

Montgomery County Department of Health and Human Services  
Child Welfare Services

*Serving Children, Youth and Families*

# 2015 | Annual REPORT



# CHILD WELFARE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT FISCAL YEAR 2015

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# 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.

## 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 for children & families.
- ◆ Create a work environment that attracts and retains competent and diverse staff, and promotes professional development and leadership

# Letter

2015 | Fiscal  
YEAR

# Director's

This has been a year of change, opportunity and transformation for Child Welfare Services (CWS).

We have been fortunate to welcome JoAnn Barnes as the Children, Youth and Families Chief and Angela Cabellon as the new Social Services Officer. The Department developed a strategic plan, focusing on ensuring strong clinical practice, developing mechanisms to track and use our local data, and developing a culture of permanency to ensure that each child we serve has a safe and permanent home. The Department offered a wide variety of trainings for all staff that focused on working within a trauma-informed practice model while ensuring safety and risk needs were addressed for all families. Our dedicated staff responded to a high number of maltreatment cases and provided numerous support services to families throughout the County.

CWS continues to be a key member of Montgomery County Health and Human Service and the Maryland Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration. We continue to rely on our valuable and outstanding community partners and agencies and organization to ensure that we continue to meet the needs of vulnerable children and youth.

Our diverse and highly dedicated staff are the key to our successful work with vulnerable children and youth. In keeping with what has become the culture in Montgomery County CWS, our staff continues to provide outstanding care and services to a large number of children and families. Our efforts are enhanced working with our wonderful, supportive partners both in government and in the community.

In the coming year, we are committed to providing excellent 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 as much as possible and to providing high quality services to families in an effort to keep Montgomery County's children safe from abuse and neglect and achieve their full potential.

Sincerely,

*Lisa Merkin*

Lisa Merkin, LCSW-C  
Administrator, Child Welfare Services

# CHILD WELFARE SERVICES ANNUAL REPORT

## THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services (CWS) is a proactive, outcomes-based system that is committed to the identification, prevention, protection, and treatment of child abuse and neglect through a wide range of fiscally responsible services to ensure safety, well-being, and permanency for every child.

These services include the following:

- Child Protection
- Family Support and Strengthening
- Licensing of Resource Homes
- Child Placement
- Foster Care
- Adoption
- Independent Living/Transitioning Youth

When CWS receives a report concerning alleged child abuse and/or neglect, an investigation or assessment is conducted by a licensed social worker to determine whether an intervention is needed and, if so, then what is the most appropriate intervention.

If problems are considered serious but the child can safely remain in the home, social workers provide services to the parents, and regularly visit the family. If children cannot remain safely in their home, they are temporarily placed with relatives or with a licensed 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.



The following Annual Report provides a description of the Montgomery County Child Welfare Services programs, services, supports, stakeholder involvement, and strategies used to meet the goal of safety, well-being and permanency for every child.

# SERVICES TO FAMILIES

## SCREENING UNIT

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 9,315 phone calls from concerned citizens and professionals seeking assistance with child maltreatment or family issues. Social workers in the Screening Unit utilize State policy and the evidence-based tool, Structured Decision Making (SDM), to determine if a Child Protective Services (CPS) response is warranted, as well as providing callers with referrals for community services to support the family. Allegations which meet criteria for CPS response are assigned to one of the Assessment Units.

## ASSESSMENT UNITS-INVESTIGATIONS

Social workers in the Child Welfare Services Assessment Units respond to allegations of suspected physical and sexual child abuse, neglect, and mental injury through either an Investigative or Alternative Response, utilizing Family Centered Practice to ensure the safety of the child, to minimize future risk of harm, and to promote family preservation.

In FY15, Assessment Unit social workers conducted 2,389 child protective services (CPS) responses. 1,176 (49%) of those responses were completed as Alternative Responses (A/R) resulting in a service plan to address the issues reported to the Department instead of punitive measures, and 1,213 (51%) were handled as Investigative Responses (I/R) resulting in a formal finding of fault. Assessment social workers collaborated with various community partners, programs, and agencies to reduce the risk of harm to children and offer families supportive referrals to appropriate services.



CWS continues to prioritize efforts to identify and deliver services to child victims of human sex trafficking. Many victims of human trafficking are highly traumatized, frequently runaways and they often present with a history of maltreatment and prior Child Welfare involvement. In an effort to formulate a coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to interviewing and screening children who are at the highest risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking, CWS is partnering with the Montgomery County Police Department, the Tree House - Child Assessment Center, and the Governor's Office for Crime Control and Prevention to offer comprehensive treatment and protection to victims of human trafficking. CWS representatives participated in a focus group led by The Child Sex Trafficking Victims Initiative (CSTVI), a partnership between the University of Maryland School of Social Work and the Department of Human Resources, to build an internal capacity for addressing sex trafficking in the child welfare population. Several CWS representatives serve on the Montgomery County Human Trafficking Task Force.

CWS worked with Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) to enhance practices for recognizing and reporting child maltreatment, including allegations involving MCPS staff. During the fiscal year, CWS staff members served on the MCPS Child Abuse Workgroup and also presented trainings on

Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse or Neglect for MCPS staff in partnership with MCPS, Montgomery County Police Department, and the State's Attorney's Office.

## **IN-HOME SERVICES**

In-Home services are home-based, time-limited, protective services meant to prevent or remedy neglect and/or abuse in instances where the child is not in imminent danger and can safely remain at home.



In FY15, a number of supportive and educational services such as clinical social work assessments of the risk/safety factors in the family; on-going clinical social work services to enhance family stability; case management and referrals; emotional support to parents and children; parent education; coordination with community agencies and service providers were provided by Child Welfare social workers and community providers to 342 families in the past fiscal year.

During FY15, an average of 114 families were provided with these services each month. In-Home services, along with The Tree House Child

Assessment Center, brokered to provide a Non-Offending Parent (NOP) support group that served six families, and they also worked with the States Attorney's Office to support victims who have acted as witnesses in criminal prosecutions. In addition, therapy services were secured to meet the needs of this special population, and families were connected with community services to assist them post-disclosure.

For those cases in which the Court has allowed the children to remain at home under an order of protective supervision, the social worker must prepare reports, provide Court-ordered services, and appear in Court. If the situation arises that the child or children are in imminent danger and need to be removed, the social workers perform that function, as well. During this fiscal year, services were provided to 99 families and 207 children. These services are time-limited, with six months to a year being the average for most families.

## **LETHALITY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM (LAP)**

The Lethality Assessment Program-Maryland Model (LAP) is an innovative strategy to prevent domestic violence homicides and serious injuries. It provides an easy and effective method for CWS social workers to identify victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) during an assessment, and then immediately connect them to local domestic violence service programs. In order to enhance the assessment of those victims of IPV, CWS staff were trained in the use and implementation of the LAP as standard practice for risk and safety concerns related to IPV. Since January 2015, CWS staff completed 37 LAP screens to enhance victim safety when IPV is present.

## **MARYLAND CHOICES INTERAGENCY FAMILY PRESERVATION SERVICES (IFPS)**

CWS serves as the gatekeeper for four Montgomery County agencies (CWS, Juvenile Services, MCPS, and Core Service Agency) referring families for modified wraparound family preservation services delivered by Maryland Choices IFPS for families in need. Maryland Choices IFPS utilizes care coordination to develop individualized Plans of Care from which services and resources are linked to address identified needs of referred families. During FY15, CWS, as the referral gatekeeper, sent 62 new cases to Maryland Choices IFPS. Of the 80 families served by Maryland Choices IFPS during FY15, 35 were involved with CWS.

## RESPONSIBLE FATHERS PROGRAM

The Responsible Fathers program continued to provide education classes and support services to fathers and their children involved in Child Welfare Services to enhance the father/child relationship. Limited support was offered to fathers navigating barriers to successful involvement with their children, and included referrals to services such as relationship classes, economic stability classes, and individual counseling.



The Responsible Fathers program was awarded a grant through the Court Improvement Project to implement the Father and Children Together (FACT) program. The FACT program recruited target fathers from the courts and from social workers responsible for cases currently involved in the court. Fathers were provided ongoing case management and referrals to community services including counseling, parent coaching, and training/educational opportunities. The FACT coordinator worked with the fathers individually and in groups to identify and plan for education and employment through support groups appropriate to their needs. The program also offered a Parent Education/Support Group that assisted in helping fathers obtain employment and to develop skills through hands-on education and workshops.

Besides this intensive work with the fathers, the FACT program also worked with family members, encouraging them to become actively involved in planning for their children and to assist them in gathering resources to divert children from out-of-home placements.

Most importantly, the FACT coordinator provided support and assistance for the fathers as they navigated the Court system and Child Support Enforcement. During FY15, the Responsible Fathers and Fathers and Children Together program provided services to 140 fathers and their families.

## SAFE & STABLE FAMILIES

The Safe & Stable Families program provides evidence-based interventions for families with adolescents whose parents find them difficult to manage, and at risk for an out-of-home placement. This past year, the Safe & Stable program worked with 28 children in 12 families. Unfortunately, due to an extended staff vacancy, this program was reduced in scope and size during FY15.



## THE TREE HOUSE CHILD ASSESSMENT CENTER

The Tree House Child Assessment Center (CAC) of Montgomery County, Maryland 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 serves child and adolescent victims of sexual and physical abuse, and neglect, along with their non-offending family members, in a child-friendly environment, and provides integrated services to child

victims including forensic interviewing, medical evaluations, nurse case management, mental health assessments, ongoing therapy, and victim advocacy. Primary funding is obtained through DHHS, and supplemented by federal, state, 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/Special Victims Investigations Division, Office of the County Attorney, and the State's Attorney's Office. This Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) approach lessens 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 FY15, The Tree House provided 4,772 services to 711 victims of abuse or neglect, including 564 new and 147 ongoing clients. Sexual abuse victims comprised 56% of new clients, while 16% were seen for physical abuse, 10% for neglect, and 2% for foster care exams. The majority of clients seen were female (61%), and age ranges for all clients were 0-6 (33%), 7-12 (38%), 13-17 (27%), and 18 and older (2%).

## FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION SERVICES

### ADOPTION

The main focus of the Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Adoption Unit is to secure permanency through adoption for children in the foster care system. In addition to identifying appropriate adoptive parents and working with pre-adoptive families, the Court, and others to facilitate the adoption process, the Adoption Unit also managed over 500 adoption subsidy cases and provided Post-Adoption supportive services to approximately 30 families with the goal of preventing adoption dissolution.



Approximately seven adopted children were given financial assistance through the College Tuition Waiver and Education Training Voucher programs. Over 16 children exited the Adoption Subsidy program at the age of 21. Furthermore, the Adoption Unit provides Confidential Intermediary services (birth search matching services) to adoptees age 20 years and older. In FY15, there were approximately 20 birth search requests which resulted in five reunions.

Montgomery County Child Welfare Services exceeded its FY15 DHR Place Matters adoption goal of 20 by finalizing 22 adoptions. The children and youth who were adopted ranged in age from 12 months to 17 years old, and were adopted by a variety of families - including several who had previously adopted through the County. Keeping siblings together as a family is a top priority, and in FY15, ten of the children and youth were adopted as members of a sibling group.

The agency celebrated National Adoption Day on November 21, 2014. The day began with adoption finalizations at the Montgomery County Circuit Court, followed by a celebration at the VisArts Center in Rockville, Maryland. This celebration, attended by over 100 children, families, local officials, and special guests, was to honor our adoptive families and thank them for the enormous personal commitment they made when deciding to become 'Forever Families' for children and youth in the foster care system. An award was also given to the agency's Adoptive Family of the Year, and the Department of Human Resources' (DHR) Adoptive Family of the Year was also recognized at the celebration.

In addition, the Adoption Unit coordinated Child-Specific Recruitment for children in need of adoptive resources and/or life long Connections. 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 Council of Governments (COG) recruitment events. An older youth who was featured on *Wednesday's Child*, was successfully matched with an adoptive family, and was finalized just two days shy of her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. As a result of these recruitment efforts, the number of children waiting for adoption has significantly decreased.



## FAMILY FINDING

The goal of Family Finding, an evidence-based program for youth in out-of-home placement, is to locate estranged and unknown relatives, as well as other supportive adults (e.g., teachers, faith leaders, neighbors) and then help them to develop realistic and sustainable commitments as they become invested in the long-term well-being of the youth. Keeping safety at the forefront and using a family-driven process, the Family Finding model includes Family Search and Engagement (FSE) - a set of six steps designed to locate, engage, connect, and support family resources for youth.

## FAMILY INVOLVEMENT MEETINGS (FIMs)



Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs) represent the foundation of Family Centered Practice (FCP). FIMs are a collaborative effort to ensure the safety and well-being of children. It is here that family involvement in the FCP model has its greatest impact. 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.

The FIM triggers are:

- ◆ 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
- ◆ When a Voluntary Placement Agreement (VPA) is requested

In FY15, 395 FIMs were held relating to 517 children. FIMs have been successful in reducing the number of children entering into care. 220 children were diverted from out-of-home placements, 157 remained with parents, and 57 were diverted to relatives. There were 350 parents/legal guardians, 211 children/youth, 338 relatives, and 102 foster parents who participated in the FIMs.

## FOSTER CARE

Abused or neglected children, unable to remain safely in their homes, are provided temporary out-of-home placement 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.

CWS ended FY15 with 391 children in foster care compared with 387 in FY14. Continued early involvement and intervention, along with utilization of a family's natural supports (e.g., extended family, friends, and community members), encourage prevention and reduction in the number of children entering foster care.

## FOSTER AND ADOPTIVE PARENT SERVICES

In FY15, CWS maintained a monthly average of 200 licensed resource homes. Efforts to increase the number of foster parents able to meet the needs of the County's children and youth requiring out-of-home placement resulted in 449 resource home inquiries with a total of 223 prospective resource families attending monthly Foster Parent Information Meetings held in Rockville. During this period, 65 new home studies were initiated, and 52 new resource families were licensed, including new guardianship homes. In addition, 23 adoption home studies were completed.

The Foster & Adoptive Parent Services (FAPS) team organized several successful retention events including the Foster Parent Appreciation Dinner (150+ attendees), the Foster Family Picnic (350+ attendees) - At the picnic, 19 foster youth high-school graduates and eight scholarship winners were presented with a certificate and a gift/scholarship, the Fall Harvest Festival at Butler's Orchard (150+ attendees), and the Holiday Skating Party (250+ attendees).



In addition, a multitude of well-attended recruitment events were held throughout the County including: the Montgomery County Agricultural Fair, the Lunch and Learn Recruitment Event at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the Bethesda Big-Train Baseball Recruitment Event, the Lunch and Learn Recruitment Event at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Buffalo Wild Wings Fundraiser and Foster Parent Recruitment Event, the Trinity Lutheran Church Outreach and Recruitment Event, the Mount Jezreel Baptist Church International Community Day, the Health/Wellness/Fitness Expo, the Seneca Creek Church Hopefest Recruitment Event, the Covenant

Life Beloved Ministry Recruitment Event, the Barnes & Noble Fundraiser and Foster Parent Recruitment Event, the MLK Day of Service Recruitment Event, the Adoption Fair/Recruitment Event at Neelsville Presbyterian Church, the Presentation to the YMCA Youth Link Mentors, the Tour de Cookie Foster Parent Recruitment Event, the Gazette Community Calendar, Facebook page for Montgomery County Foster Parents, Montgomery County Volunteer Services Website, quarterly Grassroots Recruiters and monthly COG Recruiters committee meetings.

To ensure that our resource families had plenty of opportunities to attend trainings, CWS organized sessions throughout the County on such topics as Emotion Coaching, Legal Training for Foster Parents, Unpacking the Invisible Suitcase, Foster Parent Support Groups, CPR, Behavioral Support Management, Trauma Informed Practice Training, Grief and Loss: Impact on the Family, Brain Trainings with the Upside Down Organization, Ethnic Hair Clinic, and Sexual Safety: Universal Precautions, plus monthly Foster Parent Association Meetings and quarterly PRIDE pre-service training classes.



## FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

Based on federal legislation, and with the goal of improving academic performance of children in the Child Welfare system, this year's focus has been on fostering communication and connections between Child Welfare Services and the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS). With leadership provided by the Casey Family Programs, both CWS and MCPS staff have been meeting regularly to improve communication, keep children in their home schools (even if they are placed

away from their home schools), increase data sharing and educational stability, and to learn how each entity functions. There have also been significant efforts made by CWS and MCPS to identify key contacts in both groups.

## KINSHIP CARE

When children have to be removed from their homes because of safety issues related to child abuse or neglect, the Department looks for appropriate relative (kinship) homes before placing any child in regular foster care. This process ensures continuity of care, culture, relationships, and environment essential for a child's well-being. The Kinship Care Program serves children who have been placed with relatives through the Juvenile Court and have been found Children in Need of Assistance (CINA). The Kinship social worker works with the child's parents and provides the necessary services to support reunification with their child. To this end, relative/kinship caregivers are encouraged to attend information and support groups, and the children in their care receive services according to their needs. If the parents are unable to remediate their circumstances after 15 months, the Kinship social worker will focus on the relative/kinship caregiver permanently raising the child - either through legal Custody and Guardianship or Adoption. During FY15, an average of 49 children lived with relatives in Formal Kinship Care placements. Over that 12-month period, 42 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

When family members agree to provide informal kinship care for their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, or other related minor child, without Child Welfare Services or Court involvement, they oftentimes need help in navigating the array of resources available to them. The Kinship Navigator Program assists these informal kinship providers with locating financial assistance, legal information and referrals, as well as finding community resources; and assists with many other issues they may face in order to provide stability and permanency to relative child(ren) in their home.

In addition, informal kinship caregivers are encouraged to attend a monthly support group to specifically address the needs of these caregivers and children. The support group provides them a place where connections can be made with others in the same situation, support is given and received, suggestions may be found to address specific issues, and where caregivers can start to gain a sense of empowerment and control.

In FY15, the Kinship Navigator Program assisted over 85 families, providing services, and resources to keep children with family or fictive kin providers and out of the CWS system. Of these families, we assisted 20 (42 children) with intensive In-Home services. Notably, over one year, none of the children served entered a placement in the CWS system. CWS partnered with the public school system and Office of Eligibility and Support Services on outreach and promotion. Social workers assisted



families with moving to permanency outside of the system by helping them navigate the court system, seek mental health and physical health services, achieve housing stability, and access other services. The next phase for the program is to develop a formal evaluation tool to track specific data, gather feedback, and determine success of the program.

## 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. Social Workers assess the progress families are making towards rectifying those issues that originally brought their children into foster care, then they recommend appropriate permanency plans for youth to the Juvenile Court.

Other efforts include searching for extended family as a possible 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.

Another major task of the Placement Solutions Unit is to assess requests for Voluntary Placement Agreements (VPA), a statewide process that allows children to be placed in foster care for treatment that the child would not be able to obtain otherwise. Parents maintain all their rights and do not lose custody of their children. In FY15, there were 21 requests for VPAs.

## TREATMENT FOSTER CARE

Our Agency Treatment Foster Care families provide a home environment for children with special or extensive needs. Twenty families received intensive training to serve children with serious health and/or mental health problems - including difficult to manage behaviors. The Treatment Foster Care staff provide specialized training to assist foster parents in managing these children's needs, and additional training opportunities were provided focusing on crisis management, attachment, and communication skills.

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 18 licensed families, has proven to be a significant cost-saving measure in comparison to private Treatment Foster Care programs. This program provides the same level of care, treatment, and oversight to serious emotionally disturbed, medically fragile, and behaviorally disordered children. Many children were placed with private agencies responsible for licensing therapeutic foster home providers. Social workers monitored an average of 98 children each month in treatment foster homes.

Additionally, the Treatment Foster Care program led the collaboration with the Montgomery County Foster Parent Association and several other CWS Units in organizing a Winter Holiday Ice Skating Party which was attended by over 250 families and children.

## TRANSITIONING YOUTH



In FY15, approximately 200 youth between the ages of 14 and 20 received services focused on strengthening the skills needed to transition successfully from out-of-home care.

It was a busy year for case managers assigned to work with this special group of youth. The *Ready By 21* Initiative continues as a statewide priority and additional tools such as the Ready By 21 Survey have been implemented to measure youth readiness to exit foster care. The Transitioning Youth Unit conducting Family Involvement Meetings for all youth this year, with a special focus on their progress toward

achieving transition plan goals.

In addition, the Department celebrated the high school graduation of 21 foster children this year with the majority of the youth choosing to continue their post-secondary education with enrollment in college or vocational certificate programs.

With tightening budgets throughout the county, CWS has been greatly challenged when it comes to maintaining vital community resources that provide supportive services to our youth. The Foster Youth Employment Program and the Live, Learn, Lead (3L) Academy has continued to provide services throughout the year with reduced funding. Additionally, affordable housing is a significant need for our youth. The Department was fortunate to receive a small state grant to provide rental subsidies and case management services to five youth through the Supportive Youth Housing Program.

This year, many of our younger teens participated in the 21<sup>st</sup> Annual Teen Conference at Towson University. The teens engaged in a two-day event consisting of team building exercises, motivational speakers, relevant workshops, and a Q & A session with the Maryland State Youth Advisory Board.

This was also an opportunity for the youth to network with one another and get a 'real feel' for life on an actual college campus. In keeping with the Ready By 21 Initiative, the older teens took part in a regional Older Youth Summit held at the Six Flags America amusement park in Upper Marlboro, MD. The daylong summit provided our youth with an opportunity to participate in a variety of workshops and activities centered on financial planning, supportive relationships and employment, including an on-site job fair.

## THE VISITATION HOUSE

The Visitation House located in Rockville, MD provides a home-like atmosphere for supervised visitation for parents, children, and siblings in the CWS system. Frequent visits with parents are a major component of efforts to reunite families,

The Visitation House was initially developed as a collaborative effort between various departments of Montgomery County Government including Health and Human Services, Housing and Community Affairs, County Attorneys, the Courts, the legal community, and various other community agencies.

In FY15, 145 families with 187 children had 1,783 visits at The Visitation House. There were 3,224 hours of visits scheduled at The Visitation House this past year. The Visitation House is also used by parenting coaches, therapists and the Montgomery County Infants and Toddlers program representatives. Several groups held meetings at this location, including the Kinship Support Group which also meets there on a monthly basis.



## THE AGENCY

### BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION

The FY15 budget for Child Welfare Services was \$22,790,020. The Maryland Department of Human Resources (MDDHR) provided approximately 70% of the total budget, and Montgomery County funds contributed approximately 30%.

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, family reunification, and adoption promotion. In addition, MDDHR also provided funds for weekend and holiday coverage, and for after-hours screening and investigation of child/adult protective services reports.

CWS utilized County funds for 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 FY15, Child Welfare Services managed nineteen (19) contracts that totaled over \$2,132,000.

## CITIZENS REVIEW BOARDS AND PANEL

Community members serve on two review boards: The Citizens' Review Board (CRB), whose members are appointed by the Governor's Office, and the Citizens' Review Panel (CRP), whose members are appointed by the Montgomery County Executive. Four Citizens' Review Boards, all appointed by the Governor, review a random selection of cases each month. This past fiscal year, the CRB reviewed 136 cases of youth in the following out-of-home placement categories:



- Adoption . . . . . 12
- Relative Placement. . . . . 4
- Reunification . . . . . 48
- APPLA\* . . . . . 72

*\*Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement*

Case review results are presented to Child Welfare Services managers and to the Court.

The Citizens Review Panel examines the policies and procedures of state and local agencies and, where appropriate, specific cases to evaluate the extent to which these agencies in the County are effectively fulfilling their responsibilities to implement child protection standards. The Panel meets monthly and reports its findings to the County Executive, County Council, and the State Citizens Review Board for Children. This past year, the Panel also examined the need for affordable housing for Transitioning Youth.

## COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND EDUCATION

The Montgomery County community continues to be very supportive of CWS' efforts to assist with the needs of abused and neglected children and their families. Approximately 31 organizations, donating throughout the year, provided the children with 250 birthday bags, 75 overnight/emergency bags, 50 camp bags, and 50 snack bags (for children who arrive at the agency hungry). Over the holidays, 181 families received Thanksgiving dinners (either a gift card or a turkey with all the trimmings), and for holiday gift giving, 909 children and youth received either gifts or gift cards. Other items donated to CWS children, youth and families included school supplies, books, toiletries, hats, scarves, mittens, blankets, and stuffed animals for the children. In addition, funds were donated to provide scholarships to six graduating foster youth for college/technical school expenses.

Child Welfare Services takes an integrated approach to help assure the safety and well-being of children, youth and their families by working closely with mental health, substance abuse, and family service agencies to ensure that families are able to access services. Because most children receiving foster care or subsidized adoption services are also eligible for medical assistance, an Income Support specialist is co-located within CWS. This individual facilitates and expedites the medical assistance enrollment process for children coming into out-of-home care.

As a result of funding limitations in FY15, Child Welfare Services was unable to execute a new contract for Community Education services, thus services were provided by the agency Ombudsperson and the Child Welfare Services Speakers Bureau. A total of 83 presentations were attended by approximately 3,450 people, representing the school system, childcare programs, health care providers, mentoring programs, summer camps, transportation professionals, crisis hotlines, etc.

## GENEROUS JUROR PROGRAM

Generous Juror is a joint project between the Montgomery County Circuit Court and Child Welfare Services which gives prospective jurors the opportunity to donate their jury payment towards activities to benefit children served by CWS and the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS).

Generous Juror continues to be a highly successful program. Approximately \$51,000 was collected during FY15, and the funds were used to provide activities and opportunities for these children that would otherwise not be covered by state or local funds (e.g., camp scholarships, tutoring, holiday arts, sports activities, birthday, and graduation gifts).

## ADOPT-A-SOCIAL-WORKER PROGRAM

In FY15, the Adopt-A-Social Worker Program continued to receive generous donations from the community for Child Welfare Services children and families. These donations were used to provide children and youth with school supplies and graduation gifts for high school seniors. Items donated included: 180+ cases of shoes, 383 backpacks filled with school supplies, and 800 haircut gift certificates 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

## EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION

It is only through the continual efforts of a talented and dedicated workforce that Child Welfare Services succeeds in achieving its mission and goals. Especially now, when staff are being asked to do more with less, CWS is committed to formally recognizing those employees whose work brings positive attention and distinction to the department, and who display consistent and exceptional efforts towards the advancement of the agency's goals.

Social workers who went above and beyond the call of duty to help a colleague or client were presented with "Going the Extra Mile" Award. In addition, three staff members were also honored by other organizations for their dedication and work. Congratulations to each of the employees who were honored for their hard work and commitment to the community.



| ORGANIZATION AWARD   | CWS HONOREE                                     |
|--|---|
| Montgomery County Black History Month Service Award (February 2015)                                | Nathaniel Parks<br>Manager, Treatment Section   |
| DHHS Gene Gardner Memorial Award for Humanitarian Service (May 2015)                               | Ramona Zeender<br>Social Worker, Treatment Unit |
| Montgomery County Collaboration Council Public Service Employee's Time Well Spent Award (May 2015) | Angela English<br>Manager, SOOHS Section        |

## 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 for service improvements, enhancing communication between staff and management, and strengthening employee morale.



During FY15, the CQI Council continued to oversee the activities of an Ombudsperson, the CWS Standing Committees (Training, Health and Wellness, Cultural Competence, Stakeholders, and CHESSE), as well as addressing employee-submitted "requests for action" (RFAs). This fiscal year, the Council directly addressed six RFAs submitted by Child Welfare staff. Topics included safety decisions, child car seat availability, cleanliness of visitation rooms, supervisor evaluations, and snow removal from County cars. The Council also

plans to survey staff to see how morale may be affecting our service delivery.

## LEGAL ACTIVITIES

In FY15, the Office of the County Attorney, Division of Health and Human Services continued to provide the legal representation for CWS staff. The Legal team consists of both staff and contract attorneys, paralegals, and legal secretaries. CWS was represented in Juvenile Court during 125 CINA and TPR mediations, and in 101 administrative appeals. Of the 101 appeals, 24 of them were stayed representing an 18% decrease from FY14.

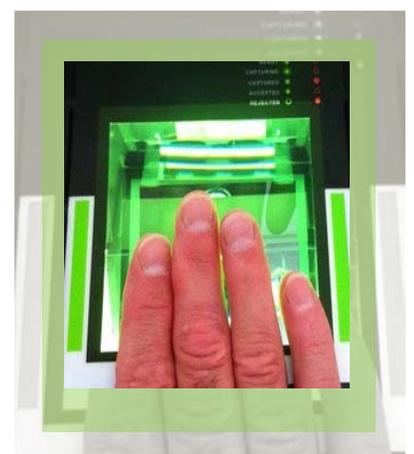
In addition, the attorneys served as general counsel to the CWS administrators, participated in weekly case reviews with Child Welfare staff, and prepared social workers to testify in Court. The attorneys also provided legal training programs for CWS staff, foster parents, and kinship providers. The attorneys also represent The Tree House, Montgomery County's Child Assessment Center, and they participated in weekly multi-disciplinary team (MDT) case reviews. FY15 saw a slight decrease in the number of new CINA (child in need of assistance) petitions filed in the Juvenile Court and in the number of Juvenile Court hearings that were held.

In FY15, the County Attorneys represented CWS at 22 finalized adoptions, 2,137 CINA and Guardianship hearings in Juvenile Court, and they filed 183 new CINA petitions.

## LIVESCAN FINGERPRINTING

The Department provides electronic fingerprinting through the LiveScan electronic fingerprinting system. Several CWS staff members have been trained and licensed as Certified Fingerprint Technicians. Electronic fingerprinting is now available to the Department's prospective foster/adopt families and kinship caregivers in the main CWS office in Rockville.

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 fingerprints 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 delay held up



placements, adoptions, and foster home licensing. Now, with in-house fingerprinting, the average turnaround time for case managers to obtain fingerprint results is less than 24 hours. Having on-site fingerprinting has made a big difference to CWS and the families it serves.

## **MARYLAND CHILDREN ELECTRONIC SOCIAL SERVICES INFORMATION EXCHANGE (MD CHESSIE)**

MD CHESSIE, Maryland's automated child welfare records system enables data tracking and facilitates information sharing. As an integrated electronic case-management structure it allows for role-based case viewing, automated federal reporting, and comprehensive funds management. Its payment system accommodates centralized vendor payments for children and families involved in Child Welfare Services programs.

DHR has implemented a number of revisions and updates in MD CHESSIE, during the year. Previously In-Home Services workers have used the CANS assessment that was designed for Out-of-Home Services. This year, DHR implemented a new assessment specifically for in-home services. CANS-F is the family version of the Maryland Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths assessment. A number of builds have also included fiscal updates to better improve the financial side of MD CHESSIE and how payments are processed. Lastly, MD CHESSIE has been updated to include more educational information for youth. DHR continues to implement new builds on a regular basis (almost monthly) to improve MD CHESSIE.

## **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**

Montgomery County continued to fund six therapists, five of whom are Spanish speaking, to provide specialized In-Home services for children and families in the Child Welfare system through the Home-Based Treatment (HBT) team. Each of these therapists is highly skilled in Child and Family therapy, and has also received training in Motivational Interviewing and Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy. The HBT team, co-located with Child Welfare staff in the Piccard and Germantown offices, provided direct services, consultation, and progress reports. Over the last fiscal year, HBT worked with 47 children and their 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 its partnership with the University of Maryland and Catholic University to offer Social Work graduate students the opportunity to gain valuable experience through a Child Welfare Services internship. This year, the program had 11 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 helps to develop the necessary child welfare competencies in a multicultural group of student social workers to prepare them for work in a public agency. Under the guidance of a seasoned social worker, these interns gained valuable, real world experience through exposure to the responsibilities and challenges that professional social workers face on a daily basis. The Department successfully recruited several graduating MSW students, with various language capabilities, as full-time employees.

## 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 members had to be hired to replace those who left. Exit interviews identified that the highly stressful nature of the work was the leading reason people left the agency, 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 approximately three months to complete and is held in Baltimore, Maryland which means that newly hired social workers are not able to assume caseload responsibilities until the second quarter of their employment.

# 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*
- *Behavioral Health Partners*
- *Board of Social Services*
- *The Casey Foundation/Casey Family Programs*
- *Center for Adoption Support & Education (CASE)*
- *Child Fatality Review Committee*
- *Citizens Review Boards and Panel*
- *Coalition to Protect Maryland's Children*
- *Collaboration Council of Montgomery County*
- *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*
- *Home Based Treatment Team (HBT)*
- *Homeless Shelter Providers Team*
- *Housing Opportunities Commission (HOC)*
- *Infants & Toddlers Program*
- *Institute for Family Centered Services (IFCS)*
- *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 Circuit Court Family Division*
- *Montgomery County Government*
- *Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS)*
- *National Center for Children & Families (NCCF)*
- *Operation Runaway*
- *Primary Care Coalition (PCC)*
- *The Lourie Center for Children's Social and Emotional Wellness*
- *Trawick Foundation*
- *The Tree House, Child Assessment Center (CAC)*
- *University of Maryland School of Social Work*
- *Workforce Solutions*
- *YMCA – Metropolitan YMCA*

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## Montgomery County Child Welfare Services Executive Staff

**Lisa Merkin, LCSW-C**

*Child Welfare Services Administrator*

*Vacant, Office Services Coordinator*

**Thomas Grazio, LCSW-C (Acting)**

*Assessment Section Manager*

*Marisa Lim, Office Services Coordinator*

**Angela English, LCSW-C**

*Out of Home Services Manager*

*Patty Carson, Office Services Coordinator*

**Vacant**

*Treatment Section Manager*

*Jessica Santos, Office Services Coordinator*

**Pat Davis Spann, LGSW**

*Resource Section Manager*

*Phyllis Reed, Office Services Coordinator*

**Thomas Grazio, LCSW-C**

*The Tree House Director*

*Sandra Merino, Administrative Assistant*

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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  
Phone: 240-777-4699  
TTY: 240-777-3560*