

2022

Department of Child Safety Community
Advisory Committee Report of Activities and
Recommendations for State Fiscal Year 2022

Revised August 2022

BACKGROUND

The Community Advisory Committee was established June 2015 by A.R.S. §8-459, to provide a community forum with the following purpose:

1. to inform the Department, analyze current law and policy and make recommendations to improve the ability of the Department to increase the safety of children, respond to child maltreatment and ensure the well-being of and timely permanency for children who are referred to and involved in the child welfare system;
2. for collaboration among state, local, community, tribal, public and private stakeholders in child welfare programs and services that are administered by the Department; and
3. to improve communication between mandatory reporters and the Department.



Additionally, the Community Advisory Committee serves as one of several Citizen Review Panels for the Department, as required by the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). The full list of Citizen Review Panels can be found at <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>.

The Community Advisory Committee includes one representative from each of fourteen stakeholder groups. The Committee’s membership includes:

ARIZONA DCS COMMUNITY ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP	
SECTOR	NAME / AFFILIATION OF REPRESENTATIVE
Child welfare agencies that directly provide contracted services to children and their families	Jacob Schmitt, MPA, President/CEO, Arizona’s Children Association
Child advocacy organizations that deal with child welfare system policy issues	Bahney Dedolph, Deputy Director, Arizona Council of Human Service Providers
Current or former foster or adoptive parent	Jennifer Huber, PhD, former foster parent and adoptive parent
Medical providers, with a preference for pediatricians, who have experience in diagnosing and treating injuries related to abuse and neglect	Cody Conklin-Aguilera, MD., FAAP, Medical Director, Department of Public Health Yavapai County, Pediatric Program Manager, Verde Valley
Volunteers with the foster care review board or Court Appointed Special Advocate program	Robin Pearson, Executive Director, Voices for CASA Children
Persons with an academic appointment to a state university who conduct research in child welfare services, child maltreatment or child abuse or neglect	Miguel Vieyra, MSW Arizona State University School of Social Work, Director Center for Child Well-Being

The courts, the representative must be involved in child welfare issues	Nicole Roskens, LPC, Clinical Director, Cradle to Crayons Program, Superior Court of Maricopa County Juvenile Division, and Independent Private Practice, Counselor
A rural area in this state who has experience in the child welfare system	Rita Stageman, MSW, Assistant Clinical Professor, Child Welfare Training Project Coordinator, Department of Sociology and Social Work, Northern Arizona University
A Native American tribe or nation who has experience in the child welfare system	Elisia Manuel, President, Three Precious Miracles
A child advocacy organization that advocates for or represents children who are victims of crime.	Peter Gentala, J.D., Chair, Senior Legal Counsel, National Center on Sexual Exploitation; Board member, Arizona Child and Family Advocacy Network
Persons who have experience with children with special needs and the child welfare system	Soncerea Swift, foster parent, social worker
A law enforcement agency. The representative must have experience with the Department on cases that involve criminal conduct allegations	Commander Matthew Siekmann Phoenix Police Department, Family Investigations Bureau
Schools. The representative must have experience in the child welfare system	Jennifer Garland Social worker, Phoenix Union High School District
A faith-based organization. The representative must have experience in the child welfare system	Mark Upton, President/CEO Christian Family Care
Volunteers with the foster care review board or Court Appointed Special Advocate program	Victoria Strayer, Co-Founder/Interim Exec. Director, Voices for CASA Children (proxy for Robin Pearson)

As required by A.R.S. §8-459, representatives are appointed by the Director of the Department of Child Safety and did not receive compensation for their service on the Committee. The statutory requirements of the Committee are to meet at least quarterly and produce a report of Committee activities and recommendations each fiscal year. A.R.S. § 8-459(D).

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES, ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee met in SFY 2022 to receive information about current laws and policies, and to review data relevant to the Committee’s three statutory requirements. In addition to the call to public and option for executive session, the meeting agendas included a variety of topics aimed at educating and informing the members. An archive of the Committee meetings, including material presented at the meetings can be accessed at the following web page: <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>. In accordance with A.R.S. §8-459(D), the Committee has summarized several key activities and recommendations that came from the five meetings held in SFY 2022. The final and sixth meeting of SFY 2022 in June was used to finalize the annual report.

Meeting #1: August 6, 2021

Activities and Actions

- DCS Service Array/Measuring Outcomes –

Katherine Guffey, DCS Executive Consultant to the Director, presented information on the July 1, 2021 roll out of the Service Array and how outcomes will be measured. Ms. Guffey discussed DCS’s implementation of two new services: Family Connections and the Nurturing Parenting Program. The two programs replaced in-home services, Building Resilient Families and family reunification teams. The programs provide:

- Individualized interventions
- Connections to resources to improve family communications and roles
- Social supports
- Family resources
- Parenting attitudes and skills building
- Parenting stress and coping skills
- Focus on general child well-being

The Nurturing Parenting Program is a parent skill training program with workbooks, lessons, and practice activities to improve parent empathy, develop age-appropriate expectations for the child, promote non-violent discipline, and define family roles. The parent receives 1-on-1 lessons and other activities to promote healthy family relationships.

The goal of the two programs is to increase reunification rates, decrease the length of stay for a child in DCS care, and reduce re-entry into care.

- Therapeutic Foster Care –

Gillian Vanasse, DCS Assistant Director of Foster Care and Post Permanency Supports, provided information on Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC). Ms. Vanasse stated the goal of therapeutic foster care was to ensure children are in a family-like setting and reduce the number of children in congregate care. She said the Department is working on the following improvements to support care caregivers and to ensure children are in a family-like setting whenever possible:

- Redesign of TFC curriculum was in the process of being completed that would address the core components of being a TFC provider
- New policy for DCS funded TFC that addresses children who recently entered care and have significant trauma. It also covers children who are no longer approved for medically-necessary TFC, but should not be moved to a lower level of care and children with three or more disruptions from a traditional family setting.
- Recruitment for TFC families and working on growing the skills of community foster care families.
- Implementation of tiered-rate structure for medically necessary TFS. This would include continuous co-occurring conditions; behavior health and cognitive impairment; and psychotic disorders.
- Implementation of rate structure for DCS funded TFC. This would include transition rates for children stepping down to a lower level of care, the DCS funded rate, and adoption subsidy rates for TFC/DDD level.

At the time of the meeting, Ms. Vanasse said the proposed changes were in draft form and had not been finalized so changes could be forthcoming.

- Vaccines(COVID) for children in DCS care–

Dr. Sara Park, DCS Chief Medical Officer, discussed COVID-19 vaccines for children in care. Dr. Park said while the vaccine was available for youth 16 years and older, the state and counties determined when each age group would be eligible to receive a vaccination. She mentioned only Pfizer’s vaccine was authorized for youth 16 and older. She said the Department continuously communicated with staff and foster parents regarding vaccine availability and consent issues. She said parents must consent prior to their child receiving the vaccine. If a parent objected to a vaccine, but the child requested it, DCS would file a motion in court on behalf of the child, she said. In April, vaccines were more readily available for young adults, she said, although limited availability remained in some counties. Dr. Park said it was now widely available through pharmacies and primary care providers throughout the state. She said the Department updated its guidance on youth vaccines once emergency-use authorization was extended to children 12 and older. As of June 2021, 250 children were vaccinated, Dr. Park said. She said once the emergency-use status changed, the vaccines would revert to standard DCS policy on vaccines.

- Discussion on Pending and Signed Legislation-

The Committee discussed legislation passed during the 2021 Legislative session.

- Call for Public Comments -

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no comments from the public for the August meeting.

Meeting #2: October 1, 2021

Activities and Actions

- Staffing shortages and the effect on timely service referrals-

Committee member Jacob Schmitt, President/CEO of Arizona’s Children Association, and Tiffany Tillotson, from Arizona’s Children Association, discussed the topic from the provider perspective and the impact it has had on timely services. Every agency is struggling to retain workers from a shrinking workforce. The COVID pandemic had diminished the workforce, leaving the remaining workers emotionally exhausted. The pandemic led many employees to reconsider their career choices and explore other options. Since human service work was already challenging, the significant increase in the severity of cases during the pandemic has exacerbated employee turnover. Some of the steps to reduce turnover include the following:

- Adjust compensation plans
- Enhance benefit plan including improved health and dental benefits, improve EAP services, and offer performance salary increases.
- Implement referral bonuses
- Create a new supervisor training program
- Enact a first-year paid time off adjustment for employees

Katherine Guffey, DCS Executive Consultant to the Director, discussed the topic of staffing shortages and the impact on timely service referrals. She said DCS was experiencing similar issues with staffing and service referrals. Despite the staffing shortages, DCS decreased the waitlist for parent aide and supervised visit only services by 41 percent between May 2021 and September 2021. The Department accomplished this by decreasing demand while increasing provider capacity.

Some the steps the Department took included:

- Kept Parent Aide available until September 20, 2021
- Worked through parent aide referrals to replace with alternative
- Offered transportation services so that parent aides could serve more families
- Practice Guidelines on Parenting Time Supervision
- Crimes Against Children/SB1660/Multidisciplinary Approach-

Committee member Commander Matthew Siekmann from the Phoenix Police Department's Family Investigations Bureau discussed Multidisciplinary Protocol for the Investigation of Child Abuse. The goal of the protocol is coordinate interactions between agencies across Maricopa County to ensure each child is treated with respect and to minimize the secondary trauma that can accompany a criminal investigation. Mr. Siekmann discussed the function of Child Advocacy Centers in Maricopa County. He then proceeded to explain how each entity (law enforcement, DCS, health care providers, Maricopa County Attorneys Office, etc.) plays a role in the protocol.

- Call for Public Comments –

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no comments from the public during the October meeting.

Meeting #3: December 3, 2021

Activities and Actions

- Grand Canyon University/CityServe–

Jay Corey, Executive Director of Grand Canyon University's CityServe Program, presented to the committee about the CityServe program's outreach mission. Mr. Corey said the program mobilizes resources (primarily household goods) and collaborative partnerships to provide solutions to families and individuals in need. He said GCU campus is the first hub for CityServe in the Arizona. Mr. Corey said they anticipate opening hubs throughout the state. He said the program received roughly \$1 million within the first few months of operation. He anticipates the program will establish itself as a significant charitable organization within the state.

- Citizen Review Panels-

Ryan Young and Ann Carver, Co-Chairs of the DCS Successful Transitions to Adulthood Citizen Review Panel, presented to the committee what the panel has focused on in 2021. Mr. Young explained the CRP's mission was to make observations and recommendations to DCS and to ensure welfare agencies are meeting their federal mandates. Some CRP's highlights included:

- Safe and Stable Housing- The CRP received a presentation for DCS's Office of Prevention regarding housing vouchers for youth.
- Financial Independence- The CRP identified a two-day training on financial literacy targeted towards foster youth.
- Education- The CRP heard from the Arizona Department of Education on the importance of DCS staying in compliance with ESSA regulations to ensure academic stability for youth.
- Health/Health Insurance-The CRP invited members from AHCCCS's Young Adult Transition Insurance Team to discuss the importance of obtaining insurance after turning 18.

- Adult Connections-The CRP reviewed Voluntary Transition TDM and Age of Majority Meeting Tools with DCS's Permanency Youth Services Unit.
- Update on Vaccines for Children in DCS Care-

Dr. Sara Park, DCS Chief Medical Officer, provided an update on COVID vaccines for children in care and any/all recent updates or changes to policy. Dr. Park said DCS updated its COVID vaccine guidelines for children in care after the FDA approved the vaccine for children 5 years and older and changed the Pfizer vaccine from emergency-use to full-use authorization for youth 16 and older. The full-use authorization meant that COVID vaccines for older youth were now covered under DCS's existing vaccine policy. She said roughly 24 percent of eligible youth 16 and older had at least one dose of the vaccine and 20 percent of 16 and older youth were fully vaccinated. She said DCS was working with MercyCare to implement a program to increase vaccinations among children in congregate care settings.

- Call for Public Comment –

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the December meeting.

Meeting #4: February 25, 2022

Activities and Actions

- Legislation/Policy-

DCS Director Mike Faust provided an update to the Committee. He discussed Grand Canyon University's new scholarship program for foster children which covers tuition, full meal plan, and year-round housing. Director Faust then talked about Governor Doug Ducey's budget, highlighting the Governor's plan to increase the kinship stipend to \$300 per month and expediting a path to licensure for kinship caregivers.

- COVID Vaccination policy for DCS congregate settings-

DCS Policy Manager Rebecca Krumm addressed the topic of COVID vaccines for congregate settings and their staff, and any policy changes related to COVID vaccines. Ms. Krumm informed the Committee that DCS has not had any updates to DCS policy regarding the COVID vaccine

- Barriers for Kinship families to get Foster Care license –

DCS Foster Supports Manager Mollie Mesaros discussed the topic of what the Department is doing to reduce barriers for kinship families to obtain a foster license. Ms. Mesaros discussed kinship waivers. She said the primary reason why people ask for waivers to accommodate a larger number of children to be placed there. She said families often don't have extra space to care for extra children. She said since having more children sleep in a bedroom isn't a safety issue, they often approve the waivers. The Committee and Ms. Mesaros proceeded to discuss other potential barriers such as pool gate funding, denials over lack of central heating/air conditioning, use of space heaters, and other issues surrounding Life Safety Inspections.

- DCS Supervised visitation/Parenting time -

Katherine Guffey, DCS's Executive Consultant to the Director, presented on what the Department's efforts to transition supervised visitation time to Parenting Time. Ms. Guffey said Parenting Time is critical to child well-being and is strongly associated with reunification. The Department's Parenting Time program is based on the following concepts:

- Normalcy- Parenting time occurs in home whenever possible. Children need to see their familiar environment. Parents are invited to parent-child events like school meetings and medical appointments.

- Safe- Safety is managed by controlling who is present, where parenting time occurs, when it occurs, and what supports are provided.
- Instructive- Parent-skill coaching is an integral part of the program.
- Nurturing- Behavioral health supports are available. All parenting time providers are trained to recognize parental needs and adjust their intervention approach.

She said the program compels DCS specialists to adopt a comprehensive approach to parent/child visits.

- Call for Public Comment –

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the February meeting.

Meeting #5 April 29, 2022

Activities and Actions

- COVID vaccination practices and mitigation efforts for DCS youth in congregate care settings–

Gillian Vanasse, DCS Assistant Director of Foster Care and Post Permanency Supports, addressed the topic of COVID vaccines for youth in congregate settings and DCS efforts to mitigate the spread of COVID in congregate care settings. Ms. Vanasse discussed DCS's vaccine policy and parental consent. She said DCS started pilot project and employed a mobile unit to vaccinate children in congregate care settings. She said DCS had created quarantine protocols for group homes including quarantine and isolation measures; and providing PPE for group home staff.

- Disparity in foster care-

Katherine Guffey, DCS's Executive Consultant to the Director, discussed what the Department is doing in order to address disparity in Arizona's child welfare system. Ms. Guffey said five percent of Arizona's population is African American, yet African American children comprise roughly 16 percent of children in foster care. She said myriad reasons contribute to the disparity, and the Department is trying to find ways to mitigate the issue. She said DCS has been listening to community members, DCS employees and others to develop a "theory of change." She said the Department has identified the following areas to focus on:

Connecting to Community and Basic Resources- Ensure access to housing, food, health care and child care. Support without DCS involvement when the children are safe. Make programs available to support in-home safety plans. Expand programs in communities without DCS involvement.

Make consistent, unbiased, shared decisions- Consistency in decisions to report to DCS since African American children are disproportionately reported to DCS. Practice fidelity to a comprehensive model. Self-awareness and cultural humility.

Value family relationships and involvement- Engage fathers and value their contributions. Team decision making to problem solve with family and community. Provide kinship support and alternatives to dependencies.

Ms. Guffey said the Department is currently working on surveys, trainings, practice changes, and more to address disparity.

- Barriers and issues for kinship families to obtain a foster license

Gillian Vanasse, DCS Assistant Director of Foster Care and Post Permanency Supports, discussed some of the issues that confront kinship families when they seek to obtain a foster license. Ms. Vanasse said in 2021 only four kinship families were denied. The denials were due to background checks and missing information in applications. She said DCS has a kinship waiver policy for any issues related to non-safety related licensing issues such as bedroom space. DCS does not have a policy that allows safety-related issues. She also mentioned the new bill to waive fingerprint clearance cards at the time of licensure for kinship caregivers. She said DCS is working on a licensing path specifically for kinship placements and reducing the time it takes to obtain a license.

- Call for Public Comment –

Members of the public were able to email comments into the Committee with the comments read into the minutes of the meeting by the Committee Chair. There were no public comments during the April meeting.

COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DCS FOR STATE FISCAL YEAR 2021

1. Regarding trauma-informed and responsive training: The Committee recommends that the Department provide training to staff that comprehends the significance of adverse childhood experiences in the lives of children, that promotes positive outcomes for increased resiliency, safety, and social-emotional wellbeing while promoting effective non-traumatic methods for reducing negative reactions to trauma.. The Committee notes that there is an existing State contract for services in this area that may provide an opportunity for resources for the Department. The Committee additionally notes that providers also benefit from trauma-informed and responsive training and many are provided such training in the delivery of their services.
2. Regarding transfer of cases between case managers: In light of staffing shortages, the Committee recommends the Department gather and track the number of transfers between case managers to more fully assess the impact of transfers on permanency and wellbeing for children, and identify and implement measures to limit disruptions for children. The Committee recognizes the Department has data review processes in place and partners with the provider community to review and identify data reporting requirements for the Department which may be beneficial for this recommendation.
3. Regarding foster home licensure for kinship families: The Committee recommends the Department review licensing requirements, the availability of waivers, and training requirements for licensure of kinship families, to expedite and increase kinship-care placements in all communities, particularly in Native-American communities.
4. Regarding the Department's overall workforce: The Committee recommends that the Department prioritize strategies to decrease vacancy rates and increase retention rates. The Committee additionally recommends that the Department alert policymakers to the importance of this priority for the success of its mission, including the need to conduct market analysis to maintain competitive compensation for employees who conduct and supervise investigations and case management.
5. Regarding the Department's contract provider workforce: The committee expresses concern with the vacancy rates among the Department's contract provider workforce and the impacts of these vacancies on the ability of children and families to have timely access to high quality services and recommends the Department in partnership with providers, review rates and contractual requirements to address the realities of the provider community. Further, it is recommended the Department in conjunction with the provider community and university partners develop strategies to help with workforce challenges.

6. Regarding the Department's subsidized childcare rate: The Committee expresses concern that the Department's childcare subsidy rates are substantially below what childcare providers charge and recommends the Department conduct a review of rates and implement adjustments to keep up with market costs. The Committee notes that a higher level of childcare is often necessary to meet the needs of the vulnerable children in the Department's custody.
7. Regarding vaccination rates for children in DCS custody: The committee expresses concern about the vaccination rates for children in DCS custody and recommends that the Department take steps to more fully incorporate COVID vaccination policies and practices in alignment with general Departmental child vaccination policies and practices.
8. Regarding scholarships and other assistance for higher-education: The committee expresses its appreciation of the program implemented by Grand Canyon University for children who had formerly been in foster care providing for full tuition, room and board and encourages other higher learning institutions, including Arizona's state universities to implement similar programs and benefits for Arizona's former foster children.