

Agency Description:

The Department of Child Safety, (DCS) is Arizona's state administered child welfare services agency. The DCS provides child abuse and neglect investigations; child safety and risk assessments; family support preservation, and reunification services; family foster care and kinship care services; services to promote the safety, permanence, and well-being of children with foster and adoptive families; adoption promotion and support services; and health care services for children in out-of-home care.

The Department of Child Safety's primary purpose is to protect children. To achieve this purpose, the Department shall accomplish the following in equal priority.

- Investigate reports of child abuse and neglect.
- Assess, promote and support the safety of a child in a safe and stable family or other appropriate placement.
- Work cooperatively with law enforcement regarding reports that include criminal conduct allegations.
- Without compromising child safety, coordinate services to achieve permanency on behalf of the child, strengthen the family and provide prevention, intervention and treatment for abuse and neglected children.

The Department of Child Safety's Vision and Mission:

The Department's vision is: Keeping Arizona's children safe through timely and appropriate intervention, strong families, and engaged communities.

The Department's mission is: To ensure the safety of children, first and foremost, to engage in prevention and early intervention services, to preserve and unify families when the safety of the child is not at risk, to remove and achieve permanency for children who have been harmed and cannot be safely returned to their family.

The Department was established and received resources in May 2014. These resources are the necessary inputs, essential to the success of this strategic plan:

- a new agency, separated from the Department of Economic Security, whose Director reports to Arizona's Governor;
- a new organizational structure that gives heightened attention to prevention, the Child Abuse Reporting Hotline, field investigations, Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI), permanency (ongoing case management) and inspections (continuous quality improvement and quality assurance);
- budget appropriations that:
 - increased the total number of authorized DCS Specialist positions from 1,320 to 1,406;
 - ensured that there is one Supervisor for every six DCS Specialists
 - allocated funds for overtime pay for employees who work on the backlog of inactive cases; and

- included funding for services for children and families.

As a result of the Child Advocate Response Examination (CARE) Team report that was released in early January 2014, the Department has identified nine strategic issues, with corresponding strategies, goals, performance measures objectives and related benchmarks. These well-developed strategies represent the interventions and activities that will be accomplished during SFY 2015 through SFY 2019. The Department expects that these initiatives will achieve the goals of greater system capacity and enhanced service delivery, to improve the safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for children in families.

Strategic Issues, Strategies, Goals, Performance Measures

Strategic Issue One: Employee Workload

Child Safety Specialists have been carrying caseloads well above the Department's standards for many years.

The Department's caseload standard is:

- for investigations, 13 reports per month per Child Safety Specialist;
- for in-home services, working with 33 cases per month per Child Safety Specialist; and
- for out-of-home (foster care) services, working with 20 children per month per Child Safety Specialist.

In January 2014, caseloads were 22 per cent above the standard. Focus groups and surveys of Department staff and stakeholders repeatedly identified unmanageable caseloads as a primary factor preventing a standard of practice that adheres to written policy and procedure. In addition to new caseload standards, the Department has over 13,000 reports that have been open for more than 60 days with no activity. This backlog of inactive cases adds to the overall caseload and must be addressed in order to reach the Department's caseload standards. Furthermore, employee surveys identified a need for support staff to assist with tasks such as copying and mailing documents, scheduling visits, completing forms and paperwork, and returning general phone calls thereby reducing workload for DCS case management staff.

According to the CARE Team report, *Eyes on Children*, "the attrition of new employees is approximately 25 to 30%, and there is a significant representation of employees whose tenure reflects months not years." High turnover contributes to the backlog of inactive cases and to high caseloads, which in turn produce more employee turnover. Turnover among field staff is costly to the agency and to families. The persistent need to hire and train new staff diverts agency resources from direct services to families. The need to reassign cases due to staff attrition can lead to delays in service provision and delays to permanency.

Strategy:

Increasing the size of the workforce, reducing caseloads, and decreasing per case workload are expected to improve the Department's capacity to meet the demand for services. Sufficient capacity is necessary for organizational stability, which is a prerequisite for consistent process and standard work. The Department anticipates that when Child Safety Specialists practice according to the standards in Department policy and procedure, with effective and timely supervision; children and families will

experience various outcomes that include higher rates of timely initial response to reports, more comprehensive safety and risk assessments, less intrusive safety plans, greater involvement in case planning, more frequent higher quality parent-child visitation, and more frequent higher quality contacts with their caseworkers. The long-range impact is expected to include a reduced rate of repeat reports, reductions in the size of the out-of-home care population without compromising child safety, more rapid success of safe and permanent reunification, the timely achievement of adoption and increased child well-being.

The Department has selected interventions to improve recruitment and retention of staff based on attrition data and employee input during the CARE Team's evaluation. Employee survey responses revealed the need for better pay equity, modern technology and equipment, and improved worker safety, and indicated that addressing these needs would improve retention. The Department believes that improved recruitment and retention will reduce caseloads, which will have the medium and long-range effects previously described. Furthermore, retention will improve staff experience and skills, which will be particularly beneficial to the quality of supervision.

Goal: Eliminate the Backlog of Inactive Cases

Performance Measure One: The average monthly caseload will be reduced to the Department's caseload standard for each case type.

Performance Measure Two: All cases will be assigned to staff and receive action.

Goal: Worker Retention

Performance Measure: The Department will measure achievement of this goal through tracking of vacancy and turnover rates.

Strategic Issue Two: Providing the Workforce with Effective Tools

Training that is individualized and competency-based

The CARE Team found that critical decisions are "subject to the individual judgment of staff," and recommended that management "identify best practices that should be standard and implement those best practices through development of standard work and continual training across the organization." The CARE Team evaluation also found that some training, such as supervisor training, has not been provided on time and that annual in-service training is needed so that "all field staff receives consistent and current instruction." Input into the adequacy and design of training was also obtained during well-attended staff forums. Suggestions from the training forums have been incorporated into the training improvement plan.

Development of Practice Standards

The Failure Mode Effects Analysis conducted by the CARE Team found 142 total potential failure points between a call arriving at the hotline and closing an investigation. To address these system-wide concerns, the CARE Team repeatedly recommended increased capacity and implementation of standard

processes that “identify the best current model of performing a task” to be promoted throughout the organization.

Improved Technology

The agency currently has an automated system that is no longer effective in managing the current agency Federal and State program reporting requirements, and its business operations. The CARE Team identified a number of issues with the State’s system, known as Children’s Information Library and Data Source (CHILDS) including the lack of remote access and mobile device interface to assist the efficiency of field work and the difficulty of preserving the integrity of data. In addition, the architecture of the system is over fifteen years old and is no longer flexible for updates and enhancements needed for addressing strategic operations in areas such as reducing the agency’s backlog of inactive cases and keeping up with newly acquired cases.

Strategy:

The Department of Child Safety believes that training is one of several essential interventions to develop standard practice across the organization. Formation of an organization with sufficient workforce and reasonable caseloads, training in current best practices, presence of high quality supervision and a sound quality assurance processes, will improve the consistency in all areas of practice. When the Department reaches a state of consistent practice, it will be better able to identify elements of current practice that are effective and those that are not, and continually adjust practice standards to achieve the best safety, permanency and well-being outcomes. The Department is particularly interested in evaluating the efficacy of the current safety and risk assessment model in achieving child safety, and preventing repeat reports, repeat maltreatment and re-entry into out-of-home care.

Several interventions have been identified by the Department to define and promote the best method of responding to reports of abuse or neglect. Adherence to joint investigation protocols will improve the ability of law enforcement, the Office of Child Welfare Investigations (OCWI) and Child Safety Specialists to conduct investigations that protect children, minimize trauma, promote child well-being and allow for prosecution of criminal conduct. The use of Multidisciplinary Teams (MDTs) and active multidisciplinary collaboration are proven methods that capitalize on expertise from a range of disciplines and perspectives to develop, implement and continually improve processes to promote child safety and well-being. In addition, the Department will resolve known inconsistencies in practice by identifying and promoting the best and current models for prioritizing response to reports, identifying criminal conduct allegations that require a joint investigation, and locating missing families and children.

A Family Assessment approach is being developed to respond to neglect and less severe physical abuse reports with a family-centered non-confrontational assessment that engages families in services to treat risks before they escalate to become safety threats. The Department expects that these interventions will result in medium-range outcomes of reduced repeat reports, and reduced entry and re-entry into out-of-home care.

SFY 2015 budget appropriations included funds for the planning phase of replacing the CHILDS system. A needs assessment is underway to ensure that the system is designed for maximum flexibility, reliability and current technological standards; yet easy to use.

Goal: Establish Training that is Individualized and Competency-based

Performance Measure: Completion of a Department training system.

Goal: Create a validated safety and risk assessment tool.

Performance Measure: The Department will measure achievement of this goal using the forthcoming Federal Child and Family Service Review measure addressing the rate of repeat reports.

Goal: To have an automated system that contributes to the efficiency of Department operations and produces quality data and outcomes.

Performance Measure: This goal will initially be measured by the completion of the Requirements Analysis document to be developed and written during the planning phase of the CHILDS replacement.

Strategic Issue Three: Integration of Operations with the Community

Working alongside the community includes positive interaction and solid customer service with the various entities that assist in ensuring child safety within the State of Arizona. In addition to the Department serving the public as a whole, the community includes those individuals that report child abuse and neglect and private and faith-based child welfare agencies.

The Department's Child Abuse Reporting line (call center) is the starting point for all Department field activity to achieve the mission of child safety. In order to assess child safety and risks, a referral must be received at the call center and correctly categorized as a report if it meets the statutory criteria. The CARE Team evaluation found that the call center does not have sufficient staff capacity to meet the demand of incoming communication volume, and that "High abandoned call rates, long wait times and the current interview design do not facilitate efficient collection of information from the public." The CARE Team concluded that "clear performance standards need to be established and maintained."

The CARE Team also concluded that the agency "must strive to establish maximum transparency in its actions to recapture the trust of the public and create agency accountability." Transparency and public accountability will encourage stakeholders to engage in the agency's improvement efforts. Improvement will only be successful when there is meaningful collaboration with stakeholders, such as parents, kin, youth, American Indian tribes, foster parents, law enforcement agencies, the courts, the behavioral health system, prevention agencies, child advocates and the state legislature.

Strategy:

The Department has identified intake strategies to standardize the collection and documentation of information gathered by the call center, including the design of an effective process and implementation of a quality assurance review to monitor the consistency of decisions. The new standard process will be a more efficient response to communications, which will reduce caller wait time and the abandoned call rate. In addition, the anticipated automation enhancements will allow Child Safety Specialists to provide additional information gathered during an open investigation electronically instead of by phone. This information is necessary so that the Hotline retains complete documentation about all events or circumstances of abuse or neglect that are known to the agency and have already been assessed or

investigated, so that future communications with the same information does not generate a new report and a second investigation. This new process would improve efficiency for field and call center employees, and increase the likelihood that field staff will communicate the information to the call center. In addition, the Department will explore the possibility of partnerships with other organizations that can serve community members seeking community resource information, thereby meeting the customer's need while reducing call volume at the Child Abuse Reporting call center. As result of all of these activities, more thorough and timely information will be collected from the public and forwarded to field units, allowing a faster response to concerns and ultimately improving child safety.

The CARE Team evaluation found a lack of clear performance standards and that individual judgment replaces standard process. Similar to high quality training, the Department believes that transparency and accountability are essential interventions to develop standard practice across the organization. When the entire organization is accountable to clearly defined best practice standards and successful outcomes for children and families, the consistency of practice will improve. When the Department reaches a state of consistent practice, it will be better able to identify elements of the practice standard that are effective and those that are not, and continually adjust practice standards to achieve the best outcomes.

Goal: Improve the Department's Child Abuse Reporting Line Intake Process

Performance Measure: The percentage of calls answered within 60 seconds will be at least 80 percent.

Performance Measure: The percentage of abandoned calls will be 8 percent or less.

Goal: Operate with Transparency, Accountability and Open Communication

Performance Measure: Consistent sharing of data and other information with the public covering material such as Department operations, policies, processes and outcomes.

Strategic Issue Four: Ensuring Permanency and Well-being for the Children DCS Serves

The results of the CARE Team's foster and adoptive parent survey indicated a need to improve the adequacy of background information foster and adoptive parents are provided, and their involvement in decision-making. Notification about hearings and case related meetings was also identified as an area needing improvement.

Strategy:

The Department expects that improved communication and resource family involvement in decision-making will improve resource family retention and improve the families' ability to meet the needs of the children in their care, which will achieve child well-being outcomes in relation to education, physical health and behavioral health. Furthermore, children who are mentally and physically healthy are more likely to have positive permanency outcomes.

Goal: Meet the needs of children in out-of-home care and their foster or adoptive families.

Performance Measure: This goal will be measured through the Department's annual foster and adoptive parent satisfaction survey, which will include several measures covering the level of Department support of foster and adoptive families.