



ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF CHILD SAFETY SFY 2023 Arizona Citizen Review Panel Report

Agency Response to Recommendations

The Arizona Department of Child Safety (DCS or the Department) is pleased to receive and respond to the recommendations made by the three Arizona Citizen Review Panels (CRP) in their Annual Reports for SFY 2023.

Citizen participation is vital to achieving successful engagement of children and families by bringing the voice of the community to safeguard and strengthen families to maintain permanency. An engaged citizenry brings vibrant new ideas and fresh perspectives creating an environment that is welcoming of community input for the elimination of child abuse and neglect, and improved child and family well-being. Citizen participation provides for open and honest communication between the citizens and DCS that forge a relationship built on mutual trust and respect.

The Department is committed to the strategic goals and initiatives outlined in the DCS Strategic Plan and demonstrated daily by our shared values:

- **Safety** - We are safety experts.
- **Compassion** - We are Compassioners.
- **Change** - We are all born to grow.
- **Accountability** - We hold ourselves to the highest levels of professionalism.
- **Advocacy** - When children can't speak for themselves, we can.
- **Family** - Family reaches beyond the home.
- **Engagement** - Engagement means listening and being responsive to earn the trust of all we encounter.
- **Teaming** - The best decisions are made together.

We thank each member of the Citizen Review Panels for their commitment and continued partnership.

The Department's response to each panel's recommendation are as follows:

Successful Transition to Adulthood for Youth Aging Out of Foster Care:

Recommendation #1: The Department provides clarity on how allowances, outlined in Policy Manual, Ch. 4, Section 10. Ch. 4, Section 10 are made available and whether they are accessible and sufficient.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #2: The Department provides clarity on how intermittent and or individual educational needs are being addressed such as field trips, tutoring, and class performance monitoring (typically done by parents, caretakers but perhaps not group homes).

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #3: The Department provides advocacy and engagement training for young people, to enhance their understanding of CFT and TDMs (much like Mercy Care is doing for behavioral health providers) and how to effectively self-advocate and engage in their planning.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #4: The Department implements cross-systems training and development opportunities for providers and adjacent systems. More specifically, CRP-STA recommends that the Department host the following:

- A Foster Care Summit, much like the summit held on May 2022, which heavily focused on 501(c)(3) foster care providers, with three areas of focus: Kinship Care, Community Foster Care, and Extended Foster Care.
- Interagency Collaboration event much like the event held in June 2019 which included presentations from foster care, Vocational Rehabilitation, WIOA, Pre-ETS, Behavioral Health, and service coordination.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #5: The Department addresses the mechanisms in place to foster connectedness among peers (cultivating friendships), healthy social, cultural and

intersectional identities, and normal developmental experiences (recreation, employment, friendships) especially for young people in group care.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #6: The Department provides status updates on past recommendations adopted in FY2021, upon request.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

The Arizona DCS Community Advisory Committee Panel

The DCS Community Advisory Committee produces an annual report in August, after the end of each state fiscal year. The annual report is available to the public on the Department's website at: <https://dcs.az.gov/about/community-advisory-committee>.

Recommendation #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, which 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 acknowledges this was recommended last report and reaffirms this recommendation because of the amount of time it takes to implement such a training and because of the increased number of new employees at the Department.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation. The Department will continually seek training opportunities to help ensure our practice and response to families is compassionate and trauma-informed.

Recommendation #2: Regarding foster home licensure for kinship families: The Committee acknowledges the upcoming departmental contract to provide services and supports for kinship families as a strength in supporting kin who are caring for children involved with the Department. The Committee continues to recommend the Department do all it can to streamline licensing requirements, increase availability of waivers, and review training requirements for the licensure of kinship families to expedite and increase kinship care placements in all communities, particularly in Native American communities.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation and will update the committee on its efforts.

Recommendation #3: Regarding support for youth who are dually involved: The Committee recommends that the Department create a workgroup to address the delay in assignment of DCS staff for those youth who are temporarily assigned to a safe environment (i.e. incarcerated, detained, or hospitalized) to improve the timely receipt of services for dually involved youth and families.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with the recommendation and will update the committee on its efforts.

Recommendation #4: Regarding meeting the educational needs of children in the care of the Department: The Committee recommends that a workgroup be developed to make policy recommendations for the ongoing educational needs of children in the care of the Department. The Committee recognizes that SB 1205 is a helpful tool in determining initially the best interests for students involved with the Department, but more is needed for a reassessment of those plans later, after there has been a transition between the investigation and ongoing staff at the Department. It is further recommended that the workgroup include members of local school districts, caregivers and foster caregivers, young adults, as well line staff from the Department.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #5: Regarding the training of Native American culture for Departmental staff: The Committee recommends that Departmental staff receive additional Native American cultural training as part of their training requirements. With 22 federally recognized tribes in Arizona and disparate rates of removal for Arizona's Native American communities, the need for enhanced training and resources for Departmental staff is highly recommended.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement, and we have been working on ways to reduce disparity in the child welfare system. We will update the committee on our efforts.

Recommendation #6: Regarding contracting for services with DCS: The Committee recommends that the Department do more to work with procurement on the selection criteria of contracted agencies with a higher emphasis on quality of service delivery versus having the lowest rate. Additionally, it is further recommended that the Department revisit its Request for Proposal (RFP) culture to strategically partner to create a collegial culture between the department and the provider community.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement and we will continue to improve our relationship with the provider community.

Recommendation #7: Regarding the disproportionate number of black and indigenous children who come to the attention of the Department. The Committee recommends that the Department continue to work with those with lived experience and community stakeholders to address issues of disproportionality in Arizona's black and indigenous communities.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement. DCS's racial disparity work has been guided by members of the Black/African American community, including the DCS African American/Black Disparity in Foster Care Committee and community partners external to DCS. There is a section of the Monthly Operational Outcomes Report specific to African American Disparity measures as well. This report can be found on our website in the reports area. We will continue the current work, and evolve the approach with continued guidance from the people affected by the child protection system. The Department encourages continued discussions with the CAC on this subject.

The Arizona DCS Citizens Review Panel on Prevention

Recommendation #1: Federal Agencies such as the Children's Bureau have released several requests for grant proposals that align with the challenges the Department of Child Safety faces regarding caseworker retention and well-being. These releases have revealed the nationwide struggles faced by many child protection agencies and an understanding that these significant challenges will require funding and technical assistance to face. Thus, we recommend that DCS keep a close eye on grant funding released by the Children's Bureau and other federal agencies and request federal funding and technical assistance. Further, this opportunity would provide support through other state CPS agencies facing similar challenges.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation and will update the committee on our efforts.

Recommendation #2: The CRP recommends that, as caseworker retention increases and caseloads per worker decreases, the Department emphasizes using additional time for learning and development within the Department. To encourage and incentivize learning amongst caseworker staff, the Department can offer the flexibility to allow employees to train on their own schedule, so as to lessen any stress that may be affiliated with participating in training opportunities while managing the various needs of staff caseloads. Additionally, it is recommended that the Department provide a menu of various development opportunities for employees to be able to choose areas of learning that are tailored to their specific needs and skill levels.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #3: The CRP recommends that the Department make modifications to the supervisor onboarding program. This includes enhancing the supervision coaching program to include reflective supervision, communication skills, psychological safety, and how to improve well-being at work. The emphasis should be on personalized coaching and not training; supervisors need to help their caseworkers develop judgment around cases. Judgment cannot be taught via training, but needs coaching support to build individual capacity to apply principles in unique situations via personal judgment.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation and has developed and implemented the Supervision Coach program. The Department's Supervision Coach Program continues to support personalized coaching for Field Operations supervisors and program managers. Each leader has the opportunity to receive, at minimum, an individualized coaching session, an observation/feedback session focused on clinical supervision, and an observation/feedback session focused on administrative supervision on a monthly basis. The clinical supervision observation/feedback session allows for the leader to receive in-the-moment feedback surrounding their ability to guide clinical decisions. Topics such as communication skills, psychological safety, and people development can be the focus of the individualized coaching sessions and/or the administrative supervision observation/feedback session. This program continues to evolve to ensure that staff receives the coaching needed to support themselves and our staff.

Recommendation #4: The CRP recommends prioritizing the Protective Factors and strengths-based approach to training new DCS specialist employees earlier into the onboarding process and identifying simple and effective ways both new employees and supervisors can reinforce the application of these principles in their interactions with families.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.

Recommendation #5: The CRP recommends that the Department of Child Safety provide a job shadowing program for employees to follow internal positions, such as those at Central Office, to see the career mobility they have within the department. Similarly, we recommend that the Department extend this job shadowing experience to external partners, such as court days with a judge and ride-alongs with law enforcement to deepen understanding of partner work to better impact families.

The CRP recommends developing a cohort-style peer support system for new employees, providing a platform that would be monitored to submit questions, get advice, and encourage their fellow newbies to build community, collaboration, and a system of support.

DCS Response: The Department is in agreement with this recommendation.