



AZ Families News March 2024 - Third Edition

For our Third Edition of AZ Families News, we are excited to share recent news as well as updates on some of our 2024 initiatives.

On behalf of all DCS staff, thanks for reading. Enjoy this spring by spending some time outdoors in our great state.

David Lujan

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CEO, Arizona Department of Child Safety



Celebrating Social Workers - National Social Worker Month

March is National Social Workers's month, so it's the perfect opportunity to celebrate the best and brightest among us. Peers acknowledge colleagues within the Arizona Department of Child Safety by nominating DCS staff for a spot in our "Compassioneers" hall of fame. Those who embody one or more of our core values (safety, accountability, change, family, engagement, compassion, teaming, advocacy, equity) have a chance to become an official Compassioneer, having their photo and story shared department-wide throughout the month. Compassioneers have not only dedicated their careers to safeguarding Arizona's most vulnerable children and families, but they do it with empathy and grace, serving as a model for all of us. Compassioneers are members of the DCS team who exemplify our values day in and day out. You may call them kind, passionate, loving, strong, sensitive, motivated, or relentless in their pursuit of what is right; we simply call them our teammates. You can learn more about our 2024 Compassioneers [here](#).



Department holds CFSR PIP Kickoff Event

What is a CFSR PIP? The U.S. Children's Bureau Administration for Children and Families has a Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) that cycles every 7-8 years. As a result of the review, each participating child welfare agency works with the Bureau to develop a Program Improvement Plan, or PIP. Arizona is beginning its "Round 4" CFSR PIP.

To start the process through thoughtful conversations, DCS held a Kickoff Event in February, which was attended by 77 staff and 65 community stakeholders. Participants attended both in-person and virtually to allow attendance of stakeholders from all areas of the state.

The morning session included information about DCS' current strategic plan for improvement, data related to the current functioning of the child welfare system, and preliminary data from the December 2023 CFSSR conducted with the Children's Bureau.

In the afternoon, participants engaged in focus groups to explore the needs of families and root causes for several challenging practice areas, with a larger goal of better strengthening families in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The focus areas included:

1. Investigation and In-Home cases (prevention and services to prevent removal, services to prevent re-entry after reunification, safety assessments, needs assessments, service provision, and engaging fathers);
2. Supporting youth who are in foster care (needs and services, placement stability, supporting OOH caregivers, education needs, medical needs, and behavioral health needs); and
3. Supporting parents whose children are in foster care to achieve timely permanency through reunification (permanency planning, needs and services, involvement in case planning, and engagement of fathers).

DCS will use the information gathered not only to help develop our Program Improvement Plan with the Children's Bureau, but to also leverage this information into our Strategic Plan for the upcoming fiscal year.

Celebrating a Lifetime Achievement - John and Wendy Frank

John and Wendy Frank began their foster care journey in 1985. Since that time, they have fostered hundreds of children in their home - both placements and many, many respite kids. They are the adoptive parents to 9 children, two of whom still live at home as special needs adults. After 39 years of fostering, the Franks have decided to retire from fostering so they can travel and visit their children that are now all over the country.

DCS partnered with #LoveUP Foundation to honor the Frank Family for a lifetime of love and achievement.

Here are links to news articles about the Franks:

[KOLD Article](#)

[Marana News Article](#)



DCS CEO David Lujan and Blake Van Es of #LoveUP Foundation present a Lifetime Achievement award to John and Wendy Frank, who have fostered and adopted children since 1985.

John and Wendy have many invaluable skills that will be deeply missed by the foster care community - they have years of experience with children of all backgrounds, a wealth of knowledge of the child welfare system, a keen ability to care for and soothe SEN infants, and a deep understanding and compassion for children with disabilities - to name a few.

What will be missed the most, though, is their willingness to say "yes" to loving any child who walks through their door. This is a quality in a foster family that cannot be taught, and it is what makes the Franks the most beautiful example.

To learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit:
<https://dcs.az.gov/foster/learnmore>

2024 Initiative Updates

Maricopa Welcome Center to add On-site Health Clinic

Plans were approved, and the build-out of the on-site health clinic is underway. It is expected to open later this year.

Remodel/Refresh Pima Welcome Center

The refresh of the Pima Welcome Center is underway, with the addition of fresh paint, furniture, bedding and kitchen supplies. In addition, positive imagery and affirmative messaging is designed into every child-centered space.

DCS to add DEIA Leader to Executive Team

This career opportunity will be posted in the coming week at [AZ State Jobs](#).

Creating a Community Hub

The scope of work is being developed for this initiative.

In conjunction with the Department of Economic Security (DES) and Pilgrim Rest Foundation, the Community HUB will be created in an effort to reduce the disproportionate representation of Black and African American children and families involved in the child welfare system. The HUB will connect families to culturally attuned and trauma-informed providers while also cultivating a culture of support instead of report, in the community. DCS aims to provide culturally congruent services that enable families to successfully navigate government agencies and programs as part of their efforts to address their needs, and to reduce the rates of disproportionality and disparity that exist in Arizona's child welfare system.

The Community HUB at Pilgrim Rest is designed to provide alternative intervention and prevention strategies for meeting the needs of the community and address the disproportionality of African American and Black children in the child welfare system. Since the Pilgrim Rest Foundation (PRF) is a known and trusted source in the community, which already serves Black and African American families with wrap-around services, the implementation of the Community HUB pilot will be a natural extension of the work being done. This pilot program will be concentrated in specific zip codes where DCS historically has a high rate of intervention and removal of African American and Black children.

Extended Foster Care (EFC) Coaches Program

The new EFC Coaching Program launched in December 2023, with 6 providers and over 30 Coaches hired and trained. Statewide, 500 youth, ages 17 – 20, have been referred for the program. DCS is implementing this community-based program to help ensure that young people are prepared for their transition to adulthood at 18, and their exit from Extended Foster Care at age 21.

The EFC Success Coaches are facilitating youth-centered meetings where they are completing Transition Plans with these youth. Young people are enjoying the transition planning meetings, sharing comments such as, "I love how this meeting is going!" We look forward to seeing how this new intervention program will support our youth in achieving their goals.

Kinship Support Services (KSS)

Oftentimes, relatives are asked to care for a family member's child while they are in foster care. While they want to help, the expenses and navigation of child welfare can be overwhelming for a family who never envisioned they would be caring for their family members' children.

To alleviate these expenses, DCS has amended its provider contracts to better serve kinship families.

Under the new program, kinship caregivers will now have the opportunity to receive similar benefits and supports as licensed foster parents. The services include:

- An expedited path to foster care licensing
- Home assessments
- Creation of a family support plan
- Initial and ongoing trainings
- Assistance with enrolling a child in school and other educational needs

Foster Adoptive Supports (FAS)

In addition to enhancing our Kinship Support Services, the Department has also implemented new services to bolster support for our licensed foster families.

The Family and Adoption Support (FAS) Contract, which took effect March 1, is designed to assist families in their journey of supporting children who are experiencing foster care.

The primary goal of the FAS contract is to offer ongoing family support before, during, and after placement.

Other services include:

- Monitoring of the home environment
- Initial and ongoing training
- Retention efforts
- Initial and renewal of foster licensing

- By encompassing a wide range of services, the FAS contract ensures that families receive the necessary assistance at every stage of the foster care and adoption process.



APRIL is Child Abuse Prevention Month

Help us stand with [Prevent Child Abuse America](#) on

#WearBlueDay: Unite in a Sea of Blue April 5th

What You Can Do: Dress in blue to stand in solidarity with child abuse prevention efforts.

Get Social: Capture the moment and share it on your social media platforms. Use the hashtag #WearBlueDay2024 to join the nationwide wave of support.

Spread the Word: Encourage your friends, family, and colleagues to participate and raise awareness about the importance of preventing child abuse.

All of us play a role in preventing child abuse.

Since April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month, the Department would like to remind the public that the best way to prevent child abuse is by providing parents with the knowledge, resources, and skills they need to strengthen their families.

With that in mind, DCS offers the following child abuse prevention tips:

1. **Support Parents:** Offer a helping hand to parents in your community. Parenting can be challenging, and sometimes all it takes is a supportive neighbor, friend, or family member to make a significant difference in a family's life.
2. **Recognize the signs of abuse:** Unexplained injuries are only one sign of abuse. Withdrawal from family and friends, inappropriate sexual behavior, sudden changes in eating or sleeping patterns, and bursts of anger may indicate a child is being neglected or abused.
3. **Be thoughtful before disciplining a child:** Discipline is a way to teach your child, not punish them. Never discipline your child when you are angry. Try using privileges to promote good behavior and time-outs when your child is acting up.
4. **Get connected to your community:** Local communities support parents by making sure they have access to everything they require to raise a healthy family. Creating connections with neighbors and statewide agencies will help them find the support they need. Many of these resources can be found in their own backyard, and 2-1-1 Arizona can help locate them.
5. **Discuss safe sleep habits with your loved ones:** Before you say goodnight to your baby, take a moment to acknowledge the ABCs of safe sleep. Babies sleep safest when they are Alone, on their Back, and in a Crib. Don't wake up to a tragedy; talk to your loved ones, caregivers, and other parents about safe sleep best practices.
6. **Take time for yourself:** Don't let problems pile up until you feel overwhelmed. Make sure you take some time to address your needs. If you need help, ask for help.
7. **If you see something, say something:** If you have reason to believe a child is being abused or witness child abuse or neglect, call 1-888-SOS-CHILD to report the abuse to DCS.

Safety · Accountability · Change · Family · Engagement · Compassion · Teaming · Advocacy · Equity

About the CEO: David Lujan is the CEO of the Arizona Department of Child Safety. David brought over two decades of child welfare advocacy experience to the Department when he assumed the Director position in April 2023. David is an attorney who earned his Juris Doctor degree from the Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law at Arizona State University. He ran for elected office in 2004 and served as a state representative from 2004 to 2010 and as a state senator from 2011 to 2013. During this time, David helped launch Defenders of Children, a non-profit organization that provides free legal representation to abused children and adult victims of domestic violence. As staff attorney for the organization, he worked with Arizona's and Utah's attorney generals to open the first non-profit in Colorado City to provide legal services to victims of child abuse. David joined Children's Action Alliance in 2017 to launch its affiliate, the Arizona Center for Economic Progress, and serve as its first Executive Director. In this role, he worked to advance policies at the State Capitol to improve economic opportunities for all Arizonans.

About the Arizona Department of Child Safety: Our mission is to successfully partner with families, caregivers, and the community to strengthen families, ensure safety, and achieve permanency for all Arizona's children through prevention, services, and support. As highly motivated and caring public servants, the DCS team is committed to fulfilling this mission with excellence, providing safety and well-being for the most vulnerable population in Arizona - our children. If you suspect child abuse, call 888-SOS-CHILD.



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