	271	188	81	78	208	261	984	2,498
<i>Out-of-Home Cases</i>	5	3	0	0	1	3	294	147
<i>In-Home Cases</i>	32	25	14	15	28	39	601	444
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>	7,326	6,973	4,804	6,457	6,290	9,153	10,968	12,115
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> ²	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
<i>Actual</i>	14,142	14,209	14,152	14,367	14,475	14,600	14,683	14,450

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 shows 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.

Semi-Annual Benchmark Progress Report
December 2021

Table 2 – Headcount and Caseload Performance (SFY22-December 2021)

Region ¹ Section # Section name			December 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	460	---	404	33	---	29
	4	In Home	---	31	31	425	35	1	14	1
	5	Mesa	13	13	758	---	380	56	---	28
	6	Gilbert	14	14	648	---	589	47	---	43
	7	Tempe	12	12	338	---	378	28	---	31
	8	South Mountain	14	14	250	---	525	17	---	37
	9	North Central	16	16	511	---	475	32	---	30
	10	Permanency - South Mountain	---	40	3	---	1357	0	---	34
South (20)	1	Eastside Loop	9	18	186	---	351	21	---	20
	2	Tucson North - Oracle	16	16	286	---	423	18	---	27
	3	Tucson South - Valencia	8	16	206	---	427	26	---	27
	5	Madera A - 4th Ave.	17	17	234	---	306	14	---	18
	6	Permanency - Alvernon	0	35	0	---	791	---	---	23
	7	Alvernon	15	15	252	---	344	17	---	23
	8	Cochise County	12	12	192	---	275	16	---	24
	9	Madera C / Nogales	10	19	208	---	388	22	---	21
	10	In Home	0	25	18	207	98	1	8	4
	11	Yuma	12	12	324	68	251	27	11	21
	Northwest (30)	1	Prescott/Prescott Valley	10	10	248	42	239	24	9
3		Coconino County / Cottonwood	11	11	212	---	278	18	---	24
4		Bullhead City/Lake Havasu	12	12	173	32	89	15	5	8
5		Kingman	10	20	110	---	546	11	---	27
Northeast (40)	3	Globe / Payson / Safford	6	11	272	37	196	48	16	18
	4	St. Johns/Winslow/Show low	4	8	106	5	151	25	5	18
	5	Apache Junction/Kearney	12	12	592	100	548	49	25	46
	6	Casa Grande/Coolidge	13	13	614	17	556	46	3	42
Maricopa-West (50)	1	AHIT	27	---	1	---	6	0	---	---
	3	In Home	0	33	30	397	36	1	12	1
	4	Thunderbird	16	16	519	---	515	33	---	32
	5	Peoria	14	14	548	---	439	40	---	32
	6	Glendale/Durango	17	17	199	---	526	12	---	31
	7	Avondale/Advocacy	17	17	417	---	378	25	---	22
	8	Permanency	---	45	1	---	1224	---	---	27
	12	West 101	15	15	530	---	448	35	---	30
	13	Pinnacle Peak	11	11	696	---	438	61	---	38
105, 106 - Other	various	OCWI, GH/FH, Other	62	---	1942	---	40	31	---	---

- 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.

- 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.