

MEMORANDUM

November 12, 2013

TO: Health and Human Services Committee

FROM: Vivian Yao, Legislative Analyst *Vy*

SUBJECT: Briefing: Tiered response system for child abuse allegations

The Health and Human Services Committee will receive a briefing on the Alternative Response system that has been implemented by Child Welfare Service (CWS) for child abuse allegations. Kate Garvey, Chief, Children, Youth, and Family Services, and Agnes Leshner, Director, Child Welfare Services, will present to the Committee. The Committee scheduled the briefing to hear about the recently implemented process as reported in the July 1, 2013 Washington Post article attached at ©1-2.

Information provided by the Department on CWS program highlights and the Alternative Response process is attached at ©3-6.

Alternative Response

In recent decades, Child Protective Services agencies (CPS) nationally have been challenged with large volumes of child abuse and neglect reports, growing caseloads, families with increasingly complex problems, and limited resources.¹ There has been a growing recognition that the traditional investigative response is not the only or best means of ensuring the safety of children in all cases. Thus, Alternative Response processes have been increasingly offered as an option, in addition to traditional investigations, to responding to reports of child abuse and neglect.

The Alternative Response process provides for a collaborative partnership with families, which is intended to increase engagement and service usage in cases where there is no CPS history and the referral suggests low risk of harm to the child. Several goals have informed this change including (1) the interest in being more flexible in responding child abuse and neglect reports, (2) the recognition that an adversarial approach is not needed or helpful in all cases; (3) the need to better understand family issues that feed into abuse and neglect reports; and (4) the interest in engaging parents more effectively to use services that meet their individual needs and

¹ Child Welfare Information Gateway, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2008) *Differential Response to Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect*. Retrieved from https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/issue_briefs/differential_response/. Excerpts attached at ©7-13

circumstances. A chart generally comparing aspects of the formal investigative and alternative approaches is attached at ©11.

Through legislation finalized in May 2012, Maryland adopted an Alternate Response process for responding to reports of child abuse and neglect. See also 14-23. Maryland has opted for a phased-in approach implementing Alternative Response, and five counties including Montgomery County were scheduled to begin on July 1, 2013. The County has developed an AR Advisory Committee (see ©3) to oversee the process in Montgomery County.

In the County, both Alternative Response and Investigative Response assess the immediate safety and potential risk of harm to children after a credible report that a child has been abused or neglected. All CPS referrals are reviewed by a supervisor, and based on State defined criteria (see ©16-17), an Investigative Response or an Alternative Response is conducted. In deciding the type of response, the type of maltreatment, the level of risk of harm or endangerment to any child in the home, and the family's history of involvement with the agency is considered. The following allegations will receive an Investigation Response: sexual abuse, maltreatment in an out of home setting, CPS history within a 3-year period, and concern about child safety at a high level of risk. Response times for both types of responses are the same: 24 hours for physical abuse and five days for neglect. DHHS notes that system flexibility allows cases to move back and forth between AR and IR depending on the situation and any changes in family circumstance.

With Alternative Response, a particular person is not identified as responsible for maltreatment and is not entered in a Central Registry or case record. A social worker conducts a full assessment to determine what service may be needed to reduce the risk of harm to a child and refers the family for appropriate services. CWS reports that it has handled the following number of allegations in the new system: 41 in July, 35 in August, and 55 in September. Although it appears that families who have been engaged in the AR process are more receptive to CPS intervention, DHHS reports that it is too soon to fully assess the benefits of AR.

The Department notes that workloads for CWS staff will continue to be impacted by the number of calls to the screening unit that meet the criteria for CPS interventions for both Investigative Response and Alternative Response.

CWS Program Updates

The following table shows CWS service trend data:

	FY11	FY12	FY13	% change FY11-FY13
Calls to Screening Unit	8,747	8,747	9,069	3.7%
Investigations	2,599	2,945	2,665	2.5%
Average # of children in out-of-home care per month	514	474	402	-21.8%

Between FY11 and FY13, the data show the following: 3.7% increase in the number of calls to the screening unit from FY11 to FY13; 2.5% increase in the number of investigations, and a 21.8% decrease in the average number of children in out-of-home care per month.

The CWS FY13 Annual Report is attached at ©24-38 and provides more information about CWS programs.

The Department reports the continuing challenges for CWS:

- **Complex Problems:** Many referred families face multiple complex problems including housing, mental health and addiction. Due to their own difficulties, parents can neglect their children and have difficulty accepting services and CWS oversight.
- **Foster Families for Sibling Groups:** It is difficult to find foster families for sibling groups and adolescents in Montgomery County. Siblings may have to be separated in different homes and visitation has to be arranged and overseen by social workers.
- **Need for Mentors for Transitioning Youth:** There is a need for more trained mentors/connections for youth transitioning out of foster care.
- **Affordable Housing for Youth:** Finding affordable housing for youth is extremely difficult. Many of the youth are going to school part time and working part time and they do not earn enough money to maintain an apartment. The Department is exploring programs in other states to determine how they are handling this problem and continuing to pursue private and federal funding opportunities.
- **Voluntary Placements:** Parents can place their children with CWS when they cannot handle the child's problems any longer. Most of the children involved are over age 15 and due to their problems are placed in residential treatment centers or group homes. Currently there are 18 youth in Voluntary Placement and several more who are now under court jurisdiction as Children in Need of Assistance.

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As child abuse investigations rise, Montgomery begins new approach

By Robert Samuels, July 01, 2013

The number of child abuse and neglect investigations in Montgomery has risen by 12 percent over the last two years — even as the number of cases statewide remained stable, county data show.

The uptick — from just shy of 2,600 cases in 2010 to nearly 3,000 in 2012 — is likely the result of increased stress on families due to the recession and increased public vigilance after the county's efforts to raise awareness about the signs of abuse, according to Agnes Leshner, director of the county's child welfare services.

But the rise also amplified concern about how to best handle investigations, a problem which county and state officials vowed on Monday to address.

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Montgomery was named one of the first jurisdictions in the state to implement a two-track system for responding to child abuse allegations, taking a softer approach for those cases deemed low-risk. Virginia and the District have already implemented similar systems.



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Currently in Maryland, for example, parents who violate state law by leaving a child under the age of 8 home alone because they didn't have a babysitter, are added to a child abuse registry if found at fault. Appearing on the registry could have a variety of consequences, from not being hired for jobs involving children to being barred from chaperoning a school trip.

Under the new system, such parents would be given a "low-risk" response. Instead of enacting harsh disciplinary measures, social workers would provide training— or find other resources— to help them be better parents.

"What we want to do is get these families help over time, so they can take care of their children," Leshner said. "When we do an investigation, it can make it seem like we are trying to fight the parents."

High-risk investigations, including cases of sex abuse or continued physical abuse, will be handled as they've always been. That process includes interviews with parents and teachers, and might result in the agency placing the child in foster care.

Maryland is beginning implementation with counties in the western part of the state. Also included are Frederick, Washington, Allegany and Garrett. Based on the experiences of the five jurisdictions, state officials aim to extend this "alternative response" method to the rest of state over the next year.

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The result could transform how thousands of families throughout the state interact with the child welfare system, said Ted Dallas, the state's secretary for human resources.

Nearly 28,000 investigations are conducted every year throughout the state, data show. But three out of every five are unsubstantiated or deal with issues of neglect -- things that would likely qualify as "low-risk" cases.

From Dallas's perspective, the idea of offering services to families -- as opposed to threatening the removal of their children -- falls more in line with a national effort to keep children out of the foster system for as long as possible.

"One size does not fit all," Dallas said. "This is something that's been a long time coming . . . And it will have an impact in ways we don't fully understand."

At least 20 states, including Virginia and the District, currently use the tiered-response system.

Following stricter enforcement of a law mandating that teachers report truant students to child protection services, the District itself saw a 17 percent increase in the number of referrals it received over the past two years, from 6,203 to 7,303.

Brenda Donald, the director of the child and family services agency in the District, said her department was able to tailor services to families better when they enacted a multi-tiered response.

"It just makes a lot more sense," Donald said.

In Montgomery, the number of calls reporting child abuse began skyrocketing in the wake of the 2011 Penn State sex abuse scandal, said Wendy Grier, who is Montgomery's supervisor for child welfare projects.

More neighbors started reporting suspicious behavior, as did more teachers and nonprofit workers. It led to the county giving presentations three times a month about warning signs of abuse, contributing to 6,533 reports of abuse last year, a 14 percent increase from 2010.

When those reports were so egregious they warranted further investigation -- as they do about 45 percent of the time in Montgomery -- caseworkers discovered cases of molestation and continued physical assault. But they also saw increases in the number of children left home because their parents had to take on night shifts -- or parents who were having difficulty paying their bills who, in a moment of frustration, might have hit their child.

Those sorts of issues might require therapy or financial assistance rather than a court order, said Jimmy Venza, who is associate director of the Reginald S. Lourie Center. That kind of help allows for parents to learn to be better parents.

"Sometimes, parents just get overwhelmed," Venza said. "And we understand that if we provide support for caregivers and focus on their relationships, you can make an impact and give them the chance to grow."

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Alternative Response

Background

In Maryland, May 2012, legislation was passed and approved by the Governor to implement Alternative Response (AR) effective July 2013. The state chose to adopt a phase-in approach which engages different regions of the state in implementation throughout 2013 and 2014. Montgomery County is one of five counties in this first phase of AR in Maryland. The Department of Human Resources (DHR) is tracking implementation strategies to determine what works and what needs modification in an effort to improve the implementation in the remaining jurisdictions later this year and in 2014.

As part of the implementation process, in May, 2013, Montgomery County developed an AR Advisory Committee to oversee AR in the county. The committee is comprised of stakeholders and community partners. The Co-Chairs of the committee are Wendy Grier, Supervisor, Special Projects with CWS and Steve Neff, Director of Pupil Personnel Services, MCPS. The advisory committee also includes: Carol Walsh, Collaboration Council, Steve Green Behavioral Health Partners, Barbara Franck, MD Choices, Jimmy Venza, Reginald Lourie Center, Viviana Azara, YMCA, Regina Morales, Montgomery County Behavioral Health. Preparation also included assessing the service array in the County, educating stakeholders and community partners, as well as training CWS staff.

How many allegations have been handled by the new system thus far:

July:	41
August:	35
September:	55

A description of the two-track approach:

Alternative Response and Investigative Response (IR) are Child Protective Services responses that assess the immediate safety and potential risk of harm to children. The assessment includes not only obtaining information about the abuse or neglect, but information about the family functioning. AR focuses on early engagement of families in identifying their service needs and assisting parents to see the importance of keeping their children safe and functioning in a positive, healthy manner.

As part of the process, all CPS referrals are reviewed by a supervisor and based on State defined criteria, either an Investigation Response or an Alternative Response is conducted. Children and families receive AR intervention when there is no CPS history and the referral is low risk of harm to the child. With Alternative Response a particular person is not identified as responsible for maltreatment and they are not entered in a Central Registry or case record. The social

worker conducts a full assessment to determine what services may be needed to reduce the risk of harm to a child; and then refers the family to appropriate services.

The criteria for determining how child abuse allegations are assigned to tracks:

All CPS referrals are reviewed by Assessment Supervisors who determine the investigation track. Allegations of sexual abuse, maltreatment that occurs in an out of home setting, CPS history within a 3 year period, and concern about child safety at a high level of risk will receive an Investigation as we have previously responded. The response times to both IR and AR are the same: 24 hour for physical abuse and 5 days for neglect.

How CWS responds to allegations and investigations based on the assigned tier:

Regardless of an AR or IR response, Social Workers conduct a thorough assessment of the family and the allegations. In AR, every effort is made to contact the family first before seeing the child and interviews may be conducted with everyone together. AR interventions do not identify a particular person as responsible for maltreatment and no one is entered in a Central Registry.

Whether there is any cross over between tracks (one that starts out at low level, but moves to high or vice versa):

There is flexibility in the system to move cases back and forth between AR and IR depending on the situation and any changes in the family circumstance. Any movement from AR to IR is tracked and reviewed to assure the initial response was the appropriate one at the time.

The benefits and challenges of implementing the new system to date including the impact of the tiered system on CWS workload and individuals who have become involved with CWS:

It is too soon to fully assess the benefits for the families who have been involved. It appears that families who have been engaged in the AR process are more receptive to CPS intervention. For the social workers, there is a greater emphasis on engagement rather than "investigation" and this enhances the communication and relationship between the family and the social worker. Workloads will continue to be impacted by the number of calls to Screening that meet the criteria for CPS interventions for both IR and AR.

Child Welfare Services Program Highlights

Directions

A mentoring program that was started by one of the social workers in Child Welfare to find connections for the transitioning youth who are leaving foster care. Adult mentors work with youth to help them transition from adolescence to young adulthood. The youth and adult come together each month to talk and participate in an activity. The mentor helps the youth explore options and develop a relationship. The mentor helps the youth explore options and develop confidence in making positive life choices. Adults attend training, complete a background check and sign a contract for a year commitment. Currently there are 12 adults matched with transitioning youth.

3 L Academy (Live Learn Lead)

This program is funded by the Trawick Foundation to focus on older youth in foster care. This program is a one year, comprehensive, interdisciplinary and individualized program serving transitioning foster youth in Child Welfare. 20 youth are enrolled, ages 18-24. The model is to engage youth in their own future planning process by setting and achieving their own individualized goals. The 3L Academy will address the mental, emotional, physical, social, academic, personal, and professional well being of the youth. Providers include CASE, Future Link, MMYC, YMCA and Crittenden Services.

Supportive Youth Housing Program (SYHP) Overview

The Supportive Youth Housing Program (SYHP) is a collaboration with Montgomery County Child Welfare Services (CWS) and the Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) to assist transitioning youth who are 'aging out' of the foster care system to gain and maintain affordable housing. The grant from the Freddie Mac Foundation not only assisted with rent subsidies but provided intensive case management support to all of the youth referred to the program.

In order to participate in the SYHP program, youth were required to be in compliance with their CWS service agreement, including being enrolled in school and/or maintaining employment. They were expected to be an active participant in their planning as they begin to 'age out' of the CWS system.

Fostering Connections

During the past year we have developed a strong partnership with MCPS to implement federal legislation called Fostering Connections. Much of this work has been done with the support of Casey Family Programs. Through this partnership, we have been able to maintain more children in their home school, hold several workshops for our respective staff, and developed training programs to familiarize Child Welfare and MCPS staff with policies and procedures of each agency. Key partners have been identified and communication has improved noticeably. CWS staff presented a workshop to all the MCPS principals focusing on the workings of Child Welfare and how to report child abuse and neglect.

One of the key strategies of this program is to maintain children in their home schools, even if they are placed with relatives and foster families outside of the school district. CWS and MCPS have developed a system to determine what is in the best interest of the child and remaining in their home school or transferring schools is now a joint decision.

Challenges:

- Many of the families being referred to CWS face multiple complex problems. Housing, mental health and addiction are some of the main problems parents face. Due to their own difficulties, parents can neglect their children and also have difficulty in accepting services and our oversight.
- It is difficult to find foster families for sibling groups and adolescents in Montgomery County. Siblings may have to be separated in different homes and visitation has to be arranged and overseen by social workers. We need additional foster families in Montgomery County who are willing to take on sibling groups and youth with multiple challenges.
- There is a need to find more mentors/connections for youth transitioning out of foster care. Although we have the Directions and the YMCA mentoring programs, more mentors are needed, and these mentors need to be well trained to deal with the difficult situations these youth present.
- Finding affordable housing for youth is extremely difficult. Many of the youth are going to school part time and working part time and they do not earn enough money to maintain an apartment. We are exploring programs in other states to determine how they are handling this problem and continuing to pursue private and federal funding opportunities.
- Voluntary Placements present a challenge in that parents can place their children with CWS when they cannot handle the child's problems any longer. Most of the children involved are over age 15 and due to their problems are placed in residential treatment centers or group homes. Currently there are 18 youth in Voluntary Placement and several more who are now under court jurisdiction as Children in Need of Assistance.



Differential Response to Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect

What's Inside:

- Defining differential response
- Why the growing interest in differential response?
- Experience in the field
- Evaluation findings
- Opportunities for improving child welfare practice
- Guiding principles for implementation
- For more information

This issue brief was developed by Child Welfare Information Gateway, with contributions from Patricia Schene, Ph.D., of Patricia Schene and Associates, LLC. This document is made possible by the Children's Bureau, Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The conclusions discussed here are solely the responsibility of the authors and do not represent the official views or policies of the funding agency.



During the past several decades, child protective services (CPS) agencies have been challenged by large volumes of child abuse and neglect reports, growing caseloads involving increasingly complex problems, and limited resources (U.S. General Accounting Office, 1997; Shusterman, Hollinshead, Fluke, & Yuan, 2005). At the same time, there has been growing recognition that "one size does not fit all" in responding to child maltreatment reports. As a result, State and local CPS agencies have introduced significant reforms to child protection systems. One such reform is differential response, in which CPS agencies offer both traditional investigations and assessment alternatives to families reported for child abuse and neglect, depending on the severity of the allegation and other considerations.

The introduction of differential response has been driven by the desire to:

- Be more flexible in responding to child abuse and neglect reports
- Recognize that an adversarial focus is neither needed nor helpful for all cases
- Understand better the family issues that lie beneath maltreatment reports
- Engage parents more effectively to use services that address their specific needs

This issue brief provides an overview of differential response and highlights lessons learned through research and experience. The brief was written primarily for child welfare administrators and policymakers, particularly those who may be considering implementation or expansion of differential response. It also may be useful to CPS caseworkers, community partners who work with vulnerable children and families, and others interested in strategies to improve child protection.

This issue brief reflects a review of selected research efforts and recent literature on differential response. A list of references and other resources is presented at the end of the brief. To highlight key issues, this brief draws from a few sources in particular:

- Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation (ASPE) and Children's Bureau reports from the *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts (Literature Review, Review of State CPS Policy, and Findings from Local CPS Practices)* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001, 2003a, & 2003b)
- *National Study on Differential Response in Child Welfare*, published jointly by American Humane and the Child Welfare League of America (Merkel-Holguin, Kaplan, & Kwak, 2006)
- *Differential Response in Child Welfare*, a special issue of the American Humane journal, *Protecting Children* (Merkel-Hoguin, L., Ed., Volume 20, Numbers 2 & 3, 2005)
- Mallon & Hess' (Eds.) book, *Child Welfare for the Twenty-First Century: A Handbook of Practices, Policies, and Programs* (2005)
- National Child Welfare Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice's Spring 2001 issue of *Best Practice, Next Practice* (Schene, 2001)
- ASPE study summarizing *Alternative Responses to Child Maltreatment: Findings from NCANDS* (Shusterman, et al., 2005)

Defining Differential Response

Differential response is a CPS practice that allows for more than one method of initial response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Also called “dual track,” “multiple track,” or “alternative response,” this approach recognizes variation in the nature of reports and the value of responding differently to different types of cases (Schene, 2001).

While definitions and approaches vary from State to State, differential response generally uses two or more “tracks” or paths of response to reports of child abuse and neglect. Typically, these responses fall into two major categories:

- **Investigation.** These responses involve gathering forensic evidence and require a formal determination regarding whether child maltreatment has occurred or the child is at risk of abuse or neglect. In a differential response system, investigation responses are generally used for reports of the most severe types of maltreatment or those that are potentially criminal.
- **Assessment (alternative response).** These responses—usually applied in low- and moderate-risk cases—generally involve assessing the family’s strengths and needs and offering services to meet the family’s needs and support positive parenting. Although a formal determination or substantiation of child abuse or neglect may be made in some cases, it is typically not required.

However, not all jurisdictions that employ differential response focus simply on choosing an assessment or investigation track. In some

areas, there is more variation in types of response. Additional tracks may include a resource referral/prevention track for reports that do not meet screening criteria for CPS but suggest a need for community services, or a law enforcement track for cases that may require criminal charges.

Similarities Between Differential Response and Traditional CPS

While introducing a more flexible way of responding to reports, differential response systems still share many underlying principles with the traditional child protection approach. Both:

- Focus on the safety and well-being of the child
- Promote permanency within the family whenever possible
- Recognize the authority of CPS to make decisions about removal, out-of-home placement, and court involvement, when necessary
- Acknowledge that other community services may be more appropriate than CPS in some cases

Differential response systems acknowledge that investigations are necessary in some cases. They typically allow for changes in the response track if circumstances change or information emerges that indicates a different type of response is needed to ensure child safety or better respond to the family.

The *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003a), which included a survey of a nationally representative sample of local CPS agencies,

found that despite the differences in focus, many of the approaches and practices used in conducting investigations and alternative responses were similar. During investigations, almost all agencies reviewed CPS records, interviewed or formally observed the child, and interviewed the caregiver. A slightly lower proportion of agencies conducted the same activities during alternative responses. Under both responses, a majority of agencies sometimes discussed the case with other CPS workers or with a multidisciplinary team, visited the family, and interviewed professionals.

Differences Between Assessment and Investigation Approaches

In traditional child protection practice, all accepted reports receive an investigation response. Investigations are conducted to determine if children have been harmed or are at risk of being harmed and to provide protection if needed. In differential response systems, investigations are no longer the singular focus of CPS response to reports of child maltreatment. While investigations are conducted for some reports (typically the more serious and severe), assessment is used for most other screened-in reports.

In comparison to investigations, assessment responses tend to:

- Be less adversarial
- Focus more on understanding the conditions that could jeopardize the child's safety and the factors that need to be addressed to strengthen the family
- Tailor approaches and services to fit families' strengths, needs, and resources

- Place importance on engaging parents to recognize concerns that affect their ability to parent and to participate in services and supports
- Tap into community services and the family's natural support network
- Offer voluntary services

Unlike investigations, assessment responses typically do not require caseworkers to make a formal finding regarding whether child abuse or neglect occurred, identify victims and perpetrators, or enter perpetrator names into central registries.

For a comparison of the two approaches, see Table 1 on page 5.

Why the Growing Interest in Differential Response?

A number of factors explain the growing national interest in differential response. Some of the most significant are discussed below, including limitations of traditional CPS practice, recognition of the importance of family engagement, and an increased focus on accountability and outcomes.

Limitations of Traditional CPS Practice

In the two decades following the passage of the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) of 1974, reports of abuse and neglect rose sharply, reaching 3 million per year in the mid-1990s without a corresponding increase in available staff. In response, CPS practice became more bureaucratic, standardized, and legalistic (Farrow, 1997).

Table 1
Comparison Between Investigation and Assessment Approaches¹

	Investigation	Assessment
Focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Did an incident of child abuse or neglect occur? • Who was responsible? • What steps need to be taken to ensure the child's safety? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What underlying conditions and factors may jeopardize the child's safety? • What strengths and resources exist within the family and community? • What areas of family functioning need to be strengthened?
Goal	To determine the "findings" related to allegations in the report and identify perpetrators and victims.	To engage parents, extended family, and community partners in identifying problems and participating in services and supports that address family needs.
Disposition	A decision must be made whether to substantiate the allegation of maltreatment.	Caseworkers are not typically required to make a formal finding regarding whether child maltreatment occurred.
Central Registry	Perpetrators' names are entered into a central registry, in accordance with State statutes and policies.	Alleged perpetrators' names are not entered into a central registry.
Services	If a case is opened for services, a case plan is generally written and services are provided. Families can be ordered by the court to participate in services if CPS involves the court in the case.	Voluntary services are offered. If parents do not participate, the case is either closed or switched to another type of response.

At the same time, families coming into the system were experiencing multiple and increasingly complex problems, such as co-occurring substance abuse, mental health, and domestic violence issues. As the numbers and severity of cases overwhelmed CPS agencies, many States adopted narrower definitions for forwarding a report on for formal investigation, and those investigations became more rigorous (Daro, Budde, Baker, Nesmith, & Harden, 2005). These conditions combined to create seemingly conflicting objectives for CPS: investigate and sanction

perpetrators of maltreatment, while providing therapeutic and support services to families to address complex problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2001).

In this context, a growing dissatisfaction with traditional CPS practices contributed to the emergence of differential response systems. This dissatisfaction reflects several perceived shortcomings in a system focused predominantly on investigation, including:

- **Limited capacity for response.** While every State has legal mandates for CPS to

¹ Adapted from Schene, 2005, p.5.

respond to all legitimate reports of child abuse and neglect, overwhelmed agencies with heavy caseloads and limited resources cannot thoroughly consider risks and needs in all accepted reports. Some legitimate reports—frequently those judged to be of lower risk or severity—are screened out or closed without further action.

- **Adversarial orientation.** Investigations help CPS to identify victims and provide evidence for prosecution of perpetrators in the most severe cases. Parents and caregivers often, understandably, perceive investigations as accusatory and are fearful of the threat of out-of-home placement of their children if they agree to receive in-home services while being monitored by the investigative agency. This can make parents less willing to accept services and less motivated to change their behavior.
- **Low rates of services.** Some argue that many families are inappropriately subjected to intrusive interventions that lead to little in the way of services. Nationally, less than 30 percent of reports of suspected child maltreatment result in substantiation of abuse or neglect, and even fewer are opened for ongoing services.
- **Family problems not addressed.** Although immediate safety issues are normally resolved before a CPS case is closed, the underlying causes for those threats to safety frequently are not. As a result, many families experience subsequent maltreatment reports while their problems, stresses, and issues remain unresolved.

As a result of these issues, CPS agencies with a focus on investigation have been perceived both as being overly intrusive into family life and as not doing enough to protect children

(Schene, 2005; Schene, 2001; Farrow, 1997; Waldfogel, 1998; Orr, 1999).

The child welfare community has been open to approaches that can be more immediately helpful to families and that can promise more lasting change. Differential response developed largely as a way to overcome the limitations identified in the traditional response by differentiating among the types of situations reported, recognizing that adversarial investigations can create barriers to working with families effectively, and finding ways to protect children and stabilize families through comprehensive assessments followed by connections to existing community-based services and supports.

Recognition of the Importance of Family Engagement

A second force behind the emergence of differential response is a growing recognition of the importance of family-centered practice and, specifically, family engagement. Family-centered practices, such as family team meetings, are generally understood to improve the level of cooperation with services compared to investigations that lack more comprehensive assessments and individualized service planning. Family involvement in the assessment and service planning process fosters a shared understanding about how the family got to the point of a maltreatment report, what needs to change, what services might help, and who is expected to do what, by when. Differential response systems leverage opportunities to engage families, identify motivations to change, build on family strengths, and involve extended family networks and community supports in protecting children (Schene, 2005).

Increased Focus on Accountability and Outcomes

A third factor in the evolution of differential response systems is the growing interest in establishing accountability for agency actions beginning with the passage of the 1994 amendments to the Social Security Act. The introduction of the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSRs) has heightened awareness within the child welfare community that the work of child protection should be measured against the outcomes of safety, permanency, and child well-being. The findings of the initial round of reviews indicated serious deficiencies in most jurisdictions in the area of assessments of children and families and indicated that improvements in this area could lead to better outcomes. As a result, many jurisdictions are paying attention to the value of responding more individually to reports and learning more about what has to change in each family to achieve and sustain a better end result.

Experience in the Field

During the past two decades, differential response systems have been implemented in more than two dozen States across the country. Some jurisdictions are still in the early stages of implementation, with just a few pilot sites, while others are expanding or institutionalizing their systems statewide. This section discusses what we know about States and local agencies that have adopted differential response, what those systems have in common, and how they differ.

Prevalence

According to *The National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003a), 20 States had identifiable policies in 2001 that reflected differential or alternative response.² The policy review portion of the study noted that 11 States had implemented the approach statewide, although not uniformly, while in other States differential response was available only in demonstration or pilot sites (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003a).

The local agency survey of the same study found that approximately two-thirds (64 percent) of local agencies nationwide (1,660) were conducting both investigations and some alternative to investigation (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2003b). While 2001 is the last year for which such Federal data were collected, similar reforms have since been adopted or are being considered by additional agencies.

Between 2005 and 2006, American Humane and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA) conducted a study of differential response to build upon the 2003 *National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts*. Their report includes State and county profiles of differential response efforts, as well as responses from some States/counties to a descriptive survey on the topic (Merkel-Holguin, Kaplan, & Kwak, 2006). It identified 15 States with differential response initiatives, as well as 3 States whose previous

² *The National Study of Child Protective Services Systems and Reform Efforts* used the following definition of alternative response: "a formal response of [the] agency that assesses the needs of the child or family without requiring a determination that maltreatment has occurred or that the child is at risk of maltreatment."

DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES
SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION
311 WEST SARATOGA STREET
BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21201

DATE: May 15, 2013

POLICY #: SSA# 13-13

TO: Directors, Local Departments of Social Services
Assistant Directors, Child Welfare Services

FROM: Carnitra D. White,
Executive Director
Social Services Administration

RE: Alternative Response

PROGRAMS AFFECTED: Child Protective Services, In-Home Services, Out of Home Placement

ORIGINATING OFFICE: Office of Child Welfare and Adult Services Programs

ACTION REQUIRED OF: All Local Departments

REQUIRED ACTION: Implementation of Alternative Response

ACTION DUE DATE: July 1, 2013 – July 1, 2014 (according to the phase in plan outlined in the Background section of this Policy Directive)

CONTACT PERSON: Steve Berry, Manager
In-Home Services
410-767-7108

Deborah Ramelmeier, Deputy Executive Director
Child Welfare and Adult Services Programs
410-767-7506

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this policy is to provide direction as to the implementation of Alternative Response in the State of Maryland.

BACKGROUND:

Over the years, Child Protective Services (CPS) workers have seen an increase in complex cases and a larger volume of referrals, coupled with a reduction in resources. Nearly half of the referrals are screened out. Of those approved for investigation, findings of abuse and neglect are made in fewer than half the cases. Across the country, more states are recognizing that many of the CPS referrals do not require a traditional investigative response to ensure the safety of children. Practice has shifted to provide an "Alternative Response" to CPS referrals where risk to children is lower and the labeling of caretakers as abusers or neglectors would serve little purpose. Best Practices show that partnering collaboratively with families leads to increased engagement and service utilization. Rather than an "Investigative Response," which involves a more forensic approach, the Alternative Response for these families emphasizes the completion of an assessment to determine the needs of the family and children and the services necessary to strengthen and preserve families. In May 2012, Governor Martin O'Malley approved the passage of House Bill 834, Child Abuse and Neglect-Alternative Response, and authorized the Secretary of Human Resources to establish an Alternative Response program for specified child abuse and neglect reports.

This law requires the Department to create an Alternative Response Council to plan for creating a Child Protective Services (CPS) system that has an Investigative and Alternative Response available for allegations accepted for a CPS response. One of the first recommendations made by the Council and accepted by the Secretary is to phase in implementation of the dual path system over a year beginning July 1, 2013. Phase I jurisdictions (Garrett, Allegany, Washington, Frederick and Montgomery County) are scheduled to go live on July 1, 2013. The remaining phases are as follows: Phase II jurisdictions are Howard, Baltimore, Carroll, Harford and Cecil counties. Phase III jurisdictions are Anne Arundel, Prince George's, Calvert, Charles and St. Mary's counties. Phase IV jurisdictions are Kent, Queen Anne's, Caroline, Talbot, Dorchester, Somerset, Wicomico and Worcester counties. Phase V is for Baltimore City. Implementation dates for Phase II – V will be announced several months prior to their go live date. This policy becomes effective for jurisdictions as they go live.

OVERVIEW:**How Does Alternative Response Work?**

Alternative Response is an approach other than an investigation to work with individuals and families in response to a credible report that a child has been abused or neglected. Alternative Response may only be considered if the alleged maltreatment meets the threshold for Child Protective Services (CPS) intervention. After a case is "screened in," local staff will evaluate the information obtained from the reporting source and determine whether the case should be assigned for an Investigative Response or for an Alternative Response. Both approaches will address the family's needs and put in place appropriate measures to protect the child. If the Local Department elects an Alternative Response, the agency will not conduct a formal investigation or

identify a particular individual as responsible for maltreatment in a central registry or case file. Instead, after meeting the family, the caseworker will conduct a full assessment and engage with the family to jointly determine what services would benefit the family. The decision to forgo an investigation will be made in accordance with this policy, weighing the type of maltreatment, the level of risk of harm or endangerment to any child in the home, and the family's history of involvement with the agency.

Screening protocols:

The Screening process is the same. A screener uses the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tool and makes a recommendation as to whether to screen in the report to a supervisor, who makes the final decision. Once the decision to screen in a case has been made, the supervisor will determine whether the case will be assigned for Alternative Response or an Investigative Response. This decision is based upon information known at the time of the screening call and any relevant information in MD CHESSIE, the Maryland Judiciary Case Search, and the Sexual Offender Registry regarding identified adults in the home and alleged perpetrators. Workers and supervisors are not expected to gather additional information from other sources in order to make this pathway decision.

Eligibility for Alternative Response:

All cases that meet the criteria for child abuse and neglect may be considered for assignment for an Alternative Response, except as outlined in the two sections below.

Mandatory Disqualifying Criteria

The case may not be referred for Alternative Response if one or more of the following factors are present:

- Sexual abuse
- Abuse or neglect that occurs in an out-of-home placement (resource home, Child Placement Agency (CPA), group home)
- Abuse or neglect resulting in death or serious physical or mental injury
- Level of case severity/risk is moderate to high
- Report meets criteria for Mental Injury Investigation
- Signs or diagnosis of failure to thrive
- The individual suspected of child maltreatment has been identified as responsible for abuse or neglect in the previous 3 year period as documented in agency case record
- The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had one report assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 12 months
- The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had two reports assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 24 months
- An active investigation or alternative response is in progress

Discretionary Disqualifying Factors:

If none of the disqualifying factors listed above are present, the Local Department must consider whether it has other information that leads to a conclusion that Alternative Response

would not be the most appropriate intervention to meet the needs of the family or ensure the safety of the children. The supervisor should take into account the following factors in making this determination. The mere existence of one of the discretionary factors listed below does not rule out assignment to Alternative Response but should be taken into account:

- Reported history of a family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment which may include:
 - Family refuses worker access to a child
 - Family refuses to discuss allegations
 - Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern
 - Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child
- Multiple similar reports (within 120 days)
- Allegations that the maltreater is responsible for domestic violence currently occurring in the home
- Criminal history bearing on child safety
- A current expressed threat of serious harm to child
- A need for law enforcement assistance
- Court ordered Investigation

Reassignment between Pathways:

After initiating an Alternative Response and making contact with the child and family and gathering information, a worker may find it appropriate for the case to be reassigned to an Investigative Response. Likewise, in the early stages of an Investigative Response, a worker may find it appropriate to have the case reassigned for an Alternative Response. A decision relating to reassignment must be made as soon as the worker becomes aware that reassignment may be appropriate. If a worker recommends reassignment, the worker will contact his or her supervisor promptly to discuss the possible referral for an Investigative Response or Alternative Response. All reassignments must have supervisory approval.

Reassignment between pathways does not "restart" the statutory timeframes for initiating and completing an Alternative Response or an Investigative Response. The begin date remains the date the case was screened in as meeting criteria for a child protective services report. A reassignment does not require a change in worker assignment.

A report assigned for an Alternative Response may be reassigned for an Investigative Response at any time based upon:

- A reassessment of the report or relevant facts
- A determination that the case involves one of the mandatory disqualifying factors;
- A family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment, which may include:
 - Family refuses worker access to a child
 - Family refuses to discuss allegations
 - Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern

- Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child
- Subsequent “screened in” allegation of maltreatment received during active AR
 - Note that this is a mandatory reassignment that will automatically be completed by MD CHESSIE system upon supervisor approval of new “screened in” report.

A report assigned for an Investigative Response may be reassigned for an Alternative Response at any time based on:

- A reassessment of the report or relevant facts that demonstrate that the case meets the criteria for an alternative response AND
- A determination that accepted services would address all issues of risk of abuse or neglect and child safety.

If the worker determines in the course of an Investigative Response that there is no credible evidence of child abuse and neglect such that the proper finding is “Ruled Out,” the case should be closed with that finding and not be reassigned to an Alternative Response.

New referral received during IR or AR

If a subsequent report is received while there is an active AR or IR, the following actions will be taken:

- If the allegations are substantially similar to the initial report that led to the AR or IR and there are no new allegations of maltreatment, the report is “screened out” as a duplicate report. The information relating to the subsequent report shall be forwarded to the active worker.
- If the report contains a new allegation and is “screened in” as meeting criteria, a new investigation is opened to make a finding as to the new allegation. If the case is currently open as an AR, the case will be immediately reassigned for an investigative response. The worker would then make a finding as to the original and subsequent allegations.

CASEWORK PROCESS

Time Frames:

The required timeframes for Alternative Response mirror those for Investigative Response; initial contact must be made within 24 hours of acceptance for physical abuse and 5 days for neglect. The entire Alternative Response assessment process may not exceed 60 days. All of the following actions must be taken within the 24-hour/5-day timeframes:

- See the child and the child’s parents or primary caretaker (visit should take place in the home whenever possible)
- Solicit parents cooperation to interview the child separately
- Complete a Safety Assessment on ALL children in the household and determine safety of the child, wherever the child is, plus all other children in the household
- Determine safety of other children in the care or custody of the individual suspected of abuse or neglect

- Advise the appropriate law enforcement agency that the report has been assigned for Alternative Response, if the law enforcement agency made the report of abuse or neglect
- Inform the individual suspected of child abuse or neglect of the allegations made against the individual in a manner consistent with laws protecting the rights of the person who made the report.

Assessment Procedure:

Alternative Response requires a full family assessment, which includes:

- Completion of Safety Assessment
- Completion of Risk Assessment
- Completion of Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (CANS-F)
- Evaluation of the child's home environment (during home visit)
- Discussion with child's caregiver and family members about their service needs, focusing upon strength building
- Develop a safety plan addressing the safety of the child or children in the household and the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect

The assessment is initiated by contacting the family to set up a home visit within the guidelines listed in the previous section. If the visit cannot be set up within the required timeframes, the worker should ask the parents for permission to see the child/ren at his or her school or day care or other mutually agreed upon setting for the purposes of safety assessment.

The assessment is a collaborative effort that involves the family in all conclusions and recommendations for service provision. Workers shall ensure that parents and children are approached in a non-adversarial manner and allow all family members to participate in the assessment process, as developmentally appropriate. Assessing and ensuring child safety and risk of maltreatment must always be paramount in all interactions with a family during the AR assessment. The tenets and procedures related to Family Centered Practice are to be applied in work with families receiving an Alternative Response.

Identification and Resolution of Service Needs:

During the course of an Alternative Response, immediate services may be needed depending upon the risk assessment and safety plan. The worker shall complete all of the following actions:

- Render any appropriate services in the best interests of the child(ren) to address any immediate issues of safety and risk
- Refer the family and child(ren) for additional services if needed
- Establish a plan to monitor the safety plan and the provision or completion of appropriate services as is necessary to ensure the safety of the child/ren and other children in the household.

Completion of Assessment and Case Closure

An Alternative Response Assessment shall be completed within 60 days after acceptance of the report and submitted to the worker's supervisor for approval.

Within 10 days of completing the Alternative Response Assessment, the Department shall provide a written report to the family members who are participating in the AR Assessment as to whether and what services are necessary to address both the safety of the child or other children in the household and the risk of subsequent abuse or neglect.

If the family requires services beyond the 60-day window, the case should be considered for transfer to In-Home Consolidated Services. If the case does not meet criteria to receive services via In-Home Services, the local department shall make appropriate referrals and linkages to community agencies before closing the case.

The Alternative Response case may be closed any time prior to 60 days if:

- The family declines to accept services and there are no safety issues regarding the children in the home and no grounds to sustain a Child in Need of Assistance petition;
- The family has been linked to appropriate community resources to stabilize the family and does not need ongoing services from the Department; or
- The issues that brought the family to the Department's attention have been resolved and there is no current need for services.

Transfer to In-Home Consolidated Services:

- If any of the children are "conditionally safe" (per SAFE-C) or the risk assessment indicates moderate-high risk, the case should be transferred to In-Home Consolidated Services for continued service provision

Record Retention:

The local Department shall maintain complete records related to an Alternative Response and services for 3 years after the report was received. If there is no subsequent child welfare involvement during the 3 years, the records will be expunged. If there is subsequent child welfare involvement within the 3 years, the record shall not be expunged.

Release of Information Pertaining to Alternative Response Records

Alternative Response is a child protective services intervention and records are subject to all laws pertaining to the protection of and/or disclosure of child protective services records. These records may be made available in any subsequent Child in Need of Assistance proceedings to the same extent as investigative records.

The presence of an Alternative Response record shall not be released in response to a 3rd party background request for child protective services history.

MD CHESSIE Instructions:

Pathway Determination

After the supervisor approves the report as “screened in”, the CPS response type window will appear. The system will default to CPS-AR unless the user selects one of the mandatory or discretionary disqualifiers. The radio button will change to CPS-IR if the user selects one of the options. The grayed out options are system selected based upon selections made under Structured Decision Making and are not user selected. When User selects “ok” (with CPS-AR enabled), a popup window will appear to confirm that user wants to assign the case to CPS-AR. If the user responds “no”, the user will not leave the CPS Response Type screen. If user responds “yes”, the Assign/Transfer screen will appear and case can be assigned to a worker.

CPS Response Type - Referrals (#9318840)

<p>Mandatory Disqualifying Criteria</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Sexual Abuse<input type="checkbox"/> Abuse or neglect that occurs in an out-of-home placement (resource home, Child Placement Agency (CPA), group home)<input type="checkbox"/> Abuse or neglect resulting in death or serious physical or mental injury<input type="checkbox"/> Level of case severity/risk is moderate to high<input type="checkbox"/> Report meets criteria for Mental Injury Investigation<input type="checkbox"/> Signs or diagnosis of failure to thrive<input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of child maltreatment has been identified as responsible for abuse or neglect in the previous 3 year period as documented in agency case record<input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had one report assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 12 months.<input type="checkbox"/> The individual suspected of abuse or neglect has had two reports assigned to Alternative Response within the prior 24 months.<input type="checkbox"/> An active investigation or alternative response is in progress	<p>Discretionary Disqualifying Factors</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Reported history of a family's inability or refusal to participate in the Alternative Response assessment which may include:<ul style="list-style-type: none">-Family refuses worker access to a child-Family refuses to discuss allegations-Family refuses to cooperate and risk and safety are a concern-Family rejects the services necessary to address immediate safety issues for the child<input type="checkbox"/> Multiple similar reports (within 120 days)<input type="checkbox"/> Allegations that the maltreater is responsible for domestic violence currently occurring in the home<input type="checkbox"/> Criminal history bearing on child safety<input type="checkbox"/> A current expressed threat of serious harm to child<input type="checkbox"/> A need for law enforcement assistance<input type="checkbox"/> Court ordered investigation
--	--

CPS Response Type
 CPS-AR CPS-IR

Service Planning

Users will have access to Safety Agreement and Safety Plan forms on the Child Protective Services tree.

CPS Response Reassignment

User selects “CPS Response Reassignment” folder in tree to get to screen

Child Protective Services - Mouse, Mickey - AR#2775460
CPS Response Reassignment

Case Head: Mouse, Mickey
CPS ID: 2775460
CPS Approved Date: 07/19/2013

CPS Response Reassignment History

Date	Initial CPS Response Type	CPS Response Change	Reason for Change	Approval Date
07/19/2013	CPS-AR	CPS-IR		00/00/0000

CPS Response Reassignment Details

Date: 07/19/2013
Initial CPS Response Type: CPS-AR
CPS Response Change: CPS-IR
Reason for Change:
Approval Dt: 00/00/0000
Notes:
[Approval](#)

User selects “new”, the information in the highlighted line will system populate. Worker selects reason for change and adds notes. User “saves” and Approval hyperlink will activate. User sends for supervisory approval. Once the supervisor approves, the CPS type will change on the folder, giving the worker access to folders for the new CPS Type. NOTE: After approval, the information in the AR Summary screen and the IR Investigation findings screen will be deleted upon transfer between types. If the case is reassigned back to original response type, the user will have to fill out the screens again. The maltreatment folder will transfer between CPS types.

Alternative Response Summary Screen

1. Reason for AR referral - brief description of what brought family to DSS attention
2. Children participating - User selects children from “select” hyperlink. Must be confirmed as clients, under age 18 and be “participating as child” on demographic screen
3. Individuals Participating - Includes all adults participating in the AR. Must be confirmed as clients
4. Services Interventions - Select hyperlink provides multi select drop down
5. Services Address AR - required if services were provided. If no services were provided, enter “no services provided”
6. Issues Requiring further Intervention - User entered narrative
7. Recommendations - User entered narrative
8. Case Closure – User selects radio button. If select “Referred to Community Resources”, user selects from hyperlink. If select “referred to DSS program”, user will make selections from radio buttons at bottom left. In Home and Out of Home should rarely be selected together.

Child Protective Services - Mouse, Mickey (AR#2775460)
 Alternative Response Information - Alternative Response Summary

New Save Delete Close

Summary **Detail**

Case Head: Mouse, Mickey CPS ID: 2775460
 AR Assessment Start Date: 07/19/2013 AR Assessment Closure Date: 00/00/0000

Reason for AR Referral: Test Edit

1

Children Participating in Incident Select

Client ID	Client Name	Cis Client ID
3490921	Minney Mouse	499009949

2

Individuals Participating in the AR Assessment Select

Client ID	Client Name	Cis Client ID
3490920	Mickey Mouse	499009948

3

Child Protective Services - Mouse, Mickey (AR#2775460)
 Alternative Response Information - Alternative Response Summary

New Save Delete Close

Summary **Detail**

Services and Interventions Provided to the family to mitigate Safety and Risk Issues: Select

4 Counseling

How did the services provided address the reason for AR referral? Edit

5 dfg

Issues requiring further interventions: Edit

6 dfg

Recommendations for the Family: Edit

7 dfg

Case Closure Status: Clients referred to community services Select

8 In-Home Services Out-of-Home Services Family Investment Services Counseling Select

Alternative Response Summary Approval

User completes Summary and Detail tabs and then submits for supervisory approval. Once supervisor approves, the case is closed and it is removed from the user's tree. User will print out the Summary to send to AR participants from hyperlink (similar process as for 181 in CPS-IR).

Montgomery County, Maryland



Child Welfare Services

2013 Annual Report



Children, Youth and Family Services • Child Welfare Services

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CHILD WELFARE SERVICES OFFICE LOCATIONS

MISSION STATEMENT

To protect children,
preserve families,
strengthen communities,
ensure permanency and
well-being for every
abused and neglected child
in Montgomery County.

APPROACH

Child Welfare Services
advocates an integrated
service strategy to
assure the safety and
well-being of children,
youth and families.

OUR VISION

A future where
children are safe,
families are stable
and communities are
strong.

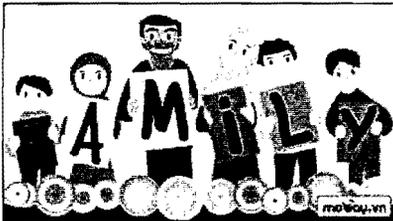
CHILD WELFARE SERVICES GOALS

Provide family-focused, community-oriented services that adhere to national standards of best practice and result in positive outcomes for children and families.

Advocate for essential services to children & families.

Create a work environment that attracts and retains competent and diverse staff, and promotes professional development and leadership.

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



This has been another very successful year in our efforts to do a better and better job of protecting children, supporting families and providing other necessary services. We reduced the number of children in out of home placement, reduced the number of youth in group homes and finalized many adoptions. CWS continues to be a key member of the Montgomery County Health and Human Services team and a strong partner of the Maryland Department of Human Resources.

As a result of our focus on Family Centered Practice (FCP), more children were able to remain with their parents and many other children were placed with relatives; in both situations, we provided supportive services to bolster the family's efforts. Family Involvement Meetings (FIM), during which the family gathers with others who are a part of their support system, continued to increase in number this year again were highly successful. We also introduced a new state initiative, Alternative Response, which seeks to engage parents in identifying the services they need to provide safe parenting. As a result of family meetings, more intensive family finding efforts, and alternative response strategies, more relatives and community members were available to provide parents with needed supports.

Our highly dedicated staff and our strong community partners are the keys to our successful work with vulnerable children and youth and their families. Our staff continues to provide outstanding care and services to a large number of children and families, many from diverse backgrounds. Our efforts are greatly enhanced because of the work of our wonderful, supportive partners both in government and in the community.

In the coming year, we will focus on providing caring, effective services to protect children and support families. We will continue our emphasis on family-centered practice strategies and outreach to communities, intensify our attempts to find relatives, and expand our efforts to identify new foster and adoptive parents. We are committed to maintaining children in their homes to the extent possible and to providing high quality services to families, all in an effort to keep Montgomery County's children safe from abuse and neglect and achieve their full potential.

Agnes Farkas Leshner

Director
Child Welfare Services

CHILD WELFARE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT – FISCAL YEAR 2013

THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a complex system offering a wide range of services to assess and ensure child safety and well-being. Social workers conduct assessments to determine first, whether an intervention is needed and then, the most appropriate intervention. In some situations there is no need for services and the case can be closed. In other situations services are provided by a community agency. If problems are considered serious but the child can remain in the home, social workers provide services to parents and regularly visit the family. If children cannot remain safely in their home, they are temporarily placed with relatives or with a foster family. If, over time, it becomes clear that reunification with the parents is not possible, permanent placement with a relative or an adoptive family is an alternative. Having a safe, permanent living arrangement is our ultimate goal for all children.

SERVICES WE PROVIDE

The Screening Unit is the single point of entry for all Child Welfare Services cases. During the past fiscal year, Screening received a total of 9,069 telephone calls. Social workers in this unit receive calls from citizens and professionals in our community, as well as calls from other state agencies seeking assistance with child maltreatment and family problems. Following state policy, social workers use the Structured Decision Making, an evidenced-based tool to determine if a child protective services intervention is warranted. Social workers evaluate each referral carefully to determine if there is a need for an investigation/assessment of the maltreatment allegation and/or to refer the callers to other community services to assist the family.



Assessment Units investigate allegations of physical and sexual child abuse and neglect, and then evaluate the need for services to ensure child safety and promote family preservation. This past year, social workers investigated 2,665 families. Of that number, neglect investigations/allegations accounted for 58% of the total, while 30% were physical abuse, 11% were sexual abuse, and less than 1% were due to mental injury. The social workers also conducted 280 assessments for other jurisdictions and the Courts.

SERVICES TO FAMILIES

In-Home Services

In-Home services were provided to 372 families when abuse or neglect had occurred, but the children were able to safely remain in the home. These were all instances in which children were not in imminent danger and the family agreed to receive a variety of services from Child Welfare social workers and community providers. Services were home based and time limited in an effort to help support and educate parents. An average of 133 families were provided services each month.

Safe & Stable Families

Through a grant from the Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR), CWS established an evidence-based model of intervention for adolescents who are “hard to manage” by their parents and are at risk for out-of-home placement. The Safe & Stable Families program offers intensive In-Home interventions beginning with an assessment of the child’s environment and the family’s functioning to establish a service plan incorporating the values of safety and well-being into the service delivery. The targets of these interventions were adolescents



referred to CWS with serious “out of control” behaviors and parents lacking the skills and knowledge to advocate for mental health, educational, and social services necessary to stabilize the crisis. The focus was improved family functioning, maintaining youth in their communities, and reinforcing the family system so that youth can safely remain with their families. The program worked with 47 children in 26 families during the past year and all the children remained in their home. Only one family re-entered the system after services had been provided.

During the year, the program saw several trends: many of the target children were female; there were increasing financial stressors among the families; there was an increase in drug/alcohol use; and many families were foreign-born. In addition, increased problem behaviors occurred when teens were not engaged in summer job/positive activities, and when there were insufficient after-school activities for them.

Kinship Care

Kinship Care is considered the placement option of choice if a child cannot be safely maintained in his/her own home, and if the kinship placement can meet the needs of the child in a healthy, stable, safe, and nurturing home. Kinship Care Services maintain the family system as the primary source of care for children, and preserve the continuity of care, culture, relationships, and environment essential for the child’s well-being. In Fiscal year 2013 (FY13), an average of 86 children each month lived with relatives in formal kinship care placements. Over that twelve month period, 48 children’s cases were closed with permanent Custody and Guardianship being awarded to their relatives. This number was double the goal set for Montgomery County by Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR).

Kinship Navigator Services Program

The Kinship Navigator Program is an In-Home, voluntary program that provides supportive services to informal kinship caregivers caring for a minor child(ren) as a result of arrangements with the child’s parent(s) without the involvement of Child Welfare Services.

The Kinship Navigator Program provides services to support families in maintaining relative child(ren) in the caregiver’s home, works to support and promote safety, assist and improve the well-being and permanency of children, provide referrals for services, and access to information along with help in finding community resources to meet the needs of these children. Informal kinship caregivers are offered a monthly support group to address the needs of caregivers and children. The support group provides the informal kinship caregivers a place where connections can be made with others in the same situation, networking can occur, support is received, suggestions may be found to address specific issues, and where caregivers tend to gain a sense of empowerment and control.



This fiscal year the Kinship Navigator Program was able to divert 68 families, including 108 children, from becoming court-involved Child Welfare Service cases. The Kinship Navigator Program assisted 16 families in gaining legal custody and guardianship for the relative children in their homes.

Foster Care

Abused or neglected children, unable to remain safely in their homes, are provided temporary "Out-of-Home Care" services. Along with case management and reunification services provided by an assigned social worker, the focus is improving the conditions which led to the initial safety concerns. The goal is to reduce the time children remain out of their homes. If reunification is not possible, the social worker explores other permanent living arrangements for the children. The social worker's ultimate plan, in conjunction with the family, is to have each child in a stable, permanent placement (home and family) that allows the child to grow and become a healthy, productive citizen who can contribute positively to society.



In Fiscal Year 2013 (FY13), CWS reduced the number of children in out-of-home care by 15% (402 at the end of FY13 vs. 474 at the end of FY12). Early involvement and intervention with the family's natural supports, such as extended family, friends, and community members, encouraged prevention and reduction in the number of children entering foster care.

Treatment Foster Care

Our agency Treatment Foster families provided a home environment for children with special needs. Twenty families received intensive training to serve children with serious health and/or mental health problems including behaviors that are difficult to manage. The treatment foster care staff continued to provide specialized training to assist foster parents in managing children's needs.

The Treatment Foster Care Program of Montgomery County continued to be one of the only successful public Treatment Foster Care programs in the State of Maryland. The program, which has 20 licensed families, has proven to be a significant cost-saving measure in comparison to private Treatment Foster Care programs. Our program provides the same level of care, treatment and oversight to serious emotionally fragile, medically and behavioral disordered children. The Treatment Foster Care program collaborated with the Foster Parent Association and several other CWS units to organize a Holiday Ice Skating Party which was attended by over 250 participants. Training opportunities continued to be provided to families focusing on crisis management, attachment and communication skills.

In addition, many children were placed with private agencies specialized in licensing therapeutic foster home providers. Social workers monitored an average of 98 children each month in treatment foster homes.

Placement Solutions

The Placement Solutions Unit is charged with providing case management services to children in congregate care and their families. The primary focus of this unit is to resolve the issues that brought these children into foster care so that they can be reunified with their family. Other efforts include searching for extended family to possibly become a permanent placement resource, and helping these youth develop the necessary skills to live independently and be self-sufficient when they leave the foster care system.



One of the tools that social workers use to help these families is participation in Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs). FIMs bring together all the relevant people in the child's life to make a plan for how to best help the child. In FY13, The Placement Solutions Unit served 92 youth and was able to close 5% of those cases. There was a 26% increase in Voluntary Placement cases served by the Placement Solutions unit in FY13.

Foster and Adoptive Families

During the past year CWS maintained a monthly average of 240 approved resource homes. Resource family recruitment and information meetings were held each month in Rockville and were attended by a total of 176 prospective resource families. There were 104 home studies initiated and 46 new resource families were licensed/approved, including guardianship homes in FY13.

The team organized several successful retention events including the Foster Parent Appreciation dinner (100+ attendees), the Foster Family picnic (300+ attendees), the Holiday Skating Party (250+ attendees), and the Wellness Fair (70+ attendees). In addition, there were a variety of trainings held throughout the County (up-County, mid-County, lower County, etc.) offered to the resource families on a variety of topics such as Behavior Support Management and Tax Tips for Resource families, The Importance of Birth Parents, Managing the Helper's Mind, Attachment Disorder and the Family, The Legal Process of Adoption, The Impact of Childhood Trauma, Creating Sexual Safety - Promoting Awareness and Healing in Foster Families, Changing Behaviors of Complicated Children, and Child Abuse and the Brain; plus ongoing resource parent support groups.



Adoption

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services achieved their adoption goal of 31 this past fiscal year. The ages of the children ranged from one to 20 years; and 15 of the children were part of a sibling group (three sibling groups of two and three sibling groups of three). The children were adopted by diverse families, including several families who previously adopted through the County. The agency celebrated National Adoption Day in November 2012 and adoptive families were honored and appreciated for forming Forever Families.



Child Welfare Services held an additional Adoption Day on June 26, 2013. The day began with adoption finalizations at the Montgomery County Circuit Court, followed by a celebration at Dave & Buster's in Rockville. A total of 13 children were adopted by nine families. Over 150 people were in attendance for the celebration.

The Adoption unit managed over 500 adoption subsidy cases, and provided Post-Adoption supportive services to approximately 40 families to prevent adoption dissolution. Approximately 15 adopted children were given financial assistance through the College Tuition Waiver and Education Training Voucher programs. Over 50 children exited the Adoption Subsidy program at the age of 21.

The Adoption Unit also coordinated Child Specific Recruitment for children in need of adoptive resources. These efforts included participation in the NBC4 *Wednesday's Child* program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruitment program, the Heart Gallery, North American Council on Adoptable Children recruitment events, and the Council of Governments recruitment events. In addition, the Birth Search program reunified approximately 15 adoptive children with their biological families.

Transitioning Youth

With a mandate to ensure that all youth are equipped with the skills and supports to transition out of foster care successfully, the Transitioning Youth Services program continues to promote youth engagement and collaboration to facilitate a smooth exit from foster care. Approximately 217 youth received transitioning youth services throughout Child Welfare Services.

Transitioning Youth Services continues to work with teens placed in a variety of settings including foster homes, supervised apartment programs, private rental arrangements and college dormitories. Our Supportive Youth Housing Program provided funding for rent for 10 young adults this year. The ten-week Life Skills course was offered three times over the course of the year. Youth met as a group and had the opportunity to learn new, and strengthen existing skills in a variety of life domains. The annual Teen Conference and Older Youth Summit was held again in FY13 to give our young adults the chance to reinforce their learning in a number of key areas. Our priority continues to be that all of our youth are provided with the supports and services they need to move to an independent



and productive adulthood.

We look forward to our partnership with the 3L Academy: *Live, Learn Lead*, an interdisciplinary and individualized program that will serve transitioning youth ages 18-24. Several community partners have come together to forge this model of youth engagement designed to support our young adults in planning and goal-setting for their futures. A generous grant from the Trawick Foundation will enable this program to serve up to 25 youth for 12 months. Our department's Foster Youth Employment Program received funding for another year and continues to serve approximately 20 young adults at any one time.

The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC)

The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC) of Montgomery County, Maryland, serves child and adolescent victims of sexual and physical abuse, and neglect, along with their non-offending family members. The program provides a child-friendly environment and is a public-private partnership between the Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Primary Care Coalition of Montgomery County (PCC). The Tree House provides integrated services to child victims including forensic interviewing, pediatric medical evaluations, nurse case management, mental health assessments and ongoing therapy, and victim advocacy. Primary funding is obtained through DHHS, and supplemented by federal and local grants, foundations, and donations. Governance and oversight is provided by The Tree House Operations Board and a Community Council.



The Tree House works collaboratively with The Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services, Police/Family Crimes Division, Office of the County Attorney, and the State's Attorney's Office. This multidisciplinary team, (MDT) approach eliminates the trauma that children experience when they are required to talk about their abuse multiple times. Coordinating investigations and treatment plans enables the victims and their families to begin healing as soon as possible.

During FY13, The Tree House provided 2559 services to 758 victims of abuse or neglect, including 699 new and 59 ongoing clients. Sexual abuse victims comprised 43% of new clients, while 22% were seen for physical abuse, 34% for neglect, and 1% for foster care exams. The majority of clients seen were female (65%), and age ranges for all clients were 0-6 (29%), 7-12 (25%), 13-17 (17%), and 18 and older (29%). Adults served are non-offending parents and a few adult siblings.

Family Involvement Meetings

Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs) are a collaborative effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children. Participants include family members, agency staff, service providers, community members, foster parents, members of the family's support network and (if age appropriate), the child is also included in placement decisions. FIM meetings are convened at key decision points over the course of a child's case such as:

- ▣ When out-of-home placement has been recommended
- ▣ When there is an emergency or planned placement change
- ▣ When changes in the child's permanency plan occurs
- ▣ When a youth is recommended for Independent Living
- ▣ Annual FIMs are held for all youth 14 years of age and older

In FY13, 364 FIMs were held relating to 523 children. 196 children were diverted from out-of-home placements; 167 remained with parents, and 29 were diverted to relatives. 80 of the 364 FIMs were the annual Transitioning Youth meetings which focused on the following service areas: education, employment, health/mental health, housing, financial literacy/resources and family/friends support. Satisfaction surveys from biological family members, community partners, social workers, and supervisors indicated continuing support for these meetings.

Family Finding



The Family Finding Program is an evidence-based model used in locating relatives of children and youth who are in out-of-home placement with CWS. The goal of Family Finding is to search and locate relatives and non-relatives who become lifelong connections for these children thereby increasing stability and permanency. The model includes *Family Search and Engagement (FSE)*; a set of six steps designed to locate, engage, connect, and support family resources for youth. Through this process we strive to provide increased permanency for children in foster care. Montgomery County is one of nine counties in Maryland to successfully implement the Family Finding Program. In FY13, the Family Finding Program worked with 44 youth and their families in an effort to make permanent connections.

LiveScan Fingerprinting

This fiscal year, the Department purchased an electronic fingerprinting system called LiveScan. Several CWS staff members were trained on this device and became licensed as Certified Fingerprint Technicians. Electronic fingerprinting is now available to the Department's prospective foster/adopt families, kinship caregivers, students, and volunteers.

One of the major benefits of having a LiveScan system at the CWS office is that it provides our families and volunteers with a convenient place to have their fingerprint taken. In addition, electronic fingerprinting provides increased accuracy, security, and reduced turn-around time. Prior to LiveScan, CWS could wait weeks for FBI and State of Maryland background check results to arrive. This held up placements, adoptions and foster home licensing. Now, the average turnaround time is less than 24 hours. Having on-site fingerprinting has made a big difference to CWS and the families it serves.

Responsible Fathers Program

The Responsible Fathers program continued to provide services to fathers and their children involved in Child Welfare Services. The program's goal was to enhance the relationship between fathers and their children while working to provide individualized services to help fathers identify and overcome obstacles in their parental involvement and responsibilities. Support was offered to fathers navigating barriers to successful involvement with their children and includes services such as: parenting classes, relationship classes, economic stability classes and individual counseling. The program continued to develop successful working relationships with various County departments including the Pre-Release Center, Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC) and Workforce Solutions Group (WSG) to provide services to fathers and their families. During the past year, the Responsible Fathers program partnered with the Montgomery County Child Support office in an effort to assist in collecting child support. It also provided counseling and ongoing workforce solutions to remove barriers thereby increasing a parent's ability to pay child support. This initiative was successful as it increased by 31% the child support collections of those involved in the program. Throughout the year, the Responsible Fathers program provided services to 143 fathers and their families.



The Visitation House

The Visitation House moved to a new, permanent location and provided a home-like atmosphere for supervised visitation for parents, children and siblings in the CWS system. The Visitation House is a collaborative effort between various departments of Montgomery County government (Health and Human Services, Housing and Community Affairs, and the County Attorneys), the Courts, the legal community, and various community agencies. The Children's Action Team (CAT) provided additional support for the The Visitation House and its operations. In FY13, 128 families with 176 children had 1,236 visits at The Visitation House. There were 2,486 hours of visits scheduled at The Visitation House this past year. The Visitation House is also used by parenting coaches, therapists and Montgomery County Infants and Toddlers program representatives. Several groups held meetings at this location, and the Kinship Support Group also meets there on a monthly basis.

Fostering Connections

Based on federal legislation, and with the goal of improving academic performance of children in the Child Welfare system, a new initiative this fiscal year has been the implementation of fostering communication and connections between Child Welfare Services and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). With leadership by the Casey Foundation, CWS staff and MCPS have been meeting regularly to improve communication, keep children in their home schools (even if they are placed away from their home schools), learn how each entity functions, and to share information. There have also been significant efforts made by both CWS and MCPS to identify key contacts in both groups. This initiative will be expanded in the coming year.

Continuous Quality Improvement Activities

Child Welfare's Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Council continues to serve as a vital part of the Child Welfare system by advocating service improvements, enhancing communication between frontline staff and various levels of management, and strengthening employee morale.

This year, the CQI Council gained fresh leadership under two new co-chairs along with several new members. The Council continues to oversee the activities of an Ombudsperson, Standing Committees (Training, Cultural Competence, Stakeholders, and CHESSIE), as well as addressing employee-submitted "requests for action" (RFA). In an effort to improve morale, the Council has begun regularly recognizing outstanding employees by presenting a quarterly CQI Service Award.

This fiscal year, the Council directly addressed nine (9) RFAs submitted by Child Welfare Staff. Topics included continued work on communication within CWS as well as with providers in the community, and ethics and safety for staff. The Council plans to survey staff to see how morale may be affecting our service delivery.

The CWS Ombudsperson provides community consultation, education and training. In FY13, presentations were conducted for community programs, non-public schools, MCPS staff, child care providers, nursery schools, volunteers, and professional committees. A Child Welfare Services Speaker's Bureau has been formed to assist with community education. Alternative Response information has been included in the Recognizing and Reporting Child Maltreatment presentation.

Maryland Children Electronic Social Services Information Exchange (MD CHESSIE)

MD CHESSIE, the statewide automated child welfare records system that enables the tracking of children and facilitates information sharing, is a tightly integrated electronic case-management system which allows roles-based case viewing, automated federal reporting, and comprehensive funds management, along with a payments system that accommodates centralized payments to vendors for children and families involved in Child Welfare Services programs.

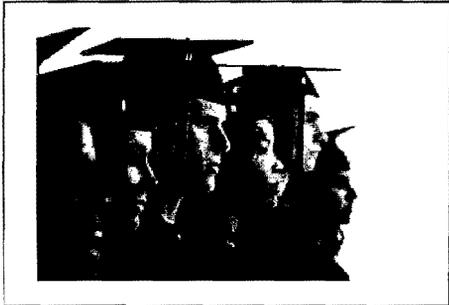
A number of changes were made in CHESSIE regarding how case information is reported federally, with improvements in AFCARS reports and the National Youth in Transition Database, where youth graduating from our foster care system are monitored in a longitudinal study. Changes were made to the IV-E determination system, improving system logic as well as making eligibility determinations for certain In-Home clients' "candidacy" for Title IV-E funds for paid services, thereby increasing the federal reimbursement our clients are eligible for.

Mental Health Services

Montgomery County continued to fund six therapists to provide specialized In-Home services for children and families in the Child Welfare system. Three of the current Home-Based Team (HBT) therapists are Spanish-speaking, all are highly skilled in Child and Family therapy, and have also received training in Motivational Interviewing and Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. These therapists, co-located with Child Welfare staff in the Piccard and Germantown offices, provided direct services, consultation and progress reports. The HBT worked with 90 children and families, providing intensive individual and family therapy, and clinical case management. Treatment focused on assisting children and adults to strengthen family functioning and stability, and resolve trauma related to child abuse and neglect.

Social Work Student Training

The Department continues a partnership with the University of Maryland and Catholic University to offer Social Work graduate students an opportunity to gain valuable experience through a Child Welfare internship. The program had 12 graduate students, including the IV-E (Title IV-E of the Social Security Act) Multicultural Unit, an expansion of our Social Work Field Instruction Program. Through collaboration with the University of Maryland School of Social Work, along with MDDHR, this program developed child welfare competencies in a multicultural group of student social workers and prepares them for work in a public agency. The mission of this unit is to develop the knowledge and skills of graduate social work students in working with clients of diverse backgrounds and experiences. The Department successfully recruited several graduating MSW students, with various language capabilities, as full-time employees.



Early Childhood Programs

Partnerships with Infants & Toddlers, Head-Start and other programs have been successful in facilitating early evaluation and intervention for children with developmental disabilities. These trans-disciplinary approaches start with rapid assessment and services often taking place in the home. Children and parents benefit from the skills gained, increased socialization, and knowledge of available community resources. Collaboration with the Head-Start program assures that eligible children are enrolled in these preschool programs to better prepare them for elementary education.



Citizens Review Boards and Panel

Community members serve on two review boards: one appointed by the Governor's Office, Citizens Review Board (CRB), and the second by the Montgomery County Executive, Citizens Review Panel (CRP). Four Citizens Review Boards, all appointed by the Governor, review a random selection of cases each month. This fiscal year, the CRB reviewed 132 cases of youth in an out-of-home placement and continued to support the efforts of providing permanency for children in foster care. Case review results are presented to Child Welfare managers and to the Court.

The CRP examined the training and services provided to foster parents. A number of recommendations were made by the panel and implemented by the agency. Some of the recommendations and changes included:

- ▣ *Foster Parent Training* - Additional topics have been added to the pre-service training sessions as well as to the ongoing training throughout the year. Also, a foster parent co-trainer has been added to all pre-service training sessions.
- ▣ *Training manuals* - Materials have been updated, reorganized, and expanded. Additionally, information is now being provided on the developmental needs of children.
- ▣ *Communication/Support* - A new procedure was introduced to assure that foster parents know how to contact the child's social worker, their supervisor, the child's attorney, and other significant people in the child's case.

In addition to making recommendations for improvement to training, a tracking form, developed by the Panel, was piloted with relatives and foster parents to track health and mental services that children in foster care receive.

The year was also spent gathering information on the needs of youth transitioning out of foster care and the implementation of the alternative response initiative. These two issues will be the panel's focus next year.

Budget and Administration

The FY13 budget for Child Welfare Services was \$21,826,000. The Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR) provided approximately 70% and Montgomery County funds contributed approximately 30% of the total budget. In addition to funds designated for personnel and operating expenses, MDDHR provided flexible and/or special purpose funds for a variety of services, such as intensive In-Home services, psychological evaluations, preparing youth for independent living, child care for foster parents and relative caretakers, court-ordered services, foster/adoptive parent recruitment and retention efforts, and adoption promotion. In addition, MDDHR also provided funds for weekend and holiday coverage, for after-hours screening and investigation of child/adult protective services reports.

CWS utilized County funds for community education, specialized services such as service coordination, parenting skills training, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), youth mentoring services, and post-adoption services to prevent adoption disruption. In FY13, Child Welfare Services managed fifteen (15) contracts that totaled over \$1,000,000.

Staffing

Recruitment and retention of staff continued to be a major challenge during the past year. Sixteen individuals resigned (15 social workers) and new staff was hired to replace those who left. Exit interviews identified that the highly stressful nature of the work was the leading reason people left, and personal reasons (children and re-location) was the second reason. Many young social workers were recruited over the past few years and they have remained energetic and committed to fulfilling Child Welfare Service's mission. New CWS social workers are required to attend extensive pre-service training through the University of Maryland and the CWS Training Academy. This training takes more than three months to complete and is held in Baltimore, Maryland.



Legal Activities

The Office of the County Attorney, Division of Health and Human Services, provided the legal representation for CWS staff. This team consists of staff and contract attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries. CWS was represented in Juvenile Court, during mediations and in administrative appeals. In addition, the attorneys served as general counsel to the CWS administrators, participated in weekly case reviews with child welfare staff and prepared social workers to testify in court. The attorneys provided regular legal training programs for CWS staff, foster parents, and kinship providers. Each year one of these trainings involves a review of recent legislative changes and the impact on CWS practices. The attorneys also represented the Director of The Tree House, Montgomery County's Child Assessment Center, and they participated in weekly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) case reviews. In addition, the attorneys participated in the Children's Action Team (CAT) headed by Judge Katherine Savage, and bi-monthly Children In Need of Assistance (CINA) Bench Bar meetings. FY13 saw a small decrease in new CINA petitions filed in the Juvenile Court as well as a slight decline in the number of Juvenile Court hearings that were held.

In FY13 there were 31 finalized adoptions. The County Attorneys represented CWS in 2279 CINA and Guardianship hearings in Juvenile Court and filed 198 new CINA petitions.

Community Education

Community Education continued to be a valuable project during the past year. There were 28 presentations attended by approximately 887 people. This included eight new organizations who requested informational workshops and the development of two new booklets: one focusing on the problems of sexual abuse, and the other on parenting difficult teens. From these presentations, one potential foster parent and three potential mentors for the *Directions Program* were recruited.

Directions Program

The *Directions Program* was created to recruit, train and provide mentors to youth ages 18-21 who are in the care of Child Welfare Services. In the first nine months, 10 matches were made. Although the program has been in existence for only a short time, there are already several "success" stories that demonstrate the value of the program.

Maryland Choices Interagency Family Preservation Services (IFPS)

Maryland Choices developed a program with the Montgomery County Collaboration Council for Children, Youth and Families in which children/youth with intensive needs receive services to help stabilize the family and develop skills toward preventing out-of-home placement. 72 youth and their families received services in FY13, and of those served, 46 families successfully completed the program. Interagency Family Preservation Services (IFPS) includes a program to help children who have been in group or residential care make the transition back into the community. Other programs include home-based therapy, mentoring, specialized services and professional team coordination, along with IFPS to children in danger of being removed from their home.



An Integrated Approach

The Department of Health and Human Services and Child Welfare Services have an integrated approach to help assure the safety and well-being of children, youth and their families. To that end, CWS maintains a large array of professional partnerships and collaborations. Easy access to services was made possible by a variety of specialists from other County programs and agencies.

- ▣ An Income Support program specialist is assigned and co-located with CWS. This individual provided medical assistance enrollment for children coming into out-of-home care.
- ▣ The Metropolitan YMCA implemented a Court-supported, mentoring program which matched more than 25 young people in effective supportive relationships. This was the program's fifth year and it has been highly successful in keeping adolescents in school and encouraging social development.
- ▣ Children's Action Team (CAT) - a group comprised of juvenile court judges, attorneys, CWS staff and Court administrators developed and implemented an agenda to help speed permanent plans for children. One of their major projects was supporting a new Visitation House and improving communication among key participants.

Employee Recognition

Child Welfare Services is able to achieve its mission through the dedicated efforts of its employees. Several awards were given during the fiscal year to recognize those staff members who brought a positive attitude to the workplace and displayed consistent and exceptional efforts towards the advancement of CWS' goals.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) Award

Wendy Hall-Page - September 2012
Kumba Baryoh - December 2012
Jackie Albanes - June 2013

Metropolitan Council of Governments (COG) Award

Ramona Zeender - August 2012
Erin Stillwell - December 2012
Brad Wofford - April 2013

Child Welfare Services Administrators' Award

Phyllis Reed - January 2013
Patty Carson - March 2013
Barbara Cromartie - June 2013

DHR Excellence in Social Work Award

Wendy Grier

Community Giving

We are very fortunate that the Montgomery County community continued to be supportive in many of our efforts to assist children and families. Two of the larger programs included:



The Generous Juror Program - A joint project between the Montgomery County Circuit Court, and Child Welfare Services which gives prospective jurors the opportunity to donate their jury fee towards activities to benefit children served by CWS and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS). It continued to be a highly successful program. More than \$68,000 was collected and used to provide opportunities for children that otherwise would not be covered by state or local funds, e.g. camp scholarships, tutoring, holiday arts, sports activities, and birthday and graduation gifts.

The Adopt-A-Social-Worker Program - The Adopt-A-Social Worker Program received voluntary donations from the community for children and families. Donations were used to provide children and youth with school supplies, and graduation presents for high school seniors. Items donated included: 180+ cases of shoes, 383 backpacks filled with school supplies, and 800 gift certificates for haircuts donated by The Hair Cuttery. \$8,000 in gift certificates were also donated for the children's use at the local Unique Thrift Store. In addition, a private citizen collected food for 185 Thanksgiving dinners. Holiday gifts for 487 children were also donated by the community.

Partnerships and Collaborations

These are some of the community groups and partners with which Montgomery County Child Welfare Services collaborates:

- *Addiction Services Coordination*
- *Arbor Employment Services*
- *Aunt Hattie's Place*
- *Behavioral Health Partners*
- *Board of Social Services*
- *The Casey Foundation*
- *Center for Adoption Support & Education (C.A.S.E.)*
- *Child Fatality Review Committee*
- *Childrens' Action Team (CAT)*
- *Citizens Review Boards*
- *Citizens Review Panel*
- *Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children*
- *Commission on Children and Youth*
- *Contemporary Therapeutic Services*
- *Council of Governments (COG)*
- *Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA)*
- *Domestic Violence Alert Team*
- *Early Childhood Workgroup*
- *Family Service Agency*
- *Friends in Action (FIA)*
- *Futurelink*
- *Hearts & Homes for Youth*
- *The Home Based Team (HBT)*
- *Homeless Shelter Providers Team*
- *Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC)*
- *Infants & Toddlers Program*
- *Institute for Family Centered Services*
- *Interagency Committee on Adolescent Pregnancy*
- *Interfaith Works*
- *Juvenile Justice Commission*
- *Linkages to Learning*
- *Local Coordinating Team (LCT)*
- *Maryland Choices*
- *Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR)*
- *Maryland Department of Juvenile Services*
- *Maryland Multicultural Youth Center*
- *Mental Health Assoc. of Montgomery County (MHA)*
- *Montgomery County Collaboration Council*
- *Montgomery County Government (DHHS, Housing, Police, Human Resources and County Attorneys)*
- *Montgomery County Public School*
- *Montgomery County Child Care*
- *National Center for Children & Families (NCCF)*
- *Operation Runaway*
- *Primary Care Coalition (PCC)*
- *Reginald Lourie Center*
- *Trawick Foundation*
- *The Tree House, Child Assessment Center (CAC)*
- *University of Maryland School of Social Work*
- *Workforce Solutions*
- *YMCA – Metropolitan YMCA*

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Executive Staff

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Child Welfare Services Director
Kim Watkins, Office Services Coordinator

Sheila Dennis, LCSW-C
Assessment Section Administrator
Marisa Lim, Office Services Coordinator

Angela English, LCSW-C
Out of Home Services Administrator
Patty Carson, Office Services Coordinator

Lisa Merkin, LCSW-C
Continuing Section Administrator
Jessica Santos, Office Services Coordinator

Pat Davis Spann, LGSW
Resource Section Administrator
Phyllis Reed, Office Services Coordinator

Thomas Grazio, LCSW-C
The Tree House Director
Sandra Marino, Administrative Assistant

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services has four offices. The main office is in Rockville and there are two regional offices. These offices are co-located with other Montgomery County Government programs.

Headquarters (Main Office)
1301 Piccard Drive,
Rockville, MD 20850
Phone: 240-777-3500
TTY: 240-777-3556

Juvenile Assessment Center
7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 400
Rockville, MD 20855
Phone: 240-777-4435 / 3391
TTY: 240-777-3560

Germantown Regional Services Center
12900 Middlebrook Road, 2nd Floor
Germantown, MD 20874
Phone: 240-777-1742
TTY: 240-777-8002

The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC)
7300 Calhoun Place, Suite 600
Rockville, MD 20855
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