

STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

2023 Annual Progress & Services Report



State of Alabama
Department of Human Resources
June 30, 2022

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I. General Information

State Agency

The Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR) is designated by the Governor as the Agency to administer the Social Services Block Grant (Title XX), Title IV-B, and Title IV-E programs. DHR administers the IV-B subpart two, Promoting Safe and Stable Families plan and supervises services provided by the Department and purchased through community service providers.

The Children and Family Services Division (FSD), with oversight from the Deputy Commissioner for Children and Family Services, has primary responsibility for the social service component of the Title IV-E plan and programs that include Independent Living Services, the Title IV-B plans and programs for children and their families through the Social Services block grant, and the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA). There is additional involvement from other key offices within the Department. The Quality Assurance Division (QAD) has a lead role in promoting and ensuring Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) in DHR's child welfare programs. The Resource Management Division (RMD) is responsible for regulatory and residential licensure functions, procuring/contracting services for the child welfare continuum, utilization review, and family preservation/support services. The population served by DHR includes dependent children, youth, and their families, as well as in-home children, youth, and their families receiving prevention and intervention services to ensure safety, permanency, and well-being.

Alabama meets the Maintenance of Effort (MOE) requirement of \$1,016,682 through the State Family Options program and does not supplant any state funds. The Substantial Portion of Funds requirement for Promoting Safe and Stable Families is met with the following allocation of funds for FY 2019: Family Preservation 29.54%, Family Support 21.93%, Time-Limited Reunification 16.44%, Adoption Promotions and Support 32.08%. For FY 2020: Family Preservation 27.95%, Family Support 24.89%, Time-Limited Reunification 20.39%, Adoption Promotions and Support 26.77%.

ORGANIZATION/STRUCTURE OF THE CHILD WELFARE SERVICES PROGRAM-FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

The Deputy Commissioner for the Family Services Division is responsible for overseeing the children and family and adult services programs. The FS Division also works in collaboration with other divisions in the Department to assure best practice, quality services, efficiency, and alignment of program, processes, and procedures.

DIRECTOR-Children & Family Services

The Director is responsible for the overall administration for the Division with support from the Deputy Directors. In that role, direct supervision is provided to the Deputy Directors and the Director's Administrative Assistant (office administrator). The Director's scope of responsibility includes oversight for the provision of a range of supports to county departments in the areas of policy development, selected training opportunities, foster and adoptive home recruitment and approval, consultation and technical assistance, budgeting, data analysis, and direct client services to children and families. Coordination with the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, the Legal Office, other division directors, and county directors takes place on a regular basis. The Director represents the Division with other state and federal agencies, advisory groups, legislators, the Governor's Office, and advocacy groups.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-Children & Family Services

As of March 31, 2022, four (4) Deputy Directors assist the Director in managing the Family Services Division (FSD). The Deputy Director of Child Welfare Case Management supervises the following offices: Child Protective Services, Adoption Resources, Subsidies and Supports, Foster Care, and Adoption Recruitment and Placement, and other clerical staff. The Deputy Director of Child Welfare Administration Services supervises the Office of Policy, FACTS, and the Office of Data Analysis. The Deputy Director of Child Welfare Eligibility and Family Resources supervises the Office of Financial Resource Management, IV-E Child Welfare Eligibility, and other clerical staff. The Deputy Director of

Traditional Placement and Specialized Supports supervises the ILP Program, ICPC, and Recruitment and Home Care Supports. The Deputy Directors serve as liaisons to represent the FSD in internal agency meetings involving the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, and the State Legal Office. Further they represent the Agency in extra-agency trainings, task forces, work committees, and other groups as needed.

OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE POLICY

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Child Welfare Policy (OCWP) is comprised of one Program Manager, one full-time Policy Developer, and one part-time policy developer. The OCWP is responsible for composing child welfare policy consistent with state and federal legislation and developing and revising all other policies as needed by each child welfare program.

The OCWP is responsible for coordinating revisions to the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes including incorporating best practice goals and principles into policy; amending the Administrative Record Procedures Code; coordinating the review of state legislation pertinent to services for children and families; development and submission of the Title IVE-E State Plan; and maintaining a database for publishing policy interpretations.

Policy development and revision processes include:

- Assessing policy needs and issues
- Planning approaches to policy development
- Completing research
- Collaborating with experts and professional resources
- Writing policy drafts
- Involving relevant stakeholders
- Managing the review, comment, and final drafting process through the Department and external stakeholders
- Securing administration's approval of the proposed final draft

In addition, the OCWP responds to counties, other state partners, national requests for information about policy, and makes referrals to other program areas as needed for case-specific consultation. The OCWP also supports Quality Service Review work in the counties, proxy work for high-level administration, and support for ongoing initiatives/needs throughout the Family Services Department.

OFFICE OF CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES

The Office of Child Protective Services (CPS) is responsible for statewide program development in child protective services. Working in conjunction with county offices, the Office of CPS provides consultation and training, both locally and statewide, to agency staff and community partners. As of March 31, 2022, the Office of CPS was comprised of one Program Manager, seven (7) Program Specialists, three (3) full-time Administrative Support Assistants, and two (2) retired state employees. The Manager responds to calls from county office staff on CPS issues, training needs, and consultation. In addition, the Manager and Program Specialists review cases and respond to concerns from constituents. Other responsibilities include supervision and development of Alabama's CPS Program; working as a team member on the development of Child Protective Services policy, and reviewing legislation related to child protective services.

The Office of CPS has responsibility for the following:

- Working in conjunction with the Children's Justice Task Force on the Child Abuse and Neglect Basic State Grant
- Managing and conducting Administrative Record Reviews when persons allegedly responsible for child abuse and neglect dispute an Indicated (i.e., substantiated) finding.
- Maintaining the Central Registry on Child Abuse and Neglect. Information contained in the Central Registry serves to prevent child abuse and neglect of children through the clearance of potential childcare providers, childcare institution employees, day care center employees, staff in school systems, voluntary agencies, child placing agencies, and others

- Provides trainings as appropriate for county staff in the areas of Intake, Safety Assessment, CA/N Investigations, Home Evaluations, and the Multi-Needs process
- Completes safety assessments across the state in those counties which are undergoing review by the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice
- Responding to calls from county office staff on CPS issues, training needs, and consultation
- Case reviews and responses to concerns from constituents
- Supervision and development of Alabama's CPS program

OFFICE OF DATA ANALYSIS

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Data Analysis was comprised of a Program Manager (Vacant) and three (3) Program Specialists. The Office of Data Analysis is responsible for the program support area of the Statewide Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS)- Family, Adult, and Child Tracking System (FACTS), which was implemented statewide in January 2009. Staff from this office serve as mentors to provide support regarding the CCWIS system for the state office staff. The Office has established and maintains a death database which provides history beginning in 1997 to the present. Data reports are available monthly, quarterly, and annually to assist state and county staff in analyzing and interpreting data. One program specialist has the assigned duties of helping to coordinate meetings and reports related to child welfare programs and planning (includes both internal as well as external meetings with staff, stakeholders, and federal partners), content assimilation and submission of Alabama's Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), and the CFSR-related documents.

This office is responsible for the following:

- Identifying the data support needs of the FSD and coordinating the collection of data with the Department's Information Services Division and FACTS Functional staff
- Analyzing data on child welfare outcomes and presenting the findings in useful and meaningful ways to administration, Family Services staff, county offices, and other state and federal agencies
- Reviews federal and state regulations to determine policy requirements that result in changes which directly affect caseworker visits, NCANDS, NYTD, and AFCARS reporting
- Works closely with the Office of Quality Assurance and provides county safety and permanency data profiles to state QA staff before every state QA review. This office has established a database of measurement mechanisms for state QA case reviews
- Collects data on child deaths through county Child Death Reports and reviews

OFFICE OF INTERSTATE COMPACT ON THE PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN

The Office of Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) reviews, approves/disapproves, and processes referrals for children to enter or leave the state for the purposes of foster care, adoption, relative, parent, and residential placements. Placement of children through ICPC ensures protection and consistency of services for children who are placed across state lines and establishes orderly procedures for the interstate placement of children. As of March 31, 2022, the ICPC office included a Program Manager, and five (5) Program Specialists with one of those program specialist slots vacant.

OFFICE OF FOSTER CARE AND THE INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM

The Office of Foster Care is responsible for supporting county staff so that children in Out-of-Home Care receive timely permanency. This office also provides specialized services and supports to agency staff, community partners, providers, and stakeholders. The Office is also responsible for:

- Ensuring the appropriateness of Therapeutic Foster Care services for any child under the age of 6
- Approving out of state residential placements
- Approving short-term placement of youth in psychiatric hospitals for stabilization
- Processes Foster Care Trust Fund requests

- Leads Alabama's Foster Parent Conflict Resolution Team (CRT)

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Foster Care has a Program Manager and four (4) Program Specialists (consultants). All four FC consultants are out based. Each county office has an assigned FC Specialist who serves as a liaison for constituent matters involving FC cases, reviewing county trends, and networking with counties for foster parent recruitment. The FC Program continues to partner with the State Board of Education-Special Education Advisory Panel (SEAP). The FC Program Manager also continues to serve as Alabama's Every Student Succeeds ACT (ESSA) liaison with the Alabama State Board of Education.

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Independent Living Program's (ILP) unit has one Program Manager, one Program Supervisor, two ILP Specialists, and two (2) Fostering Hope Mentors. There is a vacancy for a third ILP Specialist. The ILP Program Supervisor serves as the State ILP Coordinator. The ILP Program Manager, Program Supervisor, and Specialists support our counties providing consultation, training, and support related to policy development and Independent Living Services. The ILP unit supports the FSD by performing logistical functions.

The Office of FC/ILP team monitors data trends to identify needed services and supports. The Office works with our various partners to develop and procure services to improve our young people's overall foster care experience, thereby improving outcomes. Alabama's ILP goals are improving permanency outcomes, education success, and overall health and well-being for the older youth in foster care. The ILP team develops programs and services to be implemented statewide utilizing Chafee and FC funds. The program also supports county offices development of Individualized Service Plans, consultation, and support for youth aged 14-26 years.

The duties and functions related to monitoring and improving the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD) and the Alabama Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program are also managed by the FC/ILP team. Foster Care and ILP also provide support to the Department of Youth Services (DYS) in a referral capacity as youth exit the juvenile justice systems. This office also serves as a support to the FSD in preventing human trafficking by monitoring runaway and at-risk populations and providing training to staff, community partners, and stakeholders.

This office continues to focus on consultation and training around positive permanency outcomes, the health, well-being, and safety of our older youth. We provide training opportunities and support to our staff, community, vendor partners and stakeholders, focused on the same. Our annual Regional Consultations were modified to meet COVID restrictions and began via Zoom in October 2020 and ended in March 2021, providing training opportunities to all 67 counties. We continued to encourage and support the use of our Assessment and Transition Planning tools in conjunction with our Individualized Service Plans, ensuring the successful transition of youth out of foster care. The focus of this year's statewide training was the appropriate use of our ILP planning tools and improving outcomes. The consultations focused on developing appropriate support relationships with the youth that we serve, promoting their strengths while maximizing opportunities to promote self-awareness and advocacy. Training related to college preparation and support and the new requirements related to both our supervised Independent Living and the Foster Youth Initiative were also provided.

OFFICE OF PERMANENCY

The Office of Adoptions has been split into two units and is now The Office of Permanency. The two units are Recruitment and Placement and Resources/Subsidies and Support; both are managed by Program Managers. As of March 31, 2022, the Adoption Subsidy/Resource and Support has three Program Specialists that are responsible for Intake, adoption petitions, Putative Father Registry, Interstate Compact Association on Medical Assistance, and adoption subsidy. The Unit also has two Retired State Employees who manage the file room, create ward numbers, and manage Free Home files. Two ASAs create files, sort mail, and aid the Adoption Specialists in various tasks. This Unit also includes two (2) Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiters. One for the Northern District and one for the Southern District. The Recruitment and Placement unit has seven (7) out based Adoption Specialists, one (1) Administrative Assistant, and one (1) retired employee. The two WWK recruiters are funded through a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and implement the Wendy's Wonderful Kid Child-Focused Recruitment Model. An administrative assistant is responsible for

registering children on the photo listing web sites, in addition to receiving and routing studies from interested families. Three Adoption program specialists provide support for the remaining responsibilities of the Office of Permanency. One program specialist serves as the Deputy Compact Administrator for the Interstate Compact Association on Medical Assistance (ICAMA) and manages the responsibility and coverage of those children who move in and out of the state with subsidy Medicaid eligibility. This program specialist is assisted by the subsidy specialist as well as another program specialist in the execution of these duties. One specialist is responsible for adoption assistance (subsidy) and the kinship-guardianship payroll. The Office of Permanency also has three Administrative Assistants responsible for processing petitions and other adoption-related paperwork as well as Putative Father Registry and records management.

The Office of Permanency focuses on planning for children in the FC system who have a permanency plan of adoption. If adoption by the current foster parent is not in the child's best interest, then recruiting an adoptive resource, preparing the child for a move, and making adoptive placements become the focus in working to achieve permanency. Consultation is provided to the counties to be certain the requirements of the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA), Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, and the Multi-Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA) are followed, and to help focus permanency efforts for all children in foster care. In addition, support and policies are provided related to the Putative Father Registry and clearing all adoption petitions through existing data systems for acknowledgement to the court to proceed with adoption. This area is served by an Intake Specialist whose role includes responding to inquiries from county staff and constituents requiring information on the laws, policies, and practice impacting permanency through adoption for children.

Placement specialists participate in facilitating and supporting permanency through adoption. Special focus is placed on identifying adoptive resources for older youth and children with special health care or developmental needs. The specialists are accessible to assigned counties by telephone and through field visits to provide training and case consultation. In addition to their focus on permanency the specialists provide input on policy development and interpretation. Specialists participate in training for county staff on current issues and new policies impacting permanency. Placement specialists are responsible for reviewing/approving adoption-only home studies submitted by county offices and contract agencies. Each specialist is expected to have extensive knowledge of ASFA, MEPA, and Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 which guides best practice

RECRUITMENT/RETENTION OF FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENTS

County Departments continue to conduct recruitment and retention activities. Additionally, statewide advertising and public awareness activities have been coordinated by the State Office of Foster Care and ILP Programs.

The Office of Permanency has two full-time program specialists dedicated to child-focused activities funded through a grant from the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption via the Wendy's Wonderful Kids program. The WWK program specialists work with smaller caseloads of children ensuring they have ample time and resources for each child. The youth on the WWK caseloads are youth who have been in foster care the longest including older youth, siblings, and children with special needs. These children are also featured on several adoption websites where families can learn more about the children and make inquiries about them. These inquiries are managed by staff at the state level.

The ILP manager, Recruitment and Home Care Support Manager, and Adoption manager currently have the responsibility to support and monitor contracts and agreements with Children's Aid Society/Alabama Post-Adoption Connections (CAS/APAC), AdoptUsKids, and participate in the partnership with Heart Gallery of Alabama and Kids to Love. Recruitment/Retention activities occur for both foster and adoptive resources. The theme for Alabama's recruitment effort is "Open Your Heart, Open Your Home". Ongoing child specific recruitment efforts include featuring children on www.AdoptUsKids.org; www.heartgalleryalabama.com, and www.adoption.com websites as well as the Department's website. The Department also features waiting children through Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA) and Alabama Post Adoption Connection (APAC) newsletters and on the Kids to Love website.

The Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support expanded sports focused recruitment by partnering with the University of Alabama, the University of Alabama at Birmingham, and Auburn University at eighteen (18) sporting events beginning

in November 2019 and concluding in September 2020. This partnership with the state's largest collegiate sports teams continued via radio, digital, and print ads on the respective universities' websites from April 2020 through September 2020. This office works in partnership with AFAPA, APAC, Heat Gallery, Kids to Love, and Alabama's DREAM Ambassadors as volunteers to share information. The partnerships provide the opportunity for patrons to speak to staff and partners regarding the critical needs of children and families served.

The Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support has contracted with an in-state advertising company to recruit for foster/adoptive homes using their services. Alabama currently has digital media in locations around the state, a social media commercial featuring Nick Saban and several other shorter ads that are triggered when people within the target audience open their social media or streaming apps. The Department's partnership with major colleges and universities across the state continued during the reporting period and expanded to now include Troy University.

OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE ELIGIBILITY

As of March 1, 2022, the Office of Child Welfare Eligibility (OCWE) consists of a Program Manager, Program Supervisor, seven (7) Program Specialists, and Administrative Record Support Assistant II (Vacant), and three (3) Retired State Employees. This office was established in 1991 in response to the state's need for accurate determinations of IVE-E Eligibility. The OCWE was transferred to FSD in April 2005. The primary responsibility of the OCWE is to determine eligibility for Title IV-E, a federally funded program that assists states in three major areas: room and board payments for children in foster care, administration, and training. Policies and procedures must be consistent with federal regulations of the Title IV-A state plan that was effective July 16, 1996. The OCWE must make determinations of providers' approvals for reimbursement for Title IV-E eligibility based on the Minimum Standards. set by the Department. In addition, the OCWE has responsibility for the maintenance of policies and procedures of the Emergency Assistance Program currently funded through the TANF Block Grant and Title XX.

OFFICE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Financial Resource Management (OFRM) consists of a Program Manager, a Program Supervisor, a Medicaid Rehabilitative Specialist (Vacant), a Targeted Case Management Specialist, an Accountant/FACTS Financial Trainer (Vacant), one Administrative Support Assistant II, and one Administrative Support Assistant I (Vacant). This office is responsible for training county staff in the policy and claiming responsibilities for the Medicaid Rehabilitative Program and the Targeted Case Management (TCM) Program. In addition to these training responsibilities, the OFRM is also responsible for updating policies related to TCM and Medicaid Rehabilitative programs. Training on Medicaid Rehabilitative services that qualify as medically necessary and are designed to treat and/or rehabilitate a child with a mental illness is provided in county offices. FACTS Financial training is a hands-on training that provides county staff with the basic information that must be entered into the system for Medicaid billing to occur.

The objective for Medicaid Rehab and TCM Training is to provide the knowledge base from which county staff can make informed decisions regarding available services, the best way in which to offer services by qualified practitioners, and how to seek reimbursement for services provided.

Training for Medicaid Rehabilitative services consists of a one-day session which focuses on the definition of eligible services, persons who are qualified to provide services, when and how services should be authorized, and the documentation required by the Medicaid Agency.

FACTS Financial Training consists of a one-day session that reinforces the following procedures to ensure the Department is able to seek federal reimbursement for eligible rehabilitative services:

- Explains the importance of establishing Medicaid eligibility, what a reimbursable service is, and what is needed to track spending from Flex Funds
- Completing Intake Evaluations, Treatment Plan Reviews, and EPSDT health screenings for each child in foster care
- Clarifying when it is appropriate to claim reimbursement (e.g., protective service and safety plan vs. an open case)

- Discussion of claiming reimbursement for services authorized in the Individualized Service Plan (ISP) and services that are not authorized in the ISP
- Discussion of adequate progress notes from service providers prior to payment being made
- Explanation of Medicaid Eligibility screens in the FACT System, including using accurate client information
- Explanation of HIPAA privacy codes, units, and rates of services that can be authorized
- Identification of services that can be provided to adults on behalf of a Medicaid eligible child
- Discussion of how to read county reports and the importance of reviewing them for accuracy

Targeted Case Management Certification Training consists of four units explaining TCM services in Case Management, Adult Protective Services, Child and Adult TCM examples, and ending with a TCM Certification test.

FACTS PROJECT

As of March 31, 2022, there is a Program Manager and two (2) Program Specialists who serve in the role of functional analysts. The Functional Analysts process requests for data fixes and test the same. They are also responsible for creating business rules for enhancements to FACTS and testing the same before they go to production. There are two Program Specialists working the FACTS Help Desk. FACTS Help Desk staff receive and troubleshoot reports from county FACTS Mentors and provide technical assistance when possible. The FACTS Project (Alabama's CCWIS) is a part of the Information Systems Division. However, the Family Services Division has designated personnel that fill the role of Functional Analysts (FA) and staff the FACTS Help Desk. The Help Desk screens in FACTS permit the Help Desk staff to correct some issues without having to involve functional or developer staff. When the issue at hand is something that the FACTS Help Desk staff cannot correct, they submit incidents through the Service Now system. These incidents are reviewed by the Functional Analysts and when possible, the FA fixes the issue. When this is not possible, a request for a data fix is entered into the TFS System where FACTS developers pick them up and make the necessary changes in a SIC (Ageing environment). Functional Analyst staff test the data fix prior to migrating them to production. ISD utilizes Agile for managing the work of the FACTS project. The FA staff are also responsible for developing business rules for these enhancements, defects, queries, etc. The developers then utilize the business rules to complete the tasks outlined in the user story. The functional analysts work closely with the Office of Data Analysis to improve data quality and accuracy. The FSD staff designated to the FACTS project are supervised by the Director of Children & Family Services.

OFFICES SUPPORTING CHILD WELFARE EXTERNAL TO CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES

THE QUALITY ASSURANCE DIVISION (QAD)

The Deputy Commissioner for the Quality Assurance Division is responsible for measuring and improving the quality of child welfare service while ensuring the highest standard of service delivery to family services consumers. The QA Division also works in collaboration with other divisions in the Department to assure best practice, quality services, efficiency, proper data management and alignment of program, processes, and procedures to continuously assess and improve the quality of child welfare performance in the state. Through May 15, 2020, the Deputy Commissioner for Children and Family Services was Interim Deputy Commissioner for QA. Beginning on May 16, 2020, a new Deputy Commissioner for QA was named. This division is responsible for capacity development around best practice and support to all 67 county departments.

DIRECTOR-QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Director of Quality Assurance is responsible for the overall administration of the Division with the support of one Deputy Director. A number of specific child welfare programs and initiatives are managed within the Division. The Director's scope of responsibility includes oversight for the provision of a range of supports to county departments including the following:

- initial and ongoing child welfare training
- responding to constituent concerns and complaints

- quality assurance services reviews
- quality child welfare practice reviews
- county improvement planning and
- a unit that provides training around behavioral needs of children as well as providing individualized behavioral consultation to families and children served by the Department

The QA Director's coordination of activities with the Commissioner, Deputy Commissioners, the Legal Office, other Division Directors, and County Directors takes place on a regular basis. The Director represents the Division with other state and federal agencies, advisory groups, and if needed legislators, the Governor's office, and advocacy groups. As of March 1, 2022, the QA Director directly oversees the Program Managers and Supervisors in the Offices of Quality Assurance, Training, and Quality Child Welfare Practice, as well as the Deputy Director for Quality Assurance.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR-QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Deputy Director directly oversees the Program Manager of the Office of Constituent Services and the Office of Behavior Analysis. The Deputy Director supports the mission of the Division by participating on various committees, workgroups, and assisting the Director with the coordination of Division activities.

OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE TRAINING

As of March 31, 2022, the Office of Child Welfare Training (OCWT) consists of six (6) Trainers and a Program Supervisor. In May 2016, this office was transferred from the FSD to the newly formed Quality Assurance Division. The Deputy Commissioner for QA works in close collaboration with the FSD. The OCWT continues to play an important role in consulting and partnering with other units to meet overall Division training needs. The OCWT serves in a consulting role to help other units in the Division develop curricula that is outcome-based and fits within the adult learning mode. In other areas, the OCWT partners by helping to deliver the training with staff. The Office also serves in a consulting role for the counties as they are enabled through train-the-trainer programs to produce and present some of their own training.

OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE PRACTICE

In May 2016, the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice (OQCWP), formerly known as the Office of Child Welfare Consultation was transferred from the FSD to the newly formed Quality Assurance Division (QAD). As of March 1, 2022, the OQCWP consisted of the following staff: one Program Supervisor, and seven (7) Program Specialists, and one vacancy. The QA Deputy Commissioner, the QA Division Director, and the QA Division Deputy Director all work in close collaboration with the FSD.

This office partners with the Office of QA to support Alabama's Continuous Quality Improvement Model. A team of staff from this office previously conducted random record reviews from a sample case pull. The OQCWP Specialists would provide completed Child Welfare Practice Review Tools and a Report of Findings to the director and supervisors in the county following each Random Record Review. The Tool was updated in 2021 to give feedback to the county regarding the OSRI 18 items. The Random Record Review identifies areas of strengths and needs. The specialists continue to complete ongoing peer reviews in counties across the state, providing feedback to supervisors and county management around the strengths and needs identified. The OQCWP focuses on three to four areas of need derived from random reviews and offers supports to counties regarding the identified needs. The OQCWP specialists work in conjunction with the QA unit and the county to develop a County Improvement Plan. This plan serves as a guide and working document to move practice forward and achieve positive and timely outcomes for children and families, and also includes the areas of need identified in record reviews. The OQCWP works toward building capacity within county supervisors to improve casework, ensure adherence to child welfare policy, and strategies for retention of staff. Supervisory Management Training was provided to county supervisors and will continue. The OQCWP specialists continue to work with county supervisors to enhance their understanding and use of the Electronic Reports Distribution (ERD) and how to review cases using the Child Welfare Practice Tool. The OQCWP continue to support the importance of unit meetings, individual

supervisory meetings with staff, accountability of staff, working agreements, time management, timeframe obstacles, purposeful technical support, and other issues that impact case management.

The current Continuous Quality Improvement model utilizes the expertise of the practice specialists in areas of policy, practice, assessment of outcomes, and supervisory capacity building. Practice specialists support county supervisors through calls and meetings to assess best practice indicators and to review case files. Through this process specialists provide case-specific feedback and suggested next steps with recommendations to provide improved sustainability and goal achievement in foster care cases, protective service cases, and foster family home records. Family Services/Child Protective Services conducts a safety assessment for the OQCWP reviews. The safety assessment provides feedback to counties with CANs, preventions, suspected CANs, and intake screen outs. The program specialists in the OQCWP unit provide support to county supervisors in training staff on meaningful caseworker visits/case narrative documentation, family engagement, times management, and CFA/ISPs. The QA Director provides oversight and the OQCWP program supervisor provides daily supervision to the OQCWP specialists in their work onsite in the counties; conducting special assignments to support directives around needs for improved outcomes and providing increased capacity-development opportunities for practice specialists an all OQCWP staff.

OFFICE OF CONSTITUENT SERVICES

The Office of Constituent Services (OCS)/Intake is part of the Quality Assurance Division (QAD). This unit was transferred in May 2016 from the FSD to the QAD. The QAD Deputy Commissioner oversees the functions of this office along with the Director. The OCS is headed by a Program Manager who supervises two (2) Constituent Service Specialists and four (4) specialists as well as one retired state employee who complete Multi-Dimensional Assessment Tools (MAT) duties with two vacancies. Those specialists receive and respond to state and national calls and written correspondence from constituents who have concerns about child welfare issues.

The OCS accepts constituent communications via phone, email, and letters. Upon receipt of a concern, the intake specialist contacts the appropriate county department in order to discuss the concern with the county director or a designated supervisor. Once addressed, the OCS requests a response from the county regarding the status of the constituent's concern within 72 hours. As a quality check, the OCS ensures the constituent is contacted by the county department within 24 hours. When calls of concern are received, intake specialists frequently access information from Alabama's CCWIS system to determine if there is a history of involvement with the Department. Information is entered and tracked into the FACTS system as an "Information and Referral". Information is reviewed by the Program Manager, approved, and tracked by the number and type of complaint received along with the county of origin.

As of August 2020, this unit is also responsible for the assignments of the Multi-Dimensional Assessment Tool (MAT) including all Therapeutic Foster Care and Residential MAT assessments. The Tool assists in determining the level of care/placement for behaviorally challenged children in foster care. The unit has four (4) MAT Assessors and one retired state employee to assist county departments where is no local assessor to complete TFC MATS. State assessors complete all Residential MAT assessments. From January 2021 until December 2021, 297 initial MAT assessments were completed with 178 TFC MAT reviews and 328 Residential MAT reviews were completed for a total of 803 assessments completed. Between January 1, 2022, and March 31, 2022, 78 initial MAT assessments, 29 TFC assessments, and 90 residential assessments have been completed for a total of 197 assessments completed.

OFFICE OF QUALITY ASSURANCE

As of March 2022, the Office of Quality Assurance (QA) consists of a Program manager, Program Supervisor, and six specialists; there is one vacant specialist position at this time. The Office of QA works closely with the office of Family Services. In February 2019, the Office of QA transitioned from using the Quality Service Review (QSR) tool to using the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) which monitors Alabama's conformity with federal child welfare services and assist Alabama in enhancing its capacity to help children and families achieve positive outcomes.

The Office of QA provides technical assistance to counties by providing information and consultation. Specialists provide

- Trainings to staff with QA responsibilities and local and state QA committee members
- Consultation on QA committee membership, functions, and activities
- Review of completed county OSRI documents and assistance in entering required data
- Feedback on biannual county self-assessments
- Monitoring and review of county improvement plans
- Measurement steps in county improvement plans
- As needed assistance to other specialists in the QA division and FSD in providing instruction and guidance in practice areas identified by onsite reviews as needing improvement
- Support and peer-to-peer learning opportunities through quarterly regional QA Coordinator Meetings

OFFICE OF QUALITY BEHAVIORAL SERVICES

The Office of Quality Behavioral Services, previously the Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), consists of a Deputy Director to Quality Assurance, one Behavior Manager, three (3) Board Certified Behavior Analysts, and two (2) Behavior Analysts. There are two vacancies at this time. This office provides training on parenting techniques specific to behavior management and individualized behavioral consultation to the families and children serviced by the Department. The Board-Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) provide parent training utilizing the “Tools of Choice” (TOC) curriculum. The TOC courses are provided to parents, legal custodians of children with an open DHR child welfare case, foster parents, and DHR staff. The 5-week, face to face course is offered as a service to teach behavior strategies with the child who exhibits challenging behaviors. After completion of the classroom portion of the course, home visits are made by specialists to observe implementation of the behavior modification strategies. The Tools of Choice Virtual classes have been conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the pandemic using ZOOM. The behavioral analysts have continued to make home visits, although certain activities such as skills acquisition and modeling/training that require close contact were modified based on the families comfort level during the height of the pandemic.

The BCBAs also receive Individual Behavioral Assessment Referrals from county departments and assist in the review of treatment programs. BCBAs review documentation in FACTS including social history, background, and the ISP and also observe the identified child in all pertinent settings to determine the level of behavioral needs. Once completed, the BCBA writes and implements a behavior modification plan specific to the identified child. In-person follow up is provided in the home and school setting as needed until progress is achieved. The BCBAs also review treatment programs/plans which contain restrictive procedures for children who have serious behavioral concerns and are residing in a residential facility. Recommendations and supports are offered to provide behavior management strategies in order to support families and to ensure least restrictive placement is identified and/or permanency can be achieved.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT DIVISION

The Resource Management Division (RMD) reports to the Deputy Commissioner for Fiscal and Administrative Services. The overall mission for the RMD is to provide technical assistance and support services to DHR county offices, providers, and to other divisions of the Department. Originally the RMD consisted of six offices until 2013 when the Office of Resource Development and the Office of Utilization Review were merged and became the Office of Utilization and Review. The other offices comprising the RMD are the Office of Contracts, the Office of Licensing, the Office of Fiscal Accountability, and the Office of Procurement.

OFFICE OF PROCUREMENT

The Office of Procurement provides overall direction for Department-wide procurement policies, regulations, and procedures, and promotes efficiency and effectiveness in the acquisition process. This office specializes in the purchasing of services in compliance with state laws, regulations, and procedures. Other responsibilities of this office include coordinating and facilitating the acquisition of services, assisting other Divisions in the preparation of Requests for Proposals (RFPs) or Requests for Information (RFI), developing RFPs or RFIs, reviewing and analyzing requests, and making

recommendations for the award of contracts. This office also provides training to Department personnel and vendors upon request regarding procurement procedures and regulations, maintains procurement records, and establishes and maintains effective working relationship with vendors, department officials and the public.

OFFICE OF CONTRACTS

The Office of Contracts negotiates, manages, and monitors the Department's social services organizations, non-governmental public or private organizations, and individuals. Services are procured per the bid law and upon selection, contracts are negotiated on the state and county level to meet identifiable needs. There are two major types of purchase for service contracts: 1) a cost reimbursement contract and 2) a fixed-rate contract. A cost reimbursement contract is the purchase of goods and services for which the contractor's actual costs are reimbursed based on a detailed line-item budget approved by the Department.

OFFICE OF LICENSING

The Office of Licensing is responsible for licensing residential childcare facilities (childcare facilities, group homes, shelters) and child placing agencies. Licenses are issued to providers who meet the Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities, Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies, Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes, and the Therapeutic Foster Care Manual. Site visits, announced and unannounced, are conducted to verify provider compliance with the Minimum Standards and manual. Several of the child-placing agencies are licensed to provide an array of services from foster care to adoption. This office licenses and monitors agencies that are in the contract network and some that are not. This office conducts an average of 120 sites per year. The Office of Licensing also provides support services, consultation, technical assistance, and interpretation of the Minimum Standards to prospective and existing childcare providers and DHR county offices. Licensing staff are responsible for entering therapeutic foster home information and updates to provider information in the FACTS system. This office is also responsible for coordinating the Rapid Response Team (RRT) and leads investigations into injuries and allegations of abuse and neglect pertaining to children in care.

OFFICE OF FINANCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

The Office of Financial Accountability is responsible for processing monthly invoices from residential and therapeutic foster care providers and for verifying Medicaid eligibility for children in the custody of the Department. This office maintains data regarding admissions and discharges and is responsible for information county offices and providers of any discrepancies. The office monitors and analyzes budgetary expenditures for residential, TFC, and continuum contracts. It is also the responsibility of this office to research and process all Board of Adjustment claims for the Resource Management Division and to assist county workers in determining the appropriate documentation on the FACTS system.

OFFICE OF RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT/UTILIZATION REVIEW

The Office of Resource Development/Utilization Review (ORD/UR) is responsible for developing resources for children and families and for providing support services and technical assistance to contract providers in the delivery of services to families and children. The ORD/UR is also responsible for assisting the county offices with placement of difficult to place children, developing in-state resources, and approving intensive placements for children (aged 13 and older), moderate, TFC, and TFC-enhanced placements. Staff in this office monitor the average length of stay of children in these placements using information gathered from providers, the FACTS system, and county workers.

The ORD/UR assisted the Family Services Division in developing TFC with Enhanced Services. The children in these homes need additional services as they may have a chronic illness, extreme behavior issues, or emotional needs that require more services. The Department receives updates about the children placed in TFC Enhanced on a regular basis via monthly summaries submitted by providers. Additionally, this office represents DHR as the liaison to the Department of Mental Health-Developmental Disability Division to assist counties in securing out-of-home waiver slots for children with intellectual disabilities.

This office also provides oversight of the Family Preservation and Support Services (FP/SS). The mission of the FP/SS program is to implement, expand and maintain quality services to preserve, reunify, support, and strengthen families. Specialists are responsible for monitoring, evaluating, and providing technical assistance to providers of the Family Service Centers' Intensive In-Home Services (IIHS) programs funded through Title IV-B, Subpart 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families. Specialists work with county departments to ensure these programs are as responsive to the needs of the county as possible, within the federal guidelines, and ensure they provide the highest quality of services possible.

OFFICE OF FINANCIAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Training on case management services moved from a regional classroom training to a desktop learning course in the DHR Learning, Education, and Training System (LETS) in September 2020. This certification method has been approved by the Alabama Medicaid Agency in order to certify staff to claim reimbursement for child and/or adult TCM encounters. TCM training is available in LETS on an ongoing basis for new child welfare and adult protective staff and is included in their learning plans.

STATEWIDE INFORMATION SYSTEM

Remote access to the CCWIS (FACTS) system was available to workers prior to COVID. Some caseworker visits were completed virtually to ensure the safety of children, families, and workers. Instructions were provided to staff on how to correctly document virtual contacts in the CCWIS system to ensure that information was reported accurately. Again, safety and well-being were assessed in person.

OFFICE OF ICPC

Delays in processing requests in some states/jurisdictions have been seen in regard to ICPC cases for Alabama due to different actions, requirements, and restrictions of other states during the pandemic. Some states would not allow placement of children into their states for a period of time and other states required quarantines and testing prior to placements. However, Alabama continued to allow placements into the state, continued to process cases, worked remotely, and accepted cases electronically. ICPC kept some staff in the state offices at all times to process mail in order to minimize the impact.

OFFICE OF CHILD WELFARE ELIGIBILITY (IV-E)

This office continues to be impacted by COVID-19. Although county staff no longer telework, submission of referrals for the determination of Title IV-E eligibility and Medicaid has not returned to pre-COVID-19 numbers. County staff turnover, court delays, and Alabama Medicaid Agency's "No Termination" policy (AMA will not terminate active recipients until the end of the pandemic) continue to have a bearing on submission of referrals to this office. Fewer children being determined IV-E eligible has adversely affected Alabama's IV-E penetration rate and federal reimbursements. To increase the IV-E penetration rate, we continue our Retro-Claiming process, and offer a mandatory Title IV-E Eligibility Training (via LETS) for county staff with foster care duties and presented at SDHR trainings for county directors and new foster care workers. To further ensure eligibility is being determined for children, the OCWE also monitors the monthly FACTS IV-E County Data Report of pending referrals.

AFCARS REVIEW

2022 Update: Alabama has begun to work on updating AFCARS data extraction codes in order to remain in compliance when AFCARS 2.0 requirements become effective in October 2022. Work also continues on updates to the FACTS system.

NYTD REVIEW

2022 Update: The NYTD audit took place between August 22-25, 2017. The audit revealed both strengths and weaknesses of the current program. Multiple problems were identified with data collection including tracking of youth in the 21-23 age bracket and tracking of youth that exit the program before their 21st birthday. All relevant issues from the report have been addressed and a PIP has been submitted for review/approval. The NYTD PIP was approved on July 31, 2018. As of this writing the Department has submitted three quarterly updates related to the approved PIP and provided the Children's Bureau with a demonstration of our new NYTD website, developed as a result of the review. Work related to improving NYTD outcomes and accurate reporting of services and supports is ongoing.

VISION STATEMENT

The Department of Human Resources (DHR), as the designated Title IVE-B Agency, administers this plan based on the philosophy that children should be protected from abuse and neglect and, whenever possible, families should be preserved and strengthened in order to nurture and raise children in safe, healthy, and stable environments. Service interventions are to be based on a set of beliefs about outcome-based practice that is both strengths-based and family focused and underscore the importance of comprehensive assessments and individualized planning on behalf of the children and families that come to the attention of the Department. At the core of these beliefs are the following tenets:

- Children belong with their families whenever they can safely live at home
- Child maltreatment is an expression of an underlying, unmet need
- Most parents love their children and want to care for them
- All individuals have worth, deserve respect, and are capable of change
- All children need to experience permanency in their lives; and when children cannot continue to live at home, they still need their families as well as meaningful relationships and enduring community connections

The Child Welfare Mission Statement is as follows: "The Alabama Department of Human Resources will help families receive the least disruptive services they need, when they need them, and for only as long as they need them in order to maintain children in – or return them to – a safe, stable home." The state Child and Family Services Plan for abused, neglected, and at-risk children and their families is intended to operationalize beliefs through developing goal-directed services that are individualized and needs-based and designed with the following desired outcomes in mind:

- Treat families as partners in parenting and protecting their children
- Respect parents and their children and focus on the family and on the family's strengths
- Services are matched to meet identified needs and vary in levels of intensity needed to keep children safe and assure their well-being
- Services are coordinated between service provider and agencies to meet the multiple needs of children and their families
- Services are delivered in culturally sensitive ways
- Services are accessible to children and families
- Address systemic barriers to accessing needed services
- Support families through services and to strengthen families so they may safely care for their children

The vision as it relates to priorities and connections to organizational outcomes includes:

- Agreement on vision, priorities, and plans for moving forward
- Clarity on organizational responsibilities and mandates
- Support the work through organizational structure and efficient processes
- Achieve partnerships between units and with counties
- Share a unified view of practice, program mission, and priorities

Central to the organizational structure within the Family Services Division and Quality Assurance Divisions are two management teams comprised of managers and supervisors from each of the offices in the respective divisions. These

two teams of staff members serve as the leadership body of each division and have responsibility for carrying out the overall vision through ownership of the goals, priorities, and desired outcomes.

PRINCIPLES OF OPERATION AND PRACTICE MODEL

The Department and its Family Services and Quality Assurance Divisions are responsible for developing, operating, monitoring, and sustaining a system of child welfare services in accordance with its goals and principles:

- Children will be protected from abuse and neglect
- Children will live with their families whenever possible and when that cannot be achieved through the provision of services, children will live near their homes in the least restrictive environment that can meet their needs
- Children will achieve stability and permanency in their living situations
- Children will achieve success in school and become stable, gainfully employed adults

INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICE PLANNING (ISP) PROCESS

Central to practice in Alabama is the Individualized Service Plan (ISP). The ISP is developed as a partnership between the Department, children, families, and stakeholders. This planning team works together to develop a plan that is directed toward achieving the goals of the Consolidated Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP). The ISP is to be based on an assessment of strengths and needs within the family as well as the behavioral and environmental conditions that need to be changed in order for children to remain safely with their family, to be safely reunited, or to be provided a permanent, safe, and stable living situation. The effective use of these collaborative planning processes can result in partnerships in parenting/ protecting children and reforms in all levels of child welfare practice (state and county) in accordance with the Department's goals and principles. The thirty-six (36) CFSR items remain a framework for assessing the level of practice and system performance, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. This collaborative system of care can only be operationalized with the support of community-based, goal-directed services that are individualized, needs based, culturally sensitive, and family-focused while also being accessible and well-coordinated. Family preservation and support services are an integral design of the Department's system of care for children and families served through child welfare programs.

PRACTICE MODEL

The Department's **Child Welfare Practice Model** sets forth the following "Guiding Principles" for, and Desired Outcomes of the work done with children.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. Safety & Protection

Children's safety is first and foremost. DHR shall promote prompt, effective intervention, and freedom from maltreatment.

2. Permanency, Stability, & Self-Sufficiency

DHR shall promote the timely achievement of permanency for children so that they may live with their birth/relative family, and if that is not possible, have enduring relationships living with a permanent family that preserves birth family and other significant connections, and provides commitment, stability, belonging, and smooth, successful transitions into adulthood.

3. Well Being & Development

Appropriate planning promotes children experiencing love and belonging along with consistent, balanced nurturing and structure in a family environment, in order for children to experience educational, emotional, physical, and developmental growth and well-being.

4. Family-Centered & Culturally Responsive

Parental/child perspectives and expert knowledge of the strengths and needs of their family are valued, encouraged, and used in a family-centered, culturally responsive approach that involves birth families as partners

in planning, shapes all aspects of agency involvement with the family and seeks to strengthen parental capacities to care for their children.

5. Individualization of Services

Children and families are best enabled to grow, change their behavior, and overcome challenges when they are engaged, understood, and treated with respect as individuals with their own unique strengths, needs, and cultural identity, and receive strengths-based, individualized services and supports accordingly.

6. Community Collaboration

Ongoing collaboration with the community is valued and cultivated in order to have a continuum of services and resources that are comprehensive, seamless, readily accessible, responsive to individual, unique, and differing levels of need, provided in the least restrictive, most normalized environment and adequately supports parents in raising their children.

7. Professional/Organizational Competence

Child welfare practice should be provided by well-trained and empathetic professional staff, who respect the dignity and worth of every individual, receive skilled supervision, are adequately trained, have appropriate caseloads, and are supported by an effectively managed child welfare agency.

Desired Outcomes:

1. Contact is promptly initiated with children who are reported to be experiencing maltreatment or an impending danger threat and immediate safety is assessed/provided
2. Children with whom the Department is involved are safety and safety threats do not exist or are effectively controlled/managed (either within or outside of the birth family's home).
3. Permanency is achieved in a timely, appropriate manner and stability for children in their living situations is maintained
4. The significant (family, relative, community, educational, faith, and cultural) connections for children and their families are consistently preserved
5. Families have enhanced capacities to provide for their children's needs
6. Children in the care/custody of the Department are achieving success in school and, where necessary, are effectively supported in successfully transitioning into adulthood where they become stable, gainfully employed adults
7. Children in the care/custody of the Department are experiencing healthy emotional and physical growth and development

POSTING OF/ CONTACT PERSON FOR THE APSR

Upon approval by the Children's Bureau, the 2022 APSR will be posted on the DHR website, where it can be accessed as shown below.

POSTING OF/ CONTACT PERSON FOR THE APSR

Upon approval by the Children's Bureau, the 2022 APSR will be posted on the DHR website, where it can be accessed as shown below.

<https://dhr.alabama.gov/child-protective-services/consolidated-child-family-services-plan/>

Date: (October 1, 2022)

CONTACT PERSON FOR APSR

Misty J. Macon, LMSW

Office of Data Analysis

State DHR-Family Services Division

50 North Ripley Street, Montgomery, AL 36130

334-242-9500

misty.macon@dhr.alabama.gov

Collaboration

Alabama DHR continues to incorporate internal and external stakeholders in the Child and Family Service Review (CFSR) process. The collaborations that are planned/ongoing between the agency and various community partners include the Alabama Judicial & Child Welfare Collaboration Project. The project includes ongoing work around the iCAN project, local and state QA committees, the Alabama Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative, the Alabama Department of Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention, the Alabama Foster/Adoptive Parent Association, the Alabama Law Institute, and others that are outlined in the CFSP. It is our belief that these collaborations lead to better outcomes for families and children as they help address a number of critical areas of practice, including timely achievement of permanency, well-being, prevention of child abuse, and placement stability. **For more detailed information please see Systemic Factors of Service Array and Agency Responsiveness to Community.**

During this reporting period, the Department partnered with the Children's Justice Task Force (CJTF) to develop a Substance Abuse training for agency staff to focus on the complexities of substance use and how to assess for safety in these cases. This pilot training was held twice in the past year (2021/2022) with an additional three trainings planned for the next year (2022/2023). The Department, along with CJTF, and the Department of Public Health also collaborated to provide child death training focused on Alabama's Sudden Infant Death Investigations protocol. This training was for investigative staff and coroners and was held in two centrally located areas of the state. **For more information on these collaborative trainings, see Systemic Factor Agency Responsiveness to the Community.**

The Department works collaboratively across units and divisions in order to improve the safety, well-being, and permanency for families and children. The Office of Foster Care and Recruitment/Home Care Support continues its partnership with the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice and the Office of Resource Management around the issues of placement stability and support. This collaborative work has already had an impact on the number of placement moves, as they have steadily decreased. We are confident that this level of collaboration is contributing to better outcomes.

Alabama's State Office most recently added The Office of Traditional Placements and Specialized Support. This unit supports statewide recruitment, retention, and support of foster homes. This unit offers extended collaboration with counties, other state entities, tribal and local communities. The Office of Traditional Placement and Specialized Support developed a Statewide TIPS availability map. This map will be updated and distributed quarterly so that class information will be readily available for those interested in becoming foster/adoptive parents.

The Department has increased trauma informed training for staff and foster care providers, including expansion of Judicial partnerships and increased placement collaborations with the Resource Management Divisions. The goal is making the first foster care placement the best and final foster care placement.

The Independent Living Program has continued to solicit the input of Alabama's community partners, providers, foster parents, CAS partners and most importantly Alabama's young people. Quarterly meetings with providers have continued remotely during the COVID 19 health crisis. Alabama's young people and the DREAM Council leaders have also met as we continue to solicit their input related to strategic planning, input related to the Department's current PIP, and improvement of delivery of ILP services. The development of the current service plan was in collaboration with current and former foster youth, community providers, congregate care providers, and county and state staff from both the foster care and IL programs. Continuing to engage our community partners has positively impacted Alabama's ability to better serve both current and former foster youth during this crisis. Alabama is in contact with our community partners, such as Youth Towers, Second Shift Alabama, BigHouse Foundation, Lifeline, and Kids to Love. It has enhanced Alabama's ability to serve current and former foster youth. DREAM Ambassadors work closely with their peer foster youth in their monthly meetings to develop relevant service and supports. They are also an integral part of our training model, providing training to judges, community members, Quality Assurance committees, foster care training classes, Tribal members, DHR staff, and others. **For more details see Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (pgs. 37/46/136) and Coordination with Other Federal Programs and Private Agencies (pg. 40).**

Alabama DHR staff works closely with the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) staff to address policies and practices of both the court system and the child welfare system. The AOC was a key partner in the implementation of Alabama's CFSR, Round 2, PIP through assisting in identifying and implementing steps to improve dependency case flow management, educating judges, and guardians ad litem. They have continued to partner with DHR in the Round 3 CFSR through assisting with survey distribution and collection of responses that were incorporated into the Statewide Assessment, providing stakeholder input during the CFSR, and having staff serve on 2 of the 4 PIP work groups (including being a co-leader of one of the work groups). DHR has included the courts through many strategies such as iCAN meetings and annual Judicial Summits. **See Systemic Factor Agency Responsiveness to Community for more information (pg. 105).**

iCAN county teams, comprised of DHR and Court staff, are now meeting in 24 of our 67 counties. The iCAN meeting is a collaboration between juvenile judges and child welfare staff that is designed to identify and address barriers to safety and permanency. Some counties are conducting monthly meetings via Zoom due to the pandemic. Caseworkers have expressed that they feel their voice is heard and that the court system is now their partner. The goal of iCAN is to reduce the number of children in care, with each team having a unique focus on their specific needs. AOC has a vested interest in assisting local counties with data while also taking part in team meetings. Our mission is to promote competence in the judiciary and child welfare through conveying information, facilitating interaction, and changing institutional culture in order to remove obstacles between children and their forever families. We pursue our goal through facilitating judicial and child welfare collaboration and the nimble use of data to inform solid practice and foster shared outcomes. Our work includes a joint review of local county child welfare and judicial data, an examination of data trends, and thoughtful dialogue about strategic solutions. Through a series of statewide and regional summits, on-site technical assistance, and consultation to county judicial/child welfare team, we implement these solutions in our relentless pursuit of ensuring Alabama's children and families are safe and strong.

Collaboration Through Joint Planning

A Joint Planning Meeting was conducted on June 9, 2022. During these sessions, collaboration across the system of care was discussed. Some suggestions for increased collaboration included more specialized training for foster parents and more partnerships with providers to contract more services to enhance independent living skills trainings no matter where children are placed. These suggestions will be provided to leadership for review. **Please see Joint Planning Meeting, Appendix 3, for summaries of the three breakout sessions that were conducted.**

For more detailed information on collaboration across internal and external avenues, please see Systemic Factors of Service Array (pg. 89) and Agency Responsiveness to Community (105).

UPDATE TO ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE

ASSESSMENT OF PERFORMANCE

Where OSRI data is used, the measurement percentages reflect the frequency with which a given item was rated a STRENGTH in OSRIs completed as a component of district QA reviews. The percentages shown for FY20 are those from the first three measurement periods (MP) of Alabama's Round 3 PIP and those shown for FY21 are from MP 4-6. **Percentages shown for FY 2022 are from MP 7-9. See Appendix 5 for measurement data on all 18 items**

SAFETY Outcome 1 Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect

Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Child safety is paramount for the Alabama child welfare system. The timeframe for initiating face-to-face contact with a child who has been identified as an alleged victim of child maltreatment is based on present or impending danger and responses to all child maltreatment reports are made within the timeframes established by agency policies or state statutes. *See also updates provided under goals and strategies

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The majority of children reported to be at risk of abuse/neglect are seen within the timeframes mandated by policy/statute.• Response times are correctly assigned in accordance with the nature of the report.• Tracking systems are in place to monitor timely child contracts.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Additional information at Intake could be gleaned to facilitate timely contacts• Some errors in data entry were identified• families affected by Substance Misuse may lead transient lifestyles

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

Children reported to be at risk of abuse/neglect will be seen and assessed within the time frames established by Alabama law and DHR policy.

Strategies:

- Intake staff will gather all available information upon receipt of the report

The Office of Child Protective Services initiated random weekly record reviews of CAN assessments as they are submitted for Due Process. Program specialists utilize the review tool already in use of the Safety Assessment conducted in counties as part of regular on-site QA reviews. This tool includes a section around Intake. Currently program specialists submit a total of 15 reviews weekly. Plans are underway to compile the data into a usable and workable spreadsheet over the coming year. In the interim, feedback regarding individual cases reviewed and areas of concern identified is shared with county directors.

- County offices will have access to training opportunities through SDHR which are designed to enhance worker competence in collecting and analyzing information at Intake.

The Office of Child Protective Services designed and provided trainings to every district in Alabama over the past year which covered the collection of relevant and necessary information at Intake.

CPS program specialists will incorporate a review of data entry at Intake into the Safety Assessment instrument completed during county reviews. The current tool utilized for record reviews and completion of county Safety Assessments includes a section focused on the collection of information at Intake. The review tool includes:

- a summary of the reported concerns for the child
- a determination about the appropriateness of the response time assigned to the report
- a determination about the overall sufficiency of the information collected at Intake
- a determination about the notation of any family history at Intake
- confirmation of all household members
- confirmation of the PARANs access to the child allegedly abused/neglected and
- the assignment of appropriate allegation(s)

The results of each individual case review are then compiled into a comprehensive report which identifies areas needing improvement. The comprehensive Safety Assessment, as well as the individual case record review sheets, are shared with the county director as part of the debriefing process at the end of the on-site review. Feedback is provided to county offices regarding trends and issues that are identified.

2022 Update: As of May 6, 2022, 31/67 counties had over 96% timely contacts and 20/67 were above 86% with the statewide average being almost 90%. This data is tracked through the CCWIS system and reported on monthly via ERD reports. State DHR continues to provide supports to county offices to facilitate ongoing conformity with the expectation that children will be seen within the appropriate time frames. The Office of CPS monitors compliance through regular review of the monthly reports which track child victim contact time frames. Feedback is provided to county level management as appropriate. Reviews by CPS program specialists continue to have a focus on obtaining the most accurate information available at intake and feedback is provided to county staff when reviews indicate more instruction is needed.

Response times are tracked, through the random reviews noted above. As of May 6, 2022, 31/67 counties had over 96% timely contacts and 20/67 were above 86% with the statewide average being almost 90%.

SDHR will continue to provide support to county offices to facilitate ongoing conformity with the expectation that children be seen within the appropriate time frames. The Office of CPS will monitor compliance through regular review of the monthly reports which track child victim contact time frames. Feedback will then be provided to county level management as appropriate. Regular feedback will be provided to county offices regarding the progress toward the goals outlined in the 2020-2024 CFSP regarding the percentages of children seen in timely fashion.

SAFETY Outcome 2 Children are Safely Maintained in Their Homes Whenever Possible and Appropriate

Item 2. Services to family to protect child(ren) in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care

Item 3. Risk and Safety Assessment and Management

<u>ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA</u>	<u>SAFETY OUTCOME 2</u>	<u>INCLUDES 2022 UPDATES</u>
Child safety is the essential focus for the CPS intervention and is the primary concern throughout the case process. The assessment process begins at the point a report is made and continues throughout the CAN safety assessment to identify impending danger and carries through to the point the case is transferred to an ongoing CPS or a foster care case, during the treatment service provision (ISP), and at the conclusion of any involvement with a family. Safety applies to settings in the child's natural community as well as to any special care or treatment setting in which the child may be served on a temporary basis.		

Parental/caretaker substance abuse continues to be a leading reason for departmental involvement with families as well as being an entry reason into out of home care. Due to the safety issues present in many of these situations, the child often must be placed on a safety plan or in foster care before services can be provided to maintain the family unit. The severity of the caregiver's substance abuse issue often requires in-patient treatment. As a state, Alabama continues to

seek additional resources for this area of concern to include seeing an increase in drug court programs and other services both in-patient and out-patient.

The Alabama Child Welfare System embraces the philosophy of service delivery in home-based or community-based settings, while maintaining the child in the most appropriate environment. Following an incident of maltreatment, a determination must be made if it is in the best interest of the child to remain with his/her family or to be placed in an alternate setting. If the child is to remain in his/her home, the factors that precipitated the maltreatment must be sufficiently assessed to ensure child safety. Typically, family preservation is comprised of intensive, in-home, or wrap-around services. There are currently 661 IIHS slots statewide. This is an increase from 527 slots during the previous year. As of February 2022, 456 families were being served through IIHS programs around the state. Family preservation can be comprised of a variety of services such as: teaching parenting skills and child development instruction, assistance with emotional well-being, financial assistance, teaching budgeting skills, crisis intervention, providing “hard services” such as payment for utilities or provision of food through the utilization of flex funding, respite care, or medical services. Family preservation can also include the follow-up care provided to a family after reunification has occurred.

The strengths and challenges listed below continue to be accurate for this reporting period. See narrative below the chart for further details.

See also the table under “Assessment of Progress” and goal/strategies.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS – Includes 2022 Updates

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Safety Plans are being utilized with some success in preventing out of home placement • Collateral information is gathered through forensic interviews, law enforcement, medical providers, and other partner agencies • The FACTS system provides a framework for more thorough assessments as part of the CAN assessment documentation process • The SDHR CPS program specialists complete Administrative Record Reviews and provide detailed feedback to the county reviewer on each assessment specifically as it pertains to child safety and practice in an effort to track issues/trends • The SDHR CPS program specialists partner with the QA Division in the completion of Safety Assessments for each county undergoing a regular QSR • The third year of the 2021 CPS training included a variety of speakers and topics from physicians providing training on sexual abuse and child fatalities to community partners such as mental health providing information on available resources to law enforcement presenting on situational awareness • In 2022, Developed and distributed a Safety Assessment Desktop Tool to all counties. This tool includes information regarding how best to assess safety, determining safety, information on 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment is often focused on the specific allegations reported at Intake • Service needs are not always being identified during the initial assessment phase • Treatment programs geared toward substance use disorder and mental illness are scarce • Frontline staff and supervisors are often inexperienced • Staff sometimes have difficulty articulating the connection between a caregiver’s drug use and how it might impair their abilities to provide a safe stable home • Staff need to identify and interview collateral contacts • Limited services for those individuals with developmental or intellectual disabilities, particularly those with an IQ less than 70 • Greater need to engage fathers in the ISP process and in all work being done with families • Lack of engagement with the families to identify needs and provide appropriate services • Providing continuous trainings to combat the frequency of staff turnover

protective capacities, present and impending danger threats, and the Continuum of Risk of Maltreatment.	
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

Children and families are engaged, assessed, and treated with respect as individuals with their own unique strengths, needs, and cultural identity.

Strategies

1. Staff will continuously and thoroughly assess and address present and impending danger threats to children in their present/anticipated living situations. Safety assessments that are done as part of the record reviews completed in counties will review work to determine if the completed assessments examined more than the specific allegations. Feedback will then be given to county staff accordingly.

This strategy is ongoing. Feedback is provided to the county immediately in those instances where unmanaged risks are identified. Comprehensive feedback is given to the county at both the debriefing meeting and the provision of copies of the individual case review sheets and a comprehensive safety assessment document that summarized issues identified. In 2021 there were 15 safety assessments completed during on-site county reviews. There are 15 more scheduled for 2022.

2. The ability of families and caregivers to create safe, stable, and nurturing environments will be supported and promoted. Beginning at Intake and throughout the intervention with the family, staff will identify and interview collaterals that have meaningful input and the capacity to strengthen the caregivers' abilities. Collateral contacts are monitored via the FACTS documentation system.
3. The SDHR Resource Division will provide support and guidance to county offices in the identification and provision of supportive services for individuals with developmental/intellectual challenges. This strategy has been initiated.
4. County staff will utilize systems available to identify, locate, and engage fathers.

The Department has been working with target counties throughout the state conducting permanency reviews on a monthly basis. At the table for the review are the County Director, Supervisors, Caseworkers, Legal, and SDHR Program Specialists and Managers. As a routine part of discussion, the identification of fathers is discussed. As a state, we also began tracking whether children are returned to mothers or maternal relatives as well as fathers and paternal relatives, instead of just parents and relatives. Although it is early in the process, we see that children are being returned to fathers and paternal relatives at a good rate and the process takes about the same amount of time on average as the child going to their mother or maternal relatives. We believe this is due to the ongoing highlighting of the importance of establishing paternity timely.

The OQCWP uses a review tool that gives feedback in regard to involving fathers and paternal family in case planning, as well as ensuring that fathers are receiving needed services and are having visits with their children in foster care.

5. SDHR is working in conjunction with the Children's Justice Task Force to provide updated Substance Abuse Training for staff with an emphasis on current treatment modalities and the connection between active addiction and the risk of harm.

6. County office management teams will request specialized trainings as needed through the Office of Field Administration. Localized trainings are provided by the SDHR Office of CPS.

County directors and leadership staff contact SDHR via email with requests for specific trainings as they arise. These requests are then approved and assigned to the Office of Child Protective Services. There are a number of training sessions available upon request, including but not limited to: Safety Planning, CAN Assessment and Decision Making, Home Evaluations, Adoption Placement and Subsidy. Each training regardless of specific intent is focused on the principle and practice that assessment begins at Intake and continues throughout the life of the case.

2022 Updates:

Date	Topic	Location	Attendees	Group size
1/26/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Jefferson supervisors/directors	7
2/4/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Jefferson supervisors/directors	10
2/5/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Supervisors/directors	19
2/8/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Supervisors/directors	20
2/9/21		(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	24
2/17/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	22
2/19/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	19
2/22/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	41
2/24/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	33
2/26/21	Safety Assessment/Safety Plan (Virtual)	(Supervisors/Directors)	Workers	24
4/29/21	Intake, CA/N, Safety assessment	Marshall County	Supervisors, Director, DAS	9
5/12/21	Intake, CA/N, Safety assessment	Marshall County	Workers & Supervisors	14
5/13/21	Intake, CA/N, Safety assessment	Marshall County	Workers & Supervisors	17
8/17/21	Intake CA/N	Limestone County	Workers & Supervisors	18
8/18/21	Safety Assessment	Limestone County	Workers & Supervisors	17
10/26/21	Intake & CA/N	Montgomery County	Workers & Supervisors	44
10/27/21	Safety assessment	Montgomery County	Workers & Supervisors	43

Implementation supports

- Provide training through webinars (LETS) and on-site to workers regarding quality caseworker visits
- Provide training through webinars (LETS) and on-site to supervisors so that they may support their worker in the quality of visits and not just their frequency

Per the PIP, and assessment workgroup has been charged with various activities, such as developing/implementing practice guidelines, training, tools, field guides, etc., that are all designed to improve practice around ensuring child safety

through ongoing assessments and monitoring. Safety practice champions will assist in application of constructs and coaching of staff. Supervisors as an integral part of ensuring child safety, will have a key role in case review and coaching, and will be provided with the needed support. A focus on services, through resource mapping and peer-to-peer sharing within districts will have a critical role in service delivery.

2022 Update:

- Peer reviews conducted by the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice specialists.
- State Office practice specialists continue to conduct individual training sessions with county DHR supervisors regarding the Record Review Tool.
- A case review addendum continues to be utilized. Some of the areas that will be prompted for review by the addendum are as follows: how often safety is assessed, does the narrative reflect a comprehensive assessment including a child's physical/dental health and mental/behavioral health, are safety threats and protective capacities incorporated into the CFA, were ongoing attempts made to locate and identify fathers, were concerted efforts made to include parents in ISP development, and a focus on meaningful caseworker visits.
- Ongoing resource development meetings are being held in the PIP implementation sites. The Center for States facilitated a resource mapping training in those counties. A meeting was later held to discuss progress with plans and lessons learned from the resource mapping sessions.
- A case transfer policy was updated and distributed to county staff as part of a PIP goal of improving family engagement and comprehensive assessments in order to improve child safety, ensure appropriate services, and achieve timely permanency.
- Development of multiple desktop tools for workers to have information at their fingertips

PERMANENCY Outcome 1

Children have permanency and stability in their living situations

Item 4 Stability of Foster Care Placements

Item 5 Permanency goal for child

Item 6 Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or APPLA

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS/DATA

PERMANENCY OUTCOME 1

Includes 2022 Updates

Item 4

Potential contributing factors impacting the high number of placements are numerous and easily found in data available across multiple data streams. A review of the Department's staffing provides several potential indicators for lack of stability in foster care placements:

1. Staff turnover is a significant concern and can contribute to timeliness and appropriateness of provision of services and follow through in case management for our children in out of home care.
2. There has been emphasis placed on training foster parents on how to manage behaviors that are congruent with children who have been exposed to significant trauma prior to entering care.
3. Barriers related to limited access to needed service, most especially in our rural communities, have been identified and present challenges related to foster parents' access to services meant to preserve placements.
4. Limited availability of foster care providers willing or able to meet the needs of large sibling groups; particularly those of varying ages and care needs.
5. The barriers highlighted were exacerbated due to the COVID crisis. Foster care providers struggled to balance the needs of children in care and work/home responsibilities resulting in placement disruptions.

6. Complex needs of children we serve including behavioral and mental health needs
7. Placement stability continues to be an issue. The state did not meet the QA benchmark related to this measurement with an average of 79% (MP6). The PIP goal is 84%. The State did exceed the goal in (MP5) with 88%. Children in the State's care as of 09/30/2021 experienced an average of 4.12 placement moves. The Department has worked diligently over the reporting period to improve supports to caregivers, providing in-classroom training experiences provided by the leading experts in attachment, including trauma informed parenting, converting to the TIPPS training model, the Trained Therapist Network provided in partnership with the Children's Aid Society/APAC provides several webinar opportunities for foster and adoptive parents as well as support groups, group and individual counseling opportunities to meet varying needs.

Efforts related to targeted recruitment, statewide recruiting campaigns, and education and support are being strengthened to meet the ever-changing needs of our children and the families who serve them. Over the past reporting period, new marketing strategies have been implemented to include digital media campaigns and new recruitment statewide at sporting events. These new efforts appear to be generating new inquiries from prospective foster/adoptive parents, but data is still being collected.

To increase the education/training opportunities and support for out of home care providers, the Department continues to contract with AFAPA. This partnership was key to our ability to provide Reasonable and Prudent Parent Training. As of 2022, 98.69% of employees listed in LETS have completed this department-wide required training. It is also required for all TIPS leaders to provide the training to prospective foster parents.

The Offices of Foster Care and Recruitment/Traditional Placement and Specialized Support continue to promote placement stability with a goal of minimizing placement moves. The units partner and provide case consultation regarding moving children and youth to more restrictive placements, approval of out of state residential placements, and therapeutic foster care placements for children aged six and younger. The information gathered is used to craft services and to provide access to additional supports in efforts to promote placement stability. The unit provides the counties with case consultation and support to ensure placement in therapeutic and out of state residential facilities be placements of only when necessary to meet the needs of the child.

The Offices of Foster Care and Recruitment/Traditional Placement and Specialized Support continue to lead the State's weekly placement team meetings. The purpose of the weekly placement staff meetings is to assess the placement needs of children and families while providing support to county staff. The assigned social worker, supervisor, and director/director's designee, meet with the team and share their efforts with the team in attempting to locate appropriate placement options. The placement team discusses the appropriateness of the placement referral for the assigned youth. Additionally, the placement team provides other options and referrals including but not limited to referrals for Autism assessments, medication review, behavioral assessments, mental health assessments, psychosexual assessments, in-home family preservation services, relative resource assessments and other services.

The Team's mission is to promote placement stability with a goal of minimizing placement moves. The Team collaborates specifically around case consultation regarding moving children and youth to less restrictive placements. The information gathered is used to craft resources, strengthen current services as well as provide access to supports to promote placement stability.

Item 5

Potential contributing factors impacting the number of counties that have issues with full compliance on permanency planning can be found in data available from QSR visits. In cases reviewed, internal and external stakeholders note both positive and negative trends in the area of permanency goals and these trends vary from county to county.

- External stakeholders in some areas report that they are not always invited to ISP meetings or that all of the appropriate parties are not at the ISP meetings.

- Case planning meetings (ISPs) are not always held when needed
- Goals may have been appropriate initially but need to be reassessed once it is determined that the initial permanency goal is not feasible.
- There are some cases where there is an appropriate goal, but the ISP does not include behaviorally specific steps designed to lead to the expected outcome.
- Staff turnover can contribute to timeliness and appropriateness of provision of services in follow through of case management for our children in out-of-home care.
- Numbers of youth in care have continued to decrease in recent years. In 2021 there were 5931 youth in care.
- The Office of Foster Care continues to support permanency best practice in working with counties. Consultants continue to make available the Parents of Children in Foster Care (ASFA timeline pamphlet) produced in cooperation with the Alabama Administrative Office of the Courts. The pamphlet is available in both English and Spanish.

Permanency Goal for Child

The continual assessment of appropriate permanency goals for children in out-of-home care has positively contributed to the trends toward shorter times spent out-of-home. Supervisors and workers are closely monitoring goals and making positive placement moves in a timelier manner and developing and managing concurrent plans, which are leading to more timely permanency achievement. Note trends below which reflect the length of times in continuous foster care (based on the most recent admission to FC). Data is point in time for children in care at the end of the fiscal year and reflects data for the most recent foster care episode:

- FY 2019 20.59 Months (approximate)
- FY 2020 21.64 Months (approximate)
- FY 2021 22.64 Months (approximate)

The Department continues to work toward children returning home within the 12-month period required by ASFA and with multiple placement moves. More placement moves may contribute to sibling separation rates and timely positive permanency outcomes. Efforts regarding stabilizing placements have been enhanced by an increase in the use of IIHS. There has also been expansion to the use of the Tools of Choice training for biological parents and foster and kin providers.

In an effort to improve the permanency outcomes, the partnerships with AOC and various initiatives on those children who are remaining in care after 12 months with specific focus on children aged 10-14 on removing barriers to permanency related to kinship care will be a focus moving forward.

Item 6

Potential contributing factors impacting full compliance on achieving permanency can be found in data available from OSRI reviews.

- In most counties, when the permanency goal is Return to Parent or Placement with Relatives, permanency achievement is exceeding ASFA time frames.
- Systemic issues concerning ICPC
- When the goal is adoption (regardless of if by current foster parent or no identified resource) ASFA time frames are often exceeded. Court issues (achieving TPR and then parental appeals of TPR) are cited as a consistent issue in this area.
- State QA reviewers indicated that strengths for ISPs are assessing maternal and paternal relatives and filing for TPR timely.

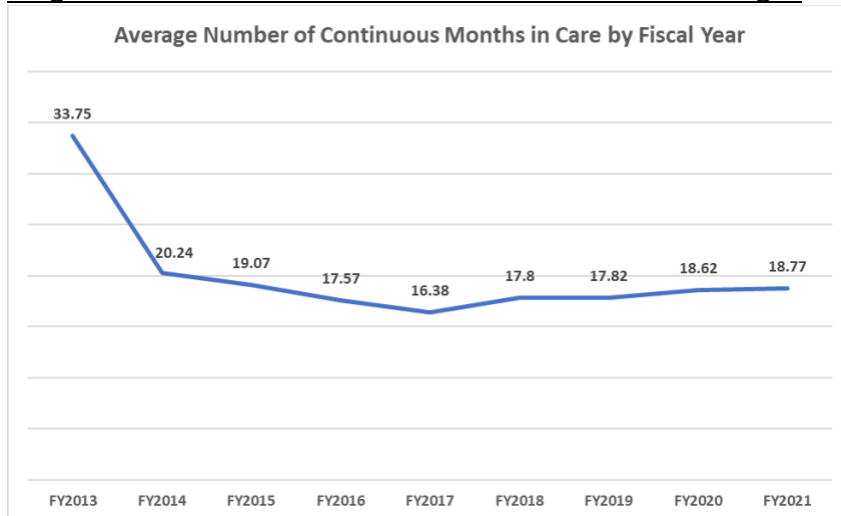
Length of Continuous Time in Foster Care for Children Discharged in FY 2021

The below table captures the length of time until discharge to the respective permanency goals for FY 2021.

Data Source for charts and data listed below: Alabama DHR CCWIS System

Time to permanency for federally recognized discharge reasons	Average Days in Care	Median Days in Care	Average Months in Care	Median Months in Care
Adoption	960	867	32	29
Kinship Guardianship	777	671	26	23
Return to Parent	359	283	12	10
Relative Placement	321	216	11	7

Length of Continuous Time in Foster Care for Children Discharged



DATA & SERVICES – Total Finalized Adoptions:

FY 2020	814
FY 2021	783

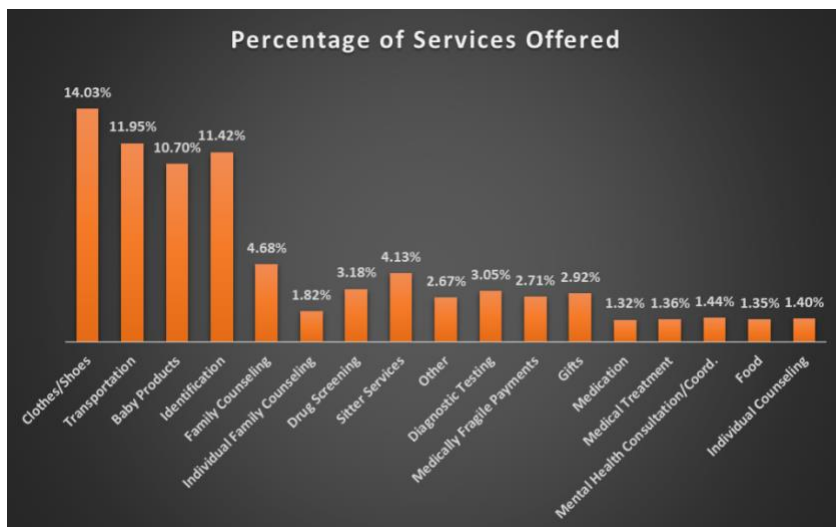
Adoptions – No Identified Resource (ANIR)

FY 2021 TOTALS: Finalizations: 118

These are specifically ANIR adoptions. Children whose goal was adoption with no identified resource. The Office of Adoptions (Adoption Recruitment and Placement) is working to ensure children receive permanency timely. FY 2020 Total ANIR finalizations 107.

Children < Age Five: Reducing Length of Stay/Providing Developmentally Appropriate Services for Children in FC and Receiving In-Home Services

In FY 2021, 1566 children under the age of five entered the foster care system. This represents a 6.02% increase from FY 2020 (1477) children. Approximately 51.5% of children entered care with reasons including parental substance abuse in FY 2021, compared to 55.7% in FY 2020. This age group remained in care longer than under 5 youth in the previous 2 fiscal years, 13.31 months in FY 2021 compared to 13.49 months in FY 2020. In FY 2021, 1406 youth under 5 years of age left foster care compared to 1334 in FY 2020.



TYPE OF SERVICE	TOTAL NUMBER OFFERED	PERCENT OFFERED
Clothes/Shoes	1678	14.03%
Transportation	1429	11.95%
Baby Products	1279	10.70%
Identification	1365	11.42%
Family Counseling	559	4.68%
Individual Family Counseling	217	1.82%
Drug Screening	381	3.18%
Sitter Services	494	4.13%
Other	319	2.67%
Diagnostic Testing	364	3.05%
Medically Fragile Payments	324	2.71%
Gifts	349	2.92%
Medication	158	1.32%
Medical Treatment	162	1.36%
Mental Health Consultation/Coord.	172	1.44%
Food	161	1.35%
Individual Counseling	167	1.40%
TOTAL	11,954	

*Note: these totals are services that are documented within the FACTS system. Other services including free and/or contract services may not be represented in the chart.

Services to Support OPPLA (APPLA) – See Also Information on Chafee Foster Care Independence Program

Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement is typically used as a permanency plan for youth who are older than 16 who cannot be safely returned to their biological families and do not wish to be adopted. The primary goal for this group of youth is to develop systems of support and improve skills to ensure successful transitions, with additional emphasis for both the youth and the professionals who serve them to focus on long-term connections to birth families, formal, and informal networks of support. County child welfare staff, foster parents, and vendor providers have been trained to encourage the development of natural mentor relationship, improve social worker-child relationships, and keep safe connections with birth families and siblings as strategies to improve positive permanency outcomes.

Inter-Country Adoptions

The Department tracks and reports only those children adopted from other countries who enter state custody. Alabama has three privately licensed child placing agencies that have received Hague accreditation status. These agencies provide adoption services in inter-country adoption cases involving the United States and Hague convention countries. The Inter-Country Adoption Act (ICAA) of 2000 (P.L. 106-279) was signed into law October 6, 2000. As of May 1, 2020, one (1) child adopted from another country had entered foster care. No additional children entered foster care in FY 2020. In FY 2021, there was only one child who was adopted from another country who entered foster care.

For international adoptees, Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections served five (5) families in counseling and zero (0) attended camp last year. There is not a waiting list. The families are seen by a counselor as soon as the counselor can schedule them. DHR families receive priority.

Services to Support Adoption

Currently, adoption services are provided by the Department of Human Resources through the Office of Permanency on behalf of children in permanent custody who cannot return to their biological family and need a permanent adoptive family. These services include: recruitment and preparation of prospective adoptive families, placement of children, supervision of children in placement and other post-placement services, legal services, administering the state and federal adoption subsidy programs, clearing Petitions to Adopt, acknowledging the receipt of the petition and documenting the findings in an acknowledgement letter to the Court as mandated by the Adoption Code, providing public information on adoption, administering the Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance (ICAMA), and maintaining the Putative Father Registry.

As for placement stability in the most recent edition of Child Welfare Outcomes reporting FY 2019 numbers, placement stability has remained consistent over the past 5 years with a five-year average of 78.3% of children in care less than 12 months having two (2) or fewer placements. The Department has renewed and expanded efforts to identify trauma assessment tools to be used during foster care placements. The Department has increased trauma informed training for staff and foster care providers, including expansion of Judicial partnerships and increased placement collaborations with the Resource Management Divisions. The goal is making the first foster care placement the best and final foster care placement. The varying care needs has been a barrier to successful initial foster care placements.

Adoption Incentive Funds – Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Funds – 5-year Goals:

Alabama has consistently been awarded Adoption (and Legal Guardianship) Incentive funds for moving children to permanency. This money is used to provide adoption focused training for state and county staff, foster and adoptive parents, therapists, and counselors as well as removing barriers for children to be adopted. Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Funds have been utilized to support training, to strengthen and support staff and stakeholder capacity and to achieve permanency through adoption. In addition, funds have been used for expanding the pre- and post-adoptive services to families and enhance statewide recruitment efforts. The flexibility of the funds provides increased opportunities to obtain and provide needed services to staff, children, and families. Some uses of the funds are outlined below:

- Children's Aid Society currently provides post-adoptive services in and to the larger and surrounding counties. These services are also available to related caregivers
- To increase awareness and recruitment through funding initiatives with Heart Gallery of Alabama. As noted earlier, this organization has partnered with Alabama in photographing waiting children and maintaining a website to see and hear from waiting children
- To increase capacity for the delivery or/accessibility to the Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety (TIPS)
- To continue the partnership agreement with AdoptUsKids through annual fees

- To purchase equipment that would enhance staff ability to manage the work needed to conduct day to day tasks more efficiently
- To provide opportunities for adoption and ICPC staff to attend adoption specific workshops, trainings, and conferences to increase knowledge and capacity to prepare, match, and place waiting children

All counties received an allotment of Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive funds to use for local adoption recruitment and training efforts. Additionally, county and state office staff have used the funds to address barriers to permanency through adoption including but not limited to counseling, diagnostic testing, behavioral management services, and other items to help the child integrate into placement, etc. If a county's allotment is exhausted or obligated, a protocol is in place to ensure they can secure more funds through the Office of Adoption. The State Office utilizes a portion of these funds to pay for recruitment and public awareness activities. Heart Gallery of Alabama's contract and the contract for CAS/APAC's pre-adoption contract, which provides for recruitment, training/preparation, and home studies for families interested in adopting children meeting the Department's special needs definition are funded through these monies as well. Both agencies, as well as the county departments, focus a substantial amount of the recruitment activities in faith-based settings. The 2019 Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive grant was issued in part for \$1,662,500 on 9/18/2019 and 10/24/2019. The FY2020 Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive grant was issued \$880, 607 on 09/18/2020 and \$547,893 10/21/2020 for a total of \$1,428,500.

2022 Update:

As of 09/30/2021, DHR has spent \$980,635 of the FY2019 grant. Alabama has until 09/30/2022 to obligate the grant and liquidate it by 12/30/2022. FY2019 funds remaining are \$681,865 as of 09/30/2021. The 2020 Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive grant was issued for \$1,428,500 on 09/18/2020 and 10/21/2020. DHR's practice is to use the oldest monies first until the grant period expires and then move on to the next grant award available. The 2020 award is available until 09/30/2023 and must be liquidated by 12/30/2023. There are not any anticipated issues at this time that would affect expenditures being exhausted.

Adoption Savings Expenditures

Alabama has used the CB method for calculating the Adoption Savings each year; no change has been made from last year's submission. The spending of the Adoption Savings is done by the Finance Division by applying the savings as payment for a contract for Psychotropic Medication, \$489,993.29. The contract is annual, and spending is done within the year. The updated information for Adoption Savings will be calculated for 2019-2020 in October 2020. The same contract is used for the savings earned. There are not any challenges currently.

2022 Update: The spending for Adoption Savings with AL Psych Medication Team, contract #1881 is historically: **2017** spent \$224,132.63; **2018** spent \$439,253.43; **2019** spent \$798,785.18; **2020** spent \$713,250.56; **2021** spent to date \$1,154,703; **2022** spent to date \$630,972.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS – Includes 2022 Updates

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
1. There has been an emphasis and much success in the area of adoptions by current foster parents	1. Need improved trauma assessment process that can be used throughout a child/youth's times in care
2. A monthly adoption report of specialist caseloads has been developed and is used to monitor progress of children in FC with a goal of ANIR and are moving toward adoption.	2. Decrease in the number of youths in care with TPR who do not consent to adoption.
3. Adoption placement specialist activity is being tracked and performance standards have been created and are being included in staff performance appraisals	3. Foster families need to be able to better address the special care needs of children/youth in care.
	4. Matching children/youth in care with appropriate placement resources.

<p>4. A trauma-informed training curriculum has been launched for foster and adoptive parents.</p> <p>5. There are ongoing partnerships with stakeholders across the state related to independent living services. An emphasis has been placed on successful housing for older youth in and out of the Department's custody. At this time, nine (9) youth have obtained housing through the Foster Youth to Independence Initiative through HUD. Alabama is also working to establish strong supports to youth through mentor and advocacy programs. The Office of ILP is working with Lifeline out of Birmingham to spearhead a mentoring model and provide connections between youth and adults willing to serve in these roles. Quarterly meetings are being held with providers of Transitional Living, Independent Living, and Mother and Infant placement services to create stronger outcomes. Children's Aid Society and Foster Care to Success continue to aid and guide Alabama youth in these areas.</p> <p>6. A team comprised of a Behavior Manager, MAT Assessor, and a Family Services foster care consultant are currently staffing children in intensive congregate care placements regarding continued need of service with the counties and other pertinent team members (e.g., adoption consultant, therapist, etc.). The purpose of these staffings is to determine appropriate next steps and to ensure the children are placed in the most appropriate settings that can best meet their needs and ensure they achieve permanency.</p> <p>7. In FY 2021, 191 older youth (aged 18-20) completed high school/GED programs. In FY 2020, 156 older youth completed high school/GED programs. In FY 2019, 147 older youth completed high school.</p> <p>8. In FY 2021 the re-entry rate decreased to 6.49%. In FY 2020 the re-entry rate was 6.81%.</p>	<p>5. Foster families need more clinical skills training in addition to the current preparation training. Areas of need include Reactive Attachment Disorder, trauma, and sexual safety in placements.</p> <p>6. Improve supports / services in handling adoptive placements that are at risk of disruption (particularly for adolescents).</p> <p>7. Explore the barriers to therapeutic foster parents adopting the children placed in their homes.</p>
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

State DHR will assist all 67 counties in their foster parent recruitment statewide, which would help with the increased demand of foster homes and provide stability for children and youths in foster care.

Strategies:

1. State DHR will plan statewide regional recruiting events/opportunities for counties to participate in, in order to increase the number of foster homes for their respective counties.

State DHR Office of Foster Care consultants and manager will continue to collaborate with counties during various recruitment activities. Consultants will share quarterly updated recruitment activities in assigned regions. Some of the

2021 events included annual parades, holiday markets, and a major presence at the Alabama State Fair. Statewide recruitment events held in partnership with four of the largest universities in Alabama at various sporting events continue to take place but on a smaller scale since COVID-19 restrictions have been put into place. The upcoming announcement of the state office recruitment team's Speakers Bureau will also present opportunities to increase nurturing and supportive foster and adoptive homes across the state. Six regional staff members will be identified to promote recruitment efforts throughout the state. This effort will include both state and county staff. SDHR will initiate meetings to gather centrally and train the speakers to ensure the messaging and overall goal of the Speakers Bureau is executed with vigor and thoroughness. A summer training session is tentatively scheduled to begin training the Speakers Bureau members during a mini resource worker day conference at the state office.

2. Each county will submit a yearly foster home recruiting plan that will be approved and monitored by State DHR. Please see the **Diligent Recruitment Plan**. County Recruitment plans will be reviewed quarterly with assigned foster care specialist and county resource staff to ensure plans are practical, functional, and being implemented according to the 1.

3. State DHR will monitor the number of foster homes per county. This will help to ensure there are adequate homes based upon the number of children in care per county. This will help ensure there are adequate homes based upon the number of children in care per county as well as document trends and needs.

4. State DHR will complete a six-county pilot recruitment program whereby the Office of Foster Care will provide added support to ensure through follow up and tracking is completed when Inquiring families want to foster and/or adopt. Individual contact will be made with the inquiring families, their application will be entered by State DHR, and timely communication will be facilitated between State DHR and county staff in effort to get inquiring families in training classes resulting in more licensed homes.

GOAL:

State DHR will provide statewide training for the child welfare workforce on permanency and concurrent planning to ensure permanency is achieved timely within ASFA guidelines and the needs of our children and families are met through effective Individual Service Plans (ISP).

Strategies:

1. State DHR continues to provide trainings statewide for workers and supervisors with a focus on permanency/concurrent planning and ISPs.

2. Supervisors continue to meet with their workers monthly to staff cases and review the permanency/concurrent plan and ISPs which will be evidenced by appropriate documentation in FACTS.

3. State DHR has made monthly ERD reports available to counties that list all data regarding ISPs.

4. County workers will invite all necessary parties to ISPs by letter.

5. Alabama will expand multiple initiatives that work together to mentor and coach frontline workers and supervisors, engage and support birth families including kin caregivers, and further reduce children's length of time in care.

6. Alabama will, through continued partnership with the Administrative Office of Courts, expand the initiatives which bring court and DHR county and state staff together to discuss barriers to timely permanency and work toward solutions of problems.

7. Alabama will conduct permanency staffings monthly within many counties to mentor and coach front line staff and supervisors in case review and problem solving in specific cases.

8. Alabama continues to utilize the kinship navigator site to provide support and answer questions for kin providing care for children in Alabama.

2022 Update:

- The Office of FC will provide training regarding the provisional licensing of foster homes to Service Supervisors at the annual Supervisor Conferences (permanency/kinship, etc.)
- State DHR will continue to address establishing paternity and assessing paternal relatives in staffings and trainings statewide (permanency/relative custody/kinship, etc.)
- Five part-time retired staff have been hired
- DHR and the AFAPA are working together to address foster parent issues
- Planned enhancements to Alabama's CCWIS have been completed, which will enable DHR to track to whom children are returning, including fathers and paternal relatives
- All counties were invited to the annual Child Welfare/Judicial Summit, with many new counties participating
- Staff from the AOC and State DHR continue to partner with local DHR staff and judicial partners in support of improved permanency outcomes
- Local permanency review processes are continuing in the PIP implementation sites, whereby barriers to permanency and proposed solutions are discussed/implemented
- Recruitment, training, and approval of foster/adoptive parents continues in the PIP implementation sites, with monitoring and evaluation activities in place as well

Permanency Outcome 2	The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved
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Item 7 Placement with Siblings

Item 8 Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care

Item 9 Preserving Connections

Item 10 Relative Placement

Item 11 Relationship of Child in Care with Parents

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA	PERMANENCY OUTCOME 2	Includes 2022 Updates
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Item 7

Attention to sibling placement and connections has been a focus of the Office of QCWP, FC/ILP, Adoptions, Training, and Policy for years. The curriculum for formal training, the policy that supports practice, and best practice in the field focus on the fundamental needs of children to be with, nearby, or connected to their siblings. When QSR or other review activities occur, counties are given feedback about placements, and data regarding sibling placements is discussed/monitored at the supervisory level in the field as well.

Item 8

FY 2020 Camp Hope served 7 children over two weekends. Numbers declined for sibling visits at Camp Hope due to COVID-19 and other restrictions. Camp hope is an outreach program of Kids to Love Foundation a 501 (c)(3) nonprofit organization. Camp Hope Alabama (CHP) provides a haven for children, reuniting siblings who are separated in foster homes and educating the general population about the foster care system and the needs of youth in foster care. Camp Hope is a weekend camp that gives foster children a “home” atmosphere filled with fun activities, but mostly as opportunity to build and maintain their sibling bond. It has also served as a family friendly meeting place for foster children being introduced to their prospective adoptive parents during the matching process. Information about this program can be found at <http://www.kidstolove.org/camp-home-alabama> .

Observations related to Item 8, include the following:

- ISPs contain visitation plans and workers provide assistance to ensure the visits happen. There are some instances where supervision is primarily provided by foster parents and/or contracted providers when, in fact, workers could benefit from providing some of the supervision and observing interactions between parents and children.
- IL Youth Surveys (as a part of the QA process) provided inconsistencies in how (or if) visits occur. Some youth report they do have visits, others say they do not have visits, and a number of the youth did not reply to the question.
- Inconsistencies were also noted when siblings are separated, in that some will visit with parents and others in the group may not.
- Many foster parents are willing to partner with birth parents to schedule visits and to aid in transportation and supervision
- Social workers taking siblings to visit each other during worker visits and birthday celebrations.
- Foster parents inviting siblings and parents to foster children birthday parties.

Item 10

Some information about children with permanency goals of kinship guardianship or placement with relatives is as follows:

Relative Placement:

- As of 10/01/2021 13.97 % of children in care had a permanency goal of relative placement. This did not include Kinship Guardianship.
- In FY 2021, 1060 (27.7%) of children were discharged to relatives and spent an average of 10.71 months in care.
- In FY 2021 a total of 370 providers were receiving Kinship subsidy payments for 758 children

Observations on this practice area include:

- Counties are not always considering both maternal and paternal relatives. Counties, in some cases, are reviewing minimum relatives
- Some birth parents are uncooperative and are not consistently disclosing relatives to the agency for consideration
- There is a tendency in some counties for the agency to wait for relatives to reach out to DHR
- In cases where children are removed from extended family members, rather than parents, there are documented efforts to locate birth parents or established paternity
- The OFC encourages counties to ensure they have maternal and paternal relative resource forms completed within the first 30 days of a child entering foster care
- The OFC also encourages staff to complete Accurint and social media searches to determine if other relatives exist

During the FY 2021 reporting period, 1060 children exited foster care to placement with relatives, which represents 27.7% of children discharged that fiscal year. During the FY 2020 reporting period, 1104 children exited foster care to a placement with relatives. That number represents 29.9% of the young people discharged for the fiscal year.

Kinship Guardianship

The Kinship Guardianship program has been in place since the legislation passed in 2010. The program pays Kinship Guardianship assistance payments to relatives who become approved as a related foster family home (meeting the same criteria as unrelated foster families), once the IV-E eligible child has been in the home for a minimum of six months. Kinship Guardians are encouraged to name a successor guardian so that in the event the Kinship Guardian is no longer able to meet the need of the child, the child does not have to reenter foster care.

REPORTING PERIOD	NUMBER OF CHILDREN RECEIVING GAP*	NUMBER OF PROVIDERS (FAMILIES)*
FY 2020	552	259
FY 2021	715	341

Point in time, not cumulative for the entire reporting period; Data Source: Alabama's FACTS system

Per the above chart our number of young people participating in the Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program has increased during the reporting period. Continued focus on educating families on the Kinship Guardianship process and removing barriers to Kinship Guardianship have resulted in an increase in the number of children being discharged to Kinship Guardianship for the past 5 years.

Services to Support Kinship Care

Alabama's Kinship Navigator website is up and functioning to provide services and supports. The Kinship Navigator website was designed as a one-stop-shop for relatives and other caregivers. The site explains what kinship guardianship is, how to become a kinship guardian, and provides information about kinship care outside of foster care. The dedicated site is <https://navigator.alabama.gov>. The AFAPA includes relative caregivers (including those with Kinship Guardianship status) as members of the association. This allows kin families the same services and supports through AFAPA as foster and adoptive parents. At the 2020 AFAPA conference, kinship families were invited and able to participate in sessions specifically addressing services for kinship families. Families also networked and supported other kinship families during this conference. During all 2020 social worker and supervisor trainings, staff were provided information about the Kinship Navigator website, newly designed pamphlet, and posters, and were encouraged to share information with schools, families, and community providers. Our Navigator website is now available in Spanish. County DHR offices also continue to have transportation contracts with community providers to assist kinship families with transportation to local or neighboring resource centers. As of this writing, 772 young people are receiving kinship guardianship payments and are eligible for kinship supports and services demonstrating even more progress in this area.

FY 2022 Kinship Navigator Funding

- Accomplishments of Kinship Navigator funding in Alabama are detailed below.
- There is now a dedicated Kinship Program Specialist in place who is a part of the Recruitment and Home Support unit and there are five part-time employees that identify kinship families in order to expedite the training and approval process.
- The Kinship Guardian Program has been added to the 211-United Way Family Support tab on their website with the Alabama DHR Kinship Program Specialist listed as a contact. The United Way-211 has committed to train their call specialists regarding Kinship in an effort to assist callers who seek 211-United Way resources.
- The Kinship Program Specialist and Deputy Director of Traditional Placement and Specialized Support provided training to the Alabama Networks of Family Resource Centers in order to strengthen our partnership.
- Alabama has utilized in-house resources to assist kinship families in connecting the Office of Foster Care and the Department's financial assistance programs. The Kinship Program Specialist and the Family Assistance Program Specialist have combined efforts to serve more kinship diversion families.
- Information regarding applying for monthly financial assistance via an online application is listed on Alabama's Kinship Navigator Website. Alabama has successfully added Spanish translation to the current Kinship Navigator website.
- The Department has developed a Kinship Guardianship Desk Tool as a reference guide for caseworkers. This tool was presented to county directors and Juvenile Court judges at the 2021 Judicial Child Welfare Summit.
- The Kinship Program Specialist presented at the Alabama's annual Pre and Post Adoption Connections Permanency Conference regarding kinship to community members, foster parents, DHR staff and contracted adoption staff. The Deputy Director of Recruitment and Home Support presented to Alabama's approved congregate care providers regarding kinship, the process, and the program benefits thereof. The Deputy Director

of Recruitment and Home Support presented to Alabama's state educator's MEGA conference about kinship to bring community awareness.

- The Department will continue to provide Kinship training for all staff to help them understand the ease and benefits of developing a kinship guardian for a case. This training will be reinforced at the annual Supervisor's Training as well as the annual Child Welfare Judicial Conference to educate both staff and court officials about the benefits of developing a kinship guardian in foster care cases.
- The Kinship Program Specialist has updated the websites as changes occur to include Foster Care Month Proclamation from Alabama's Governor, National Kinship Month Proclamation from Alabama's Governor as well as , family- centered state-wide activities to the website to enhance family growth among kinship caregivers and their kin.

The State Kinship Specialist follows up with the State DHR TANF Consultant monthly to receive information regarding Kinship TANF applications in the counties.

One.alabama.gov is the official app of the Alabama Department of Human Resources whereby individuals can quickly and easily apply for family assistance online, specifically those community members who need to apply for Kinship Assistance. As of July 2022, the One Alabama system has created 16,555 accounts and it has received 15,925 TANF applications since its inception in 2019.

Item 11

As stated in item #10, relationship of child in care and birth parent is one of the items reviewed by State QA through the use on the Onsite Review Instrument. A review of the OSRI findings reveals the following observations when this item is considered an area needing improvement.

- When visits are inconsistent between the child and the parent, the Agency is not always making concerted efforts to assess the barriers that are preventing the parents from visiting with their child.
- All parents are not consistently invited to attend medical appointments, dental appointments, school conferences, extracurricular activities, or other events in the child's life.
- Concerted efforts are not always being made to identify and/or engage birth fathers in order to promote, support, and/or maintain a positive relationship between the fathers and their children.
- Lack of parental engagement, both mothers and fathers, has an impact on the relationship of the child(ren) in care with their parents.
- Visits between worker and one or both parents are sometimes less frequently than monthly.
- When fathers are involved, there is inconsistency in the level of engagement and assessment. .
- In some cases, a contract provider supervised visits (rather than the caseworker), and the caseworker is not following up with the provider to get information about the visit. Sometimes the services provider fails to recognize when circumstances surrounding visits is less than desirable
- The Alabama Kinship Navigator is up and running and is connected to 211. Alabama has an ALAKIN telephone number that is functional. Training continues to be provided around Kinship Guardianship at the local and state level and is an ongoing theme in work with the Court and in the CIP. Alabama has hired 2 retired state employees to work with kinship caregiver families to expedite their foster care approval process to include completing required trainings.
- Workforce stability impacts this issue

CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (CFCIP)

Includes 2022 Updates

Program Design and Delivery

Alabama DHR Children and Family Services is implementing the Foster Care Independence Act (the Act) of 1999 by operating a statewide Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The Education Training Voucher Program was implemented in 2004. Direct and indirect services are provided to youth for whom the Department holds custody and planning responsibility. Alabama's Independent Living Program is a state-administered, county-managed program. As

such, the Alabama DHR Children and Family Services Division, through the Office of Foster Care and ILP services, administers, and supports the programs and services carried out by the 67 county Departments of Human Resources under the Act. Thus, each county is able to create and maintain its own Foster Care Independent Living Program. Programs are to provide services to assist a youth in improving education and career opportunities and to decrease high-risk activities and the potential for incarceration, unplanned parenthood, dependence, and homelessness. The mission of Alabama's Independence Program is to assist Alabama's eligible foster youth and former foster youth in attaining the skills, education, and character needed to become healthy adults who will contribute to their community. The role of the state team is to provide services, supports, training, and consultation to the counties, assisting them in the development of group and individual services and supports to youth in foster care. Alabama partners closely with the Children's Aid Society to focus on leadership development in the DREAM Ambassadors and DREAM Council.

As of April 1, 2022, there were 1766 young people in foster care aged 14 to 20 representing a 4% decrease in the number of youth in care from the most recent reporting period (1849 on April 1, 2021). All of those young people are eligible to receive Independent Living Services. Though there are several job opportunities available, several young people lost employment with COVID 19 and continue to struggle with consistent, stable employment. Stable housing also continues to be an issue for some. One positive outcome has been more young people attending college and other post-secondary education programs. We have an all-time high of 233 young people currently enrolled in school and receiving our state's Fostering Hope Scholarship.

The Program participated in a NYTD review in August 2017. That review highlighted Alabama's need to improve capacity to collect data related to direct services to young people. A PIP was developed and approved in July 2018. NYTD PIP progress was severely hampered by the COVID 19 health crisis. Enhancements updates and changes were completed per the Children's Bureau recommendations. A demonstration related to the new NYTD website was completed on November 22, 2021. The changes suggested regarding that demonstration were submitted by our NYTD PIP team on January 3, 2022. The Department is awaiting a follow-up discussion related to that submission.

Connected to the launching of the framework and Youth Assessment Summary, the Independent Living Program updated policy to require all youth 17 years of age and older to have a written Transition Plan. This plan is developed with direct involvement of the youth as a way to map out a successful transition plan for them from foster care. Regional consultations were structured around regional DREAM Council meetings. The consultations brought together county staff, contract providers, and IL partners for training on effective youth transitions. The regional DREAM Council Meetings were led by the State Youth Ambassador to follow regional consultations as a means to pull youth from training regions to the IL meetings.

Successful transitioning for older youth in care is still being guided through the use of our ILP case management tools. Our tools were developed and strategically rolled out for statewide use beginning in 2018. The use of our ILP Framework, in conjunction with Youth Assessment Summary and the Alabama ILP Transition Plan are used in concert with the youth's ILP plan to assess skills, craft services, and support successful transition. The Transition Plans are monitored and reviewed monthly by our caseworkers and their foster youth and updated as needed and along with their Individualized Service Plan. Beginning in 2020 Regional Consultations were conducted via Microsoft Teams and Zoom and provided training regarding the continued use of ILP tools. The Regional DREAM Council Meetings were suspended due to the continued public health crisis. Our county offices conducted their scheduled meetings in-person and virtually as they deemed appropriate and safe.

The partnership and contract with Children's Aid Society continues to expand. It currently employs 3 former youth and two licensed Social Workers that have experience with this population of young people and experiences as former Department employees. The Team also employs a Media Specialist that guides social media and contact with current and former foster youth. The CAS / ILP Team serves youth, foster parents, congregate care providers and community stakeholders statewide. Our supports and services are enhanced through direct services and trainings provided monthly by our Youth Leaders and annually at the State and national conferences for our youth aged 14-21 and county and state staff. CAS staff meets quarterly with youth at our Transitional Living Placements to help provide skill development, and

guidance to best prepare youth for Independent Living. See also system factor, “Agency Responsiveness to the Community”, Older Youth Input.

The IL Program has continued to solicit the input of Alabama’s community partners, providers, foster parents, CAS partners and most importantly Alabama’s young people. Quarterly meetings with providers have continued remotely during the COVID-19 health crisis. Alabama’s young people and the DREAM Council leaders have also met as we continue to solicit their input related to strategic planning, input related to the Department’s current PIP, and improvement of delivery of ILP services. The development of the current service plan was in collaboration with current and former foster youth, community providers, congregate care providers, and county and state staff from both the foster care and IL programs. Continuing to engage our community partners has positively impacted Alabama’s ability to better serve both current and former foster youth during this crisis. Alabama is in contact with our community partners, such as Youth Towers, Second Shift Alabama, BigHouse Foundation, Lifeline, and Kids to Love and it has enhanced Alabama’s ability to serve current and former foster youth. DREAM Ambassadors work closely with their peer foster youth in their monthly meetings to develop relevant service and supports. They are also an integral part of our training model, providing training to judges, community members, Quality Assurance committees, foster care training classes, Tribal members, DHR staff, and others.

The FY 2021 work of the ILP Division related to training, collaboration, and support is outlined below. The activities included statewide in-person and via Zoom training, “Serving Youth in Congregate Care”, and youth participation in court and their ISPs. Training regarding these issues has been provided to the staff and foster parents, service providers, and stakeholders at the annual Foster and Adoptive Parent, Permanency, and ILP networking conferences. Education and training were also provided to youth at the Annual ILP camps held in June and July 2021. The Program has provided support to staff, young people, and providers at ISP meetings, promoting youth empowerment, involvement, and preparation.

2022 Update:

Training was conducted with Alabama’s lived-experience DREAM Council on October 22nd and 23rd and November 3rd and 4th in 2021. Trainings included were: Cohesive teamwork; Ambassador Expectations and Listening Session; a review of Social Media and development of Ilconnect app; Advocacy 101; Team Building activities and training on Peer leadership. We closed out the day with an activity by giving the youth \$20 and having them create “care baskets” that were dropped off at Children’s Hospital. We also held an annual ambassador retreat in December 2021. The first day of the retreat centered around the What and Why of being an Ambassador. We trained on “Remarkable Leadership”, Addiction Prevention, and watched the movie Dear Evan Hansen. The second day centered around How to Be an Ambassador. We trained on Relational Permanency; Strategic Sharing, and had the Ambassadors do a training on Advocacy. We made a recording of all the Ambassadors sharing their story. On the final day, we shared Reflections on Being an Ambassador. During this day we reviewed the taped Ambassador interviews and completed an Ambassador speak out where we talked about wins and follow ups of the retreat.

A peer-to peer TEAMS meeting was held on January 10, 2022, to address all areas of IL with county staff. During the call, IL ideas were shared from across the state, clarification of IL policy and procedures was given, and feedback was received from the counties related to the continuation of best practice. State ILP hosted this meeting, and it was attended by 37 of the 67 counties. A second peer-to-peer TEAMS meeting was held on January 31, 2022, to address services and discuss how counties should assist youth graduating from high school. The result of the call was the development of two Life After High School Transition Fairs that were held in March 2022. One transition fair was held in the northern part of the state the other was held in the south. We pulled from the list of pending graduating seniors and invited them to learn about the various options for post high school. In the north we had 10 vendors from various colleges, certification programs, local programs, military, and law enforcement. Approximately 80 youth attended this event. In the south we had 6 vendors that included several local schools, military, and a few local programs. We had approximately 50 youth attend. Along with the providers listed, we presented youth with information about Fostering Hope and helped youth complete their FASFA while at they were present.

The Department also submitted a proposal for Division X technical assistance for improvement in identifying supports and growing staff knowledge and development. This assistance and supports would be geared toward encouraging the

successful transition out-of-care for our older youth to prevent homelessness, joblessness, early parenthood, and substance use. Our current data shows 409 youth in care who are 18 and 19 years of age, and 74 who are 20 years of age. Technical assistance to encourage youth to remain in care would be beneficial. Through this technical assistance we believe we can decrease the number of youth between 18 and 21 who leave care without adequate supports. There should be evidence of stability in youth when they leave care demonstrated by a decrease in those that return with needs of housing, employment, and mental health supports. The emphasis on the TAP centered around completing several Focus Groups, beginning stages of Resource mapping for the purpose of determining the length of time it would take to complete state-wide so a proposal for full resource mapping could be examined. We also worked to develop a 5- minute video explaining how to use the new ILconnect app. This will serve as phase one in development of additional youth and staff-oriented training videos. And finally, we set up phone conversations with the State of Nebraska and with the Children's Bureau to determine similarities in services and where Alabama could broaden its scope, resources and efforts.

LGBTQ Resource Meetings/Contacts

The Department continues to work in conjunction with our current partners in developing trainings about meeting the needs of youth in out care who identify as LGBTQ. The Office of Foster Care's program manager will meet with our current partners to develop specific recruitment strategies to nurture all of our youth in care.

Proposed trainings will involve sensitivity, education, support, and nurturing components. This will be accomplished by meeting with the below partners to develop training series throughout the year for staff, foster and adoptive parents, and our foster youth.

- Children's Aid Society
- Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
- PFLAG of ALABAMA

2022 Update:

Special training sessions for LGBTQ was held during both of our 2021 IL Summer Camp Life. The sessions were led by our State Foster Care Program Manager and allowed youth to share their experiences.

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

The data collected continues to be shared with providers and community stakeholders, staff, Tribal partners, and our young people since the initial results collection was released in 2011. Alabama continues to reach the required benchmarks set and is compliant with ongoing submissions as of this writing. Information acquired through the surveys have been used to maintain connection to out-of-care youth, as well as used to assess ongoing youth needs and obtainment of Medicaid services.

Our DREAM Council Ambassadors play a key role in the proposed improvements to our current NYTD survey and website development, assisting Alabama in making it more user friendly. Alabama will continue to work with the current DREAM Council and youth participating in DREAM Council meetings and summer camps and conferences regarding the importance of NYTD. Alabama will continue to work with our young people to develop strategies to ensure that youth are aware they are required to participate at age 19 and at age 21. Incentives are provided to youth as they complete the surveys. Updates are being made to the NYTD portal to create a youth-friendly engagement.

Coordination with Other Federal Programs and Private/Public Agencies

There have been several initiatives related to private and public agencies which will continue. The IL Program works closely with the **Children's Aid Society** to provide service and supports to current and prior older youth in foster care. Alabama has developed great collaborations with the **Alabama National Guard, Alabama Adoptive and Foster Parent Association, Alabama Department of Education, Alabama Reach, the Alabama Medicaid Agency, Alabama Department of Youth Services, the Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative, the National Social Work Enrichment Program, Foster Care to**

Success, Alabama Department of Public Health, Casey Family Programs, Youth Towers, Second Shift Alabama, and the nsoro Educational Foundation. These collaborations improved educational outcomes, college retention and matriculation, an improved knowledge of psychotropic medication use and trauma-informed practice, and a focus on ensuring that older youth re-enroll in the Medicaid program. We have had the opportunity to coordinate services with **Department of Youth Services** crossover youth, provide training and education to our **Tribal partners** and **Court Improvement Program** staff regarding older youth issues. We have also had an opportunity to utilize a new permanency consultation model and prepare our young people for academic life beyond high school. We will be working to develop more comprehensive collaborations with Job Corps, the **United States Armed Forces**, the **Department of Mental Health**, and the **Alabama Department of Labor**. A stronger and more defined partnership with the Alabama Department of Mental Health regarding smooth transition would improve outcomes for our youth with serious mental health issues. Our work with the **Armed Forces**, **Job Corps** and the **Department of Labor** is meant to improve and provide improved options to a population of youth who may struggle with transitions post foster care. Due to the increased number of young people participating in post-secondary education, two Youth Transition Fairs called Life After Foster Care, were held in March 2022 through a collaborative effort with our Children's Aid and community partners representing the Alabama National Guard, technical training schools, out Fostering Hope Mentors, National Social Work Enrichment Program, and two-and four-year colleges and universities. Youth were able to complete their FAFSA onsite and gather information regarding college and career options.

Focus on post-foster care housing assistance has included youth who participate in our traditional Independent Living apartment settings and youth needing to move out independently to better maintain stable housing by taking advantage of opportunities and programs offered by **HUD**. 62 referrals have been made to Public Housing Authorities in the state through the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) program. Mobile and Jefferson County have been able to reestablish services through HUD's Family Unification Program through our connection with FYI. Twenty-eight (28) youth have been placed in public housing through the FYI program with another twelve (12) youth pending housing. The Department has MOU's with 15 public housing authorities across the state.

2022 Update:

We have worked closely with our Medicaid Agency to ensure that young people who are eligible for the extension of Medicaid coverage to age 26 are made aware of this opportunity. We have coordinated training for our staff and youth making them aware of their eligibility and directing them to Alabama's Medicaid website to re-enroll for insurance coverage. The information and link to the website is also on our Independent Living website. As of October 1, 2016, all young people who are eligible upon their exit from out of home care will be automatically converted to the Medicaid to 26 health insurance programs. The Department has been working on an interface with the Alabama Medicaid Agency to ensure that all eligible young people will continue to receive this much needed service without interruption. The Department's continued work on the NYTD PIP includes an expansion of our electronic information sharing with the Alabama Medicaid Agency so that all youth over the age of 18 are identified, their FACTS files are included as they exit care, and working with that agency to ensure that the needed data is correct. There are also plans to update the Medicaid system by the end of the fiscal year to automatically end date the Medicaid service for eligible youth on their 26th birthday.

Serving Youth Across the State

All youth in the System of Care are considered Alabama's children. In an effort to ensure that all young people receive the same level of support and services, the Program has gone to great lengths to provide training directly to youth by DREAM Council Ambassadors and community providers statewide. Alabama is currently strengthening our partnership with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to provide training directly to their youth leaders. A joint regional DREAM Council meeting will be set for 2021. All available services and supports are offered to all foster youth in Alabama. Youth and their caregivers and social workers can access information regarding ILP policy, NYTD, camps, conferences, services, job opportunities, health services, Medicaid, and trainings at our various youth social media avenues (www.ilconnect.org; @ILConnect on Facebook; and @originalilconnect on Instagram). These avenues offer a one-stop webpage that list independent living services across the state. The Division has updated the state's website, iDHR, with tools, forms, and instructions to improve accessibility for staff and community partners thereby improving outcomes for our older youth in

care. Services to our foster youth and those youth being served in their own homes are individualized to meet each youth's unique needs. Limited available resources in rural areas can create challenges in securing placements.

Case reviews and consultations have continued during the COVID health crisis. Our ILP team conducts monthly reviews related to young people in our ILP and TLP placement settings regarding their readiness for transitioning to adulthood. Our team also participates in weekly meetings with the Office of Foster Care and the Resource Management Division for consultation regarding our hardest to place youth. Special focus has been made regarding pregnant and parenting teens. Our mother's and infant providers began participating in quarterly provider meetings during this reporting period.

Serving Youth of Various Ages and Stages of Achieving Independence

The focus of the IL program is to provide services and supports to promote healthy interdependence. Our young people enter care at various stages and levels of maturity. Because of the unique nature of their circumstances, proper assessment and youth engagement are key when serving this age group. Our ILP partner, Children's Aid Society, developed transition toolkits based on levels of maturity and competence identified by the ISP team.

ILP aged youth in our protective service caseloads are encouraged to participate in ILP activities, but there is no financial incentive offered for their participation. Alabama allows youth to remain in foster care until they reach the age of twenty-one (21). Each year we hold an Annual Celebration of Scholars designed to recognize youth graduating high school or completing their GED. This celebration promotes ongoing educational supports and opportunities for youth post-high school. Our FY 2020 Graduation Celebration was opened by the Governor with an online address via YouTube. There was a virtual ceremony followed by eight pop-up graduation celebrations statewide where the graduates were safely recognized in person. Our FY 2021 Graduation Celebration was held in-person. We have a record 191 high school graduates.

Providing personal and emotional supports to young people exiting care through mentors and promoting positive interactions continues to be a focus. True, permanent connections developed through safe interactions and potential reunification with biological families, the use of the Permanency Pact, the development of host families through our partnership with Alabama Reach, and the development and enhancement of foster and adoptive homes to serve older youth are strategies we will continue to ensure that our older youth have the best possible opportunities.

Our Second Shift partners developed and distributed post foster care guidebooks which were provided to all of our high school graduates and to our camp participants. The guidebooks noted state and national resources for life after foster care. Our Finance Division ensures, through monthly monitoring, that no more than 30% of our allotted federal CFCIP funds are expended for room and board for youth who have left foster care after 18 and have not yet attained 21 years of age. Young people are made aware at the time of discharge from foster care that they are still eligible for services and supports post-foster care to include services and supports of our Fostering Hope mentors, our post-foster care support providers, and the FYI program and its Continuum of Care providers linked through HUD.

Alabama offered foster care to youth up to age 21 prior to the national Title IV-E foster care extension. There are provisions regarding school attendance or employment in our current policy in order to access Title IV-E funding. Young people may remain in foster care continuously past their 18th birthday without re-entering care through request and signature. They remain eligible for all services and supports until they reach age 21. Youth who have left foster care after attaining 16 years of age continue to be eligible for and participate in our adoption subsidy and Kinship Guardianship supports. Additionally, youth who exit foster care at age 14 to adoption or kinship guardianship are eligible to participate in the state's Fostering Hope Scholarship.

Young people reside in all levels and types of foster care placements after turning 18, ranging from traditional foster homes to IL apartments and college dorms. We are working diligently to offer services and supports and foster home placements for young people so that they can remain in foster care in their home counties when possible. There are programs, supports, services, and placements available to assist all special needs populations to include substance using

or addicted youth, pregnant and parenting teens, and those with mental health needs. We are working with a community provider to develop a facility or facilities to address the special placement needs of those young people who have been victims of sex trafficking. We have partnerships with our Adult Services and Mental Health communities to ensure that our young people with developmental disabilities receive available services as they transition to adulthood.

National Social Work Enrichment Program, nsoro, and the Alabama Reach Program

A good education is the great equalizer for our young people. We have developed strong partnerships with the nsoro Educational Foundation and the **Alabama Reach Program** to promote post-secondary education. Because of these partnerships, we have more young people graduating high school and receiving GEDs, and more attending two and four-year colleges and universities, technical, and training schools. We will continue to work with these community partners and work to expand our partnership with Job Corps and the high school systems, the United States Armed Forces, and the Department of Youth Services to promote graduation and dual enrollment programs that are being offered in high schools across the state. Neither of these programs were able to be offered in Summer 2020 due to the pandemic. NSEP will resume on June 14, 2021, on the campus of Troy University. The nsoro Educational Foundation will return Summer 2022 at the University of Alabama.

Alabama Reach

The Reach program is currently housed at the University of Alabama with support from the University. Alabama Reach provides group sessions, access to host families, year-round dorm access, financial support, training, and volunteer opportunities for any youth identifying themselves as current or former foster youth. The program supports all foster care youth at the University of Alabama and at Shelton State Community College in Tuscaloosa. We conducted preliminary program meetings with Alabama State University in Montgomery. That program successfully launched in Fall 2014 through ASU's Social Work Department. Reach provides group sessions for foster youth on the campus of ASU on a limited basis. It is their goal to serve all foster youth in the two-and four-year colleges and technical and training schools in the area. Alabama Reach will continue to work with the Department to expand their programs to other colleges and universities in the state. During the 2020-2021 school year, Alabama Reach has continued to provide their services and supports which was key to our student's success through the pandemic. Alabama Reach works to assist our young people with housing, facilitating moving off campus, assisting them in navigating withdrawals when necessary, and linking them to services to help maintain their physical and mental health. Alabama Reach is interested in working with other colleges and universities around the state to replicate the programming statewide. We will begin working with them in this effort in 2022.

Fostering Hope

The Fostering Hope Bill (the Bill) passed in April 2015. Since the passage of the scholarship bill, 627 young people across the state have participated. The Bill has provided funding to cover tuition and required fees to young people attending over 40 in-state two-and four-year colleges, universities, and certificate programs. The scholarship provides tuition and all required fees for all youth in foster care at the time they graduate high school and all youth adopted at age 14 and older. An additional \$3.5 million was allocated for the 2020-2021 school year. Eight young people completed their two-and four-year degrees during the 2019-2020 school year and an additional fourteen (14) in the 2020-2021 school year. These two classes represent the first of our young people to complete college debt-free with the Fostering Hope Scholarship, ETV, federal grants, private scholarships, and those provided by our partners. The eligible recipients have increased to young people exiting foster care to kinship care after age 14. The Bill also provides for DHR staff who act as mentors to youth in college. As of this writing, 69 young people have a two-or four-year degree or a certification with an additional sixteen (16) set to graduate in May 2022. The Fostering Hope Mentors are required to meet with each young person face to face at least one time per semester to ensure that they are meeting educational requirements, are having their emotional and physical needs met, and are linked to appropriate service and supports on their campuses. The mentors further serve as liaisons between the Department and the universities should our young people experience difficulties. The mentors work closely with county staff if participants remain in foster care. Our ETV contract with Foster Care to Success was expanded to include young people applying for Fostering Hope. This facilitates streamlining the process and maximizing the funding available for our young people. The application is accessed on the same web portal.

Kids to Love / KTech

Kids to Love provides services to foster youth and families throughout the state. The services range from providing Christmas gifts to providing training, education, and housing support for former foster youth. KTech is a 16-week training course for young people exiting care due to their age. Upon completion, the young people are Siemens certified and have earned six (6) credits toward a two-year college certification in automotive technology. They may also go to work for the automotive industry with the Siemens certification. Kids to Love supported 48 current and former foster youth and those adopted from foster care through their college scholarship program. They have provided support to the Department promoting sibling visitation through Camp Hope (note-Camp Hope is included under Item 10). Those services were also expanded this year to provide one on one contact for children available for adoption and their potential adoptive parent(s). KTech has expanded its service to our young people and now offers housing support. They continued to serve our young people through the pandemic remotely and in person.

Room and Board

Counties often need to know how board payments are to be used to meet a child's needs. Board payments vary according to the age of a child and the core rate does not include difficulty of care payments. The maximum monthly core board payment should be used according to the following breakdown. These percentages are used as a guide and may vary according to a child's specific needs. Note: Incidentals include purchase for a child such as school supplies, movie tickets, etc.):

- Room and Board 85%
- Clothing 7.5%
- Medicine Chest Supplies 2.0%
- Incidentals 5.5%

Data on Youth Over the Age of 18

As of April 1, 2022, 409 of our young people remained in care past age 18 years old. As stated in the current APSR, they reside in every type of placement from traditional foster home to college dorm rooms and apartments. All young people are eligible to receive training and employment support. Young people all over the state have access to local employment services and receive training to develop and increase their skills with employment and career preparation. Young people, without regard to age, receive the placement setting services deemed most appropriate by their ISP teams. Additional placement categories meant to reflect the true status of young people aged 18 and older who have located their own housing and are supported using Chafee funding for room and board.

Credit Reports and Health Care Proxies

Per PL-113-183, credit reports are requested by county staff annually upon each youth's 14th birthday. The results are shared with the young person and documentation of the results is recorded in their files. Information regarding the credit reporting and documentation of efforts to resolve any issues on the youth's credit report has been shared with social workers, county directors, foster parents, and vendor/service providers. This information has been shared at Annual Permanency conferences, annual ILP conferences, at meetings with the ACCA and FFTA groups, during ILP regional consultations, and at the annual AFAPA conference to ensure all parties are aware of the requirements. Youth are also provided training regarding the importance of maintaining good credit and responsible fiscal management. The youth were trained regarding how to achieve and maintain good credit and had opportunity to request their own credit reports during the 2016-2019 Camp Life I & II Camps, summer youth conferences. We were unable to provide the opportunity in Summer 2020 due to the pandemic but will resume at this summer's (2021) sessions. We are also working to provide credit counseling, a credit repair service, to youth 18 and older which will be available statewide via online services. Youth attending the 2022 ILP Camps will be provided the opportunity to complete their credit report updates. Alabama's FACTS

system requires this information to be updated in order to close out the discharge screen prior to case closure. State IL consultants are also trained to build capacity with county staff to monitor and ensure counties are in compliance with this requirement.

Health care proxies are a new area of focus for the Department. Proxies are encouraged for youth who have not identified permanency resources, so that they may have someone to speak on their behalf should they become incapacitated. Individualized consultation regarding this matter will continue to be provided to staff. Alabama has had no young people request Health Care Proxies during this reporting period. When a young person requires a proxy, Chafee ILP funds are used to provide them. Alabama will provide Health Care Proxy training during the upcoming Regional Consultation and DREAM Council training to refresh our staff and educate our young people, providers, and stakeholders regarding the process.

Determining Eligibility of Benefits

All youth aged 14 to 21 in the foster care system or receiving services through our protective services program are eligible to receive services. Foster youth aged 14 to 21 are eligible for all benefits and services. There are no restrictions for the use of CFCIP funding for foster youth residing outside of the state.

Participation in National Evaluations

The State of Alabama's Independent Living Program will cooperate and participate in any and all national evaluations required regarding the effect of the programs in achieving the purposes of CFCIP.

Education and Training Vouchers Program

The Alabama Department of Human Resources uses a vendor/provider who is experienced in providing ETV student support services. The vendor provides an electronic application platform. The Department verifies student eligibility. The vendor works with eligible youth and their respective colleges and universities to assess and confirm the cost of attendance. The vendor is selected through the Request for Proposal process and ensure that methodology to avoid duplication and overpayment of federally provided and assisted funding. The ETV vendor is required per contract to maintain a database of individual and cumulative data related to an annual, unduplicated count, and qualitative roster of ETV recipients.

Youth are supported with CFCIP monies allotted for ETV through our contract with Foster Care to Success. A web portal is maintained which can be accessed by our youth, their caregivers, university officials, and state office staff 24 hours per day, seven days per week. The youth apply online, and information is verified by DHR. Once all documentation is received and approved, youth are awarded funds based on their individual need. Our contract provider delivers comprehensive support to include care packages, school supplies, and equipment youth may need. Our youth are required to check in with an identified staff member once per month to report their progress. There were 181 youth participating in FY 2021. The data collected by Foster Care to Success assists us in improving the provision of services to our youth. Current data shows that college and technical school graduation is an area in which improvements could be made as our number of freshmen enrolling in post-secondary education far outnumbers our seniors near completion of college or technical school. We will continue to work with partners at the State Department of Education, National Social Work Enrichment Program, Alabama Reach, nsoro Educational Foundation, and our Fostering Hope mentors to improve the college completion success rate through better preparation for college and additional supportive services while participating in post-secondary education. Staff has been advised at all trainings to have their youth complete the ASVAB as early as their Junior year in high school. In our consultations moving forward, more focus will be placed on improved permanent connections, supports, and increased financial support through tuition waiver. The Fostering Hope Scholarship legislation, along with added staff, is having a positive impact on college success.

Alabama's youth participating in the program received an average of \$3,357 per year. There are 182 current and former foster youth participating in the program attending a total of 52 colleges, universities, and/or technical schools. Chafee funds may be used for activities that are outside the scope of an institution's definition of "cost of attendance" and are not covered by the ETV program. Funds are also available for the Poarch Band of Creek Indians in they have youth in custody.

Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act

Our Management Team worked diligently with Data Analysis, Legal, Communications, and the Finance Division to develop and provide guidance to county directors and staff regarding distribution of these funds. Listings of eligible youth were provided to counties on June 2, 2021. We also worked with our ILP provider, Children's Aid Society, placement providers, AFAPA, post-foster care providers, Youth Towers, Big House Foundation, Kids to Love, and Second Shift to provide information regarding the Act to share with eligible youth. In partnership with the Communications Division, we developed a press release which was distributed on June 2, 2021. We produced informational videos which are available and shared on continuously on the ilconnect.org website. Links to the application for assistance were placed on all IL Connect social media platforms and our ETV provider's website. Links are also available on partner agency websites.

On June 2, 2021, county offices, providers, and IL partners were provided with the information regarding the Division X funding as well as information about applications being released on that same day. Information regarding the Act and guidelines for serving eligible youth was also provided. An informational conference call including all county directors, ILP coordinators, and county Finance Officers was held on June 10, 2021. All applications were received by both county and state offices and are being tracked at the state level. We have received, reviewed, and are processing over 850 different requests for assistance. Approximately \$4,273,659 in funding has been provided to our counties to serve these youth.

2022 Update:

As of March 7, 2022, the state has issued \$4,273,659.90 of Division X funding over 700 youth ranging in age from 18 – 26. Funding has covered housing supports, transportation needs, as well as additional living expenses as mapped out by the program instructions for the Division X Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021. The ~~county~~ (State) is currently working to finalize data related to the number of youth served and the specific areas they were served. In May 2022, Alabama launched our IL Connect App. The App was created in partnership with the Children's Aid Society and will help connect everyone to IL services in Alabama. The App can be downloaded to any device and users can log in as a guest or create an account. The App contains a "Lockbox" feature that allows youth to save a copy of their birth certificate, driver's license, social security card, and medical records. It will also allow the Department to send out instant notifications about special events and activities. This information was shared statewide.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Training (CFCIP)

We will continue to provide comprehensive, innovative, and relevant training to our youth, providers, county and state staff, foster parents, judges, and interested community stakeholders. We will conduct annual networking opportunities for ILP staff, providers, and community stakeholders. We will continue to provide regional trainings to the county related to IL policy and procedures and NYTD. We will provide online trainings as deemed appropriate using our LETS training system. We will improve our capacity to provide training upon request to counties and community stakeholders as staffing allows. Youth will be provided annual leadership and ILP training. Youth will participate in national conferences annually and in monthly trainings around the state.

The annual ILP Networking Training, reinforced by statewide ILP Framework Training and staff and partner participation in monthly DREAM Council meetings, and DREAM Council leadership training have positively enhanced our service model. Our young people and those tasked to provide services to them have several opportunities to enhance their support network, obtain useful and portable skills, and strengthen their support networks. For FY 2021, we conducted training for staff, providers, and IL partners through the Children's Aid Society. Topics centered around preparing older youth for life after foster care dealing with the developing youth brain, and educational assistance for youth post-high school.

Consultation with Tribes

We consulted with Alabama's one federally recognized tribe, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians regularly prior to the national health crisis. It is our goal to re-engage and expand this partnership by planning an annual convening of our youth leaders and tribal youth leaders. The Tribe is an active partner in our Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative (CWCI) with full access to all information regarding services and supports available to all other youth in the state. Our ability to have our youth collaborate with the Tribe was hampered by the COVID 19 pandemic. We will resume our work and annual meetings with them when possible.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Improvement Efforts

In order to improve independence outcomes, Alabama's plan and planning will continue to involve youth. Traditionally our youth leaders (DREAM Ambassadors) meet once monthly during the school year and participate in camps, leadership trainings, and state and local conferences annually where they set and develop goals based on information received from youth during their monthly meetings. These monthly meetings occur in a different county each time. Youth Leaders provide training to their peers at monthly meetings and serve as junior counselors at summer camps and conferences. Leaders also develop strategies related to their goals and consult with ILP staff and Children's Aid Society partners to effect the change they would like to see. Our focus on the youth voice will continue and will be enhanced by more leadership and training opportunities related to working with Legislature and effective youth advocacy.

Strengthening our partnership with our young people has been a focus in our effort to improve services and support to their peers in foster care and those who are transitioning. Our DREAM Ambassadors have received leadership training and support and have crafted and led this year's DREAM Council meetings. Our DREAM Ambassadors are also participating in Quality Service Reviews, meeting with their peers to prepare them for the stakeholder interviews and facilitating the collection of consumer surveys. They have also participated as presenters at the Daniel Memorial Conference three consecutive years prior to the pandemic. Their presentations have centered around providing supports to other foster youth and challenging adult advocates.

Older Youth Input

Ongoing skill development is the most integral part of the IL Program. Beyond skill development, we recognize the need for older youth to develop long-term support systems, actively participate in their transition plans, and learn to manage their mental health. In addition to utilizing our designated Alabama Youth Ambassadors to assist with development of policies and practices, we have begun recruiting for input of additional lived-experience youth. During our in-person 2020 supervisor conference, we had several former foster youths share their experiences after leaving foster care. We have also been adding former foster youth to our Child Protective Services training and have included information from them during our virtual Permanency Conference. We also had several Ambassadors and lived experience youths participate in the October 2020 Judicial Conference. During that event, youth were able to speak to judges, county administrators, and GALs.

We were unable to hold the National Social Work Enrichment Program in 2020, but plan to have 25 youth participate in learning public speaking through Toastmaster's International volunteer work through on-campus forums and learn overall pre-college experience during their six-weeks on the campus of Troy University.

In order to further the connection to our older youth, both in and out of foster care, the State utilizes youth specialists who are Alabama foster care alumni through a contract with the Children's Aid Society. Our youth continued to provide training to their peers, foster parents, and other stakeholders across the state. During the past year while working around COVID concerns, we have made 351 connections with youth, identifying 245 unduplicated connections. The Office of ILP has sent out emails and correspondence bi-monthly to 678 current and former older youth to assess their needs during the pandemic. Local counties have provided ongoing financial support to these youth in need.

Report on the specific accomplishment achieved to-date (and planned) for each of the following eight purpose areas – Includes 2022 Updates:

1. Help youth transition to self-sufficiency:

The number of foster youths in care 18 years and older is now 485. This change does not seem to be affected by any noticeable trends. We continue to see an increase in the percentage of young people completing high school and transitioning to college, training programs, and work. We have worked diligently to establish a partnership with the Alabama National Guard which has raised awareness of careers, increased mentorship opportunities, and increased the opportunities for positive permanent connections available through the armed forces. Staff, youth, foster parents, the QA Committee, and the CWCI team have all been provided information and have provided input regarding services and supports to our older youth through dual degree and vocational programs available at high school across the state and training opportunities available through partnerships with Kids to Love and local employment agencies.

All of our new partners have worked with us throughout the year, participating in all of our DREAM Ambassador meetings across the state. They have provided training at Supervisors Conferences, our Strategic Planning Meetings, and the ILP Networking Conference. The FY 2020 ILP Networking Conference was presented via Zoom. The FY 2021 ILP Networking Conference will be held at Lake Guntersville State Park.

Permanency Goal Percentage of APPLA for Children in Out-of-Home Care

Fiscal Year	As of Date	Percentage
FY 2021	03/31/2021	10.34%
FY 2022	03/31/2021	10.26%

*Excludes children placed in their own home, relative home, or court ordered non-relative homes.

Data Source: Alabama's CCWIS system

2. Help youth receive the education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment:

See chart below. The program's goal is to help students attend, succeed, and graduate from post-secondary schools, ready to enter the workforce (Source: Foster Care to Success). Alabama had 142 youth graduate high school in 2020. We continue our efforts to review and support post-high school participation in vocational and educational opportunities available has been improved. Annually we requested that each county report future plans related to each youth. Those reports were reviewed, and counties were advised related to educational and vocational opportunities to be shared with youth who had no post-high school plans.

3. Help youth prepare for and enter post-secondary training and educational institutions, ETV statistics:

Awarded for School Year	Total ETVs	Returning Students	Number of New Students
2020-2021	182	101	81
2021-2022	222	122	100

Data Source: Family and Children's Services, Office of Foster Care

The National Social Work Enrichment Program (NSEP) is an initiative to engage youth around education and career opportunities through a six-week program in which youth stay on campus at a local university and attend workshops, do community work, and learn about campus life in preparation for career choices with a specific focus around social work. Since 2010, NSEP has graduated 255 participants, with 13 former participants graduating from college with several others currently attending. The Alabama Educational Assistance program is a comprehensive student support system developed to help youth attend and succeed in post-secondary education. The program recognizes that funding to attend school must be coupled with the consistent and specific help and guidance that young people need to navigate the college experience and mature into confident, well-rounded adults.

Toolkits

All Alabama ETV students receive Academic Success and Career Planning materials throughout the semester. The materials are posted on FosterU, and links are sent to students weekly via email and text messages. Students leaving foster care may not understand the college culture, so that information was developed to help them make informed decisions. Topics include money management and understanding financial aid, student loans, time management, health, and nutrition, etc. New Materials may be written as needed or adopted from other sources to be relevant for foster youth; the purpose of the information is to fill knowledge gaps and help them progress toward earning a credential and being an independent young adult.

4. Provide personal and emotional support to youth exiting care through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults: Currently the state does not have a state-wide mentor program. Our partners, Kids to Love, Heart Gallery of Alabama, and Alabama Reach have and are developing mentor programs for our youth. We will continue our work with them to develop a statewide mentoring program. Mentors are strongly encouraged and several counties recruit and link their young people with mentors. Though we continue to seek mentors for all youth in our care, natural mentorships have yielded the best results.

5. Attending and making academic progress towards completing a degree or certificate is the goal of al Alabama ETV Program: To help students progress academically, Foster Care 2 Success developed its Academic Success Program (ASP) so educational mentors can provide targeted academic and career guidance to students. The tiered program was developed to meet the needs of all students by recognizing that students skill levels range from struggling with basic skills to being academically gifted and that students are incoming freshman through graduating seniors. The Academic Success Program offers academic mentors who provide moral support and consistently focus on the students' academic goals, progress, and success. Students receive resources based on their individual profile including parenting, test-taking, time management, career planning, employment readiness, access of on-campus resources, and others. By reviewing each student's academic transcript, ASP identifies those who are failing classes or are in remedial classes and works with them throughout the semester to help them develop skills and means to pass and progress academically.

Our Fostering Hope mentors meet with our college youth to assess their strengths and needs based on their performance and progress in college. These mentors attend ISP meetings and meet with college advisors to offer supports to young people and to provide necessary supports to promote academic success. Our Fostering Hope mentors have participated in monthly DREAM Council Meetings, ILP Networking, Permanency, and Supervisors Conferences in order to provide training to staff, supervisors, and community partner agencies. The addition of this team has led to increased secondary education interest and participation. The Fostering Hope mentors have participated in individual and group completion of the FAFSA and coordinated and supported ASVAB testing. They have also coordinated and supported services to young people seeking to begin military service and to participate in the KTech program supported by Kids to Love.

6. Provide financial supports, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support and services to former foster care recipients between 18 and 21 years of age to complement their own efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and to assure that program participants recognize and accept their personal responsibility for preparing for and them making the transition into adulthood: Youth of all ages are entitled to receive age-appropriate services, including opportunities to learn independent living skills and receive unique services as determined by the child and family planning team. Youth may stay in care per state law until their 21st birthday. Aftercare assistance is available to youth who leave care between their 18th and 21st birthday in the form of financial assistance or services. Alabama provides each youth exiting the foster care system with a one-time stipend of \$1,000.00 for start-up costs. Aftercare financial assistance and support services continues to be available to youth who leave the system prior to their 21st birthday. For youth who leave care on or after their 18th birthday, policy allows for the youth to re-enter foster care if the need arises. If the youth needs to re-enter foster care or remain in his own home, financial assistance, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate supports and services are also to be provided as needed until the 21st birthday. Room and Board payments are available for youth who remain in care after their 18th birthday or for those who leave care after their 18th birthday on a case-by-case basis. County staff must make such requests to their state ILP specialist to ensure no more than

30% of the state funds are used for Room and Board. Room and Board funds may be used to assist with dorm room deposits or to make limited payments on rent when a plan is in place to ensure the youth will continue to have housing available after the assistance is no longer available. Permanency outcome data will continue to be closely monitored. New partnerships in the form of Second Shift Alabama and Youth Towers and out expanding relationship with Kids to Love and Alabama Reach have yielded positive results for youth as they transition while in care and upon their exits. These programs offer emergency housing, job training, job referrals, internships, facilitate housing referrals, link current and former foster youth to community services and supports, and provide hard services to our young people.

Additional placement options were added to our FACTS system in order to assist young people in moving into their own homes with continued Room and Board assistance from the Department. Supportive services to maintain those placements in encouraged and provided. The program is also working with a traditional supervised independent living provider to develop and provide pre-ILP services for those young people who have been assessed to need preparative services in order to enhance their independent living skills.

7. Make vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary education, available to youth who have exited foster care due to their age: See chart under #3, page 65

8. Provide services to youth who, after attaining 16 years of age, have left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption. What is available to this population involves financial subsidies to the family as well as eligibility for ETV to provide educational support for youth to access post-secondary education. The adoptive parents and caretaker become responsible for the youth upon exit from care. Services provided by our Alabama Pre and Post Adoptive Services Program are also available to these young people free of charge. Youth and their families may also participate in the free family support services provided by our extensive network of Family Service Centers. Foster youth who have exited foster care to adoption after age 14 are now eligible for our Fostering Hope Scholarship, which provides eligibility up to age 26. The AFAPA offers scholarship opportunities for young people exiting foster care. There are also supportive services offered to these youth by BigHouse Foundation, Kids to Love, Youth Tours, Alabama Department of Commerce, Alabama Department of Labor (Alabama Works), the Alabama National Guard, JobCorps, the National Social Work Enrichment Program, NSORO, and the Positive Movement.

9. Ensure children who are likely to remain in foster care until 18 years of age have regular, ongoing opportunities to engage in age or developmentally appropriate activities as defined in section 475(11) of the Act.

We will continue to provide supportive services to those youth likely to remain in foster care until age 21. We will work with all stakeholders, community providers, AFAPA and foster youth to develop policy to encourage participation in age and developmentally appropriate activities. As of April 1, 2022, with 482 young adults, those age 18 and older, represent 9% of our overall ILP population. This is a decrease but is in line with our overall foster care population decrease. Young people who choose to remain in foster care past age 18 experience that process without interruption in services or supports and reside in placements ranging from traditional foster homes to college dormitories. These young people are strongly encouraged to take advantage of education, training, and vocational opportunities available to them while encouraging their participation in their transition planning. Staff, youth, foster parents, the Department's Quality Assurance Committee and CWCI Team have all been provided information and have provided input regarding services and supports to our older youth. During the fiscal year, the Program has worked to improve self-sufficiency outcomes through expanded collaboration and strengthen partnerships with HUD, Youth Towers and Second Shift Alabama to assist youth who are homeless or need housing supports post-foster care. As stated, prior in the report, the Department has continued its work with Public Housing to provide 28 post-foster care housing placements.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN: 2020-2024, OBJECTIVES, Includes 2022 Updates:

Alabama will continue to deliver specialized services and supports to those youth in our care aged 14-21, based on their individualized strengths, needs, and goals. The COVID 19 health crisis highlighted the need for more intensive and focused services related to true preparedness for adulthood. We continue to work with our partner agency and Resource

Management Division to develop more services with a focus on connection. The Department will continue to expand opportunities of Positive youth Development by expanding opportunities for more of our youth to serve in leadership roles in our DREAM Council.

During the previous reporting period, the Department has realized success with regard to improved permanency outcomes with regard to our older youth; most prominently noted in the number of adoptions completed in FY 2020 of 80 older youth and 98 in FY 2021. We can also note that permanency for these youth overall, marked notable increases during the reporting period. We also demonstrated our efforts to decrease the number of young people with an APPLA permanency goal and reduce our older youth long-stayers, or youth who are in care for 5 years or more.

OBJECTIVE

Independent Living services will be provided to all youth ages 14 – 21. Services will be tailored to meet the need of our older youth with a focus on strengthening their life-long connections, supporting their educational and vocational goals, as the means by which to successfully transition into adulthood. All youth who are currently in the planning responsibility of the Public Child Welfare system, will receive the services and supports needed to become successful interdependent adults.

OBJECTIVE

The Independent Living Program will conduct, coordinate, and provide consultation and training for all county social workers with ILP responsibilities, community providers, transitional and IL Providers, congregate care providers, foster parents, and federally recognized Tribes, and community stakeholders to develop programs to promote successful outcomes for youth. Trainings and consultations provided during the pandemic are noted above.

OBJECTIVE

The Office of Foster Care and Independent Living will work to expand support to counties in building capacity to understand and serve older youth needs through funds available through Chafee. The Office of FC/ILP will launch, as a follow-up to the new ILP Framework, an ILP Transition Plan to be used in conjunction with the ISP. This Transition Plan will be used to appropriately assess the need for, and plan services and supports meant to meet the specific needs of the young people we serve. We will also continue monitoring those assessments and plans by conducting monthly conference call consultations to improve the inconsistencies noted in the most recent review.

OBJECTIVE

Safely continue to reduce the number of youths who have APPLA as a permanency goal. A slight decrease, .1% was noted between FY 2020 and FY 2021. This number is on pace with the decrease in the overall foster care number. We will continue to monitor the appropriate use of APPLA as a permanency plan.

OBJECTIVE

An emerging area of concern are those young people exiting care in runaway status. We will continue our efforts to comply with the provisions of PL 113-183 with regard to reporting to law enforcement and the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children per policy requirements in an effort to continue to reduce potential sex trafficking victims and additional poor outcomes for our young people. The FY 2021 number slightly decreased to 102. Of these 102, approximately 50% were aged 18 and above. The ILP Division reviewed each case and assisted the county in employing new methods of locating these young people. We also found that several young people were listed as runaway though the counties knew their whereabouts and that they were stable in those placements. These placement statuses were updated to reflect that the youth were stable.

Fiscal Year	2020	2021
Discharge Reason		
Discharge reason		
Adoption	80	95

Adult Custodial Care	8	6
Child Aged Out	48	40
Custody Awarded to Another Agency	19	32
DYS Commitment	11	10
Emancipation	139	147
Kinship Guardianship	25	33
Mental Health Commitment	3	2
Other	3	24
Relative Placement	228	212
Return to Parent	303	341

Data Source: Alabama's FACTS System

OBJECTIVE

ILP teens will have access to information about policies and program development along with activities and opportunities that will be supportive as youth transition into adulthood. Youth leadership will be promoted and enhanced.

The Department continues to strengthen the lived experience youth voice in all areas. In partnership of our current DREAM Ambassadors, the Department reaches out to multiple youth and young adult both in and out of care to share their ongoing insight. Maintaining a direct connection between our administrative staff at the state office and live experience youth continues to prove beneficial to keeping the pulse of youth and young adult needs. Youth Speak Outs are incorporated in most state-wide IL events. These Speak Outs serve as a type of Townhall meeting for youth where they are free to share their story and journey through foster care. During FY 21, over 237 youth were given an opportunity to share their voice through these forums.

Our DREAM Council current consist of 8 active members, 4 inactive members and 32 alumni members. The State ILP staff assist Children's Aid Society, (ILP partners) with providing relevant and appropriate content for our www.ILConnect.org. This website continues to provide pertinent information and helpful tips for teens regarding foster care policy, educational and vocational information, scholarship opportunities, peer achievements, information regarding camps and conferences, NYTD portal, policy relevant to foster parents, Independent Living and transitional living providers, congregate care providers and the community at large. The site is regularly updated. This site has proven extremely helpful during the Covid-19 pandemic in connecting and keeping our youth informed of services and information. The social media avenues used have extended to Facebook and Instagram. Information listed has included career training, assistance with mental health needs and an ongoing information stream. Our peer-to-peer training model has yielded success. Youth have been empowered through training and advocacy to participate in ISPs and Judicial proceedings. There has been a shift in the content of the Ilconnect website. Youth input has been gathered and youth driven content is being provided quarterly content. Youth input is also crucial with regard to the NYTD requirements moving forward. Youth input will be key in the re-design of our NYTD website as is described in the NYTD PIP. They will be featured in the introduction to the re-design and their input will be an included improvement to the current provision and delivery of NYTD related services.

In May 2022, Alabama launched our IL Connect App. The App was created in partnership with the Children's Aid Society and will help connect everyone to IL services in Alabama. The App can be downloaded to any device and users can log in as a guest or create an account. The App contains a "Lockbox" feature that allows youth to save a copy of their birth certificate, driver's license, social security card, and medical records. It will also allow the Department to send out instant notifications about special events and activities. This information was shared statewide.

OBJECTIVE

Improve educational outcomes for ILP Youth partnering with our education systems to provide additional supports and services. As indicated above, Alabama has invested in our children's educational success, and it has resulted in very positive results. The Department had the highest recorded number of graduates to date with a total of 191 young people receiving a high school diploma or GED in 2021. The Fostering Hope Scholarship Program also realized great success during the reporting period having 9 young people graduate with two- and four-year degrees in FY 2020 and an additional 14 completed college in FY 2021. With regard to higher education, partners join us in supporting our older youth as they tackle college and careers. We will continue to focus on positive educational outcomes for our older foster youth in out of home care. Programs have all worked to promote higher education, increase interest in trade and technical school, and dual enrollment in high schools.

OBJECTIVE

The Department will enhance its system to track youth exiting care due to age from the System of Care in order to meet National Youth in Transition Data requirements to monitor outcomes for youth transitioning out of care. Enhanced aftercare services will be available to all teens eligible and served for participating in the LIP Program. Alabama's Program Improvement Plan related to the August 2017 NYTD Review was approved July 31, 2018. We have submitted updated required. We continue to work closely with our FACTS team to make suggested and required changes to our systems to improve NYTD data collection and youth outcomes. National Youth in Transition Data PIP progress was hampered by the COVID 19 health crisis. Enhancements were completed per the Children's Bureau's recommendations and submitted to the Children's Bureau on June 8, 2019. The Department started working again on the current PIP with the Children's Bureau on April 13, 2021. The Children's Bureau is in receipt of all requested information including enhancement information. The Department is awaiting a follow-up discussion related to scheduling a date to review the proposed updates to the NYTD page as of this writing. The state has been deemed compliant with all NYTD survey submissions during this reporting period.

OBJECTIVE

The Department considers all children as "Alabama's Children" without regard to race or culture. The Department continues to strengthen services to Tribal youth who need access to benefits and services under the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The Department will collaborate with all Tribal entities located in Alabama to provide information and obtain input in the support of Indian youth and their families. As of this writing, there are no ILP age youth in foster care with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians. Work will resume later in the fiscal year.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS Includes 2022 Updates

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Permanency roundtables have been introduced and trained in all 67 counties.2. Kinship-Guardianship legislation is now in effect. The number of children and providers receiving Kinship-Guardianship assistance from the Court Improvement Program and Casey Family Programs.3. Training has been provided at Permanency Conferences, Supervisory Conferences, Judicial Summits, County Director Forums, and the Education/Court/Child Welfare Summit.4. See the chart below that provides data currently available on caseworker visits (see Item 14).5. When children on the Adoption No Identified Resource (ANIR) waiting list are part of the Wendy's Wonderful Kids or other child-specific recruitment, and a part of separated sibling groups, the recruiters focus efforts on visits and	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Need for improved caseworker visits2. Need continued increase of Kinship Guardianship3. When it is in the best interest of siblings to be separated, the Agency needs to continually assess the need for on-going separation.4. While FACTS has the capability to track sibling visits, the fields on the FACTS screen are not being consistently documented by users.5. Availability and flexibility of placement and service provision for older youth with extraordinary mental health needs.6. Relatives are not willing to complete the Kinship Guardianship process due to training requirements7. Some counties are hesitant to use Kinship Guardianship as a permanency plan due to misinformation regarding

<p>connections between siblings as an assessment and recruitment strategy.</p> <p>6. When children on the ANIR waiting list are part of a sibling group, adoption planning and placement efforts focus on reuniting these children in adoptive placements. There have been some instances where large sibling groups separated in foster care placements have been placed together for adoption.</p> <p>7. Camp Hope is a new program providing an opportunity for separated siblings to connect and bond with one another.</p> <p>8. A state-funded Kinship-Guardianship option is now available for youth/kin that are not IVE-E eligible. Legislations effective 06/01/18 removes a barrier for concluding Kinship-Guardianship agreements.</p> <p>9. We are currently tracking caseworker visits with parents/family.</p>	<p>policy as well as lack of licensed TIPS / Deciding Together trainer and co-trainers in the county.</p>
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

State DHR will conduct statewide trainings on the Alabama Practice Model and Best Practices that focuses on safety, well-being, permanency, least restrictive placements, and maintaining connections, which would enhance the ability for the child welfare workforce in efforts to preserve connections.

Strategies:

1. County workers and supervisors will attend statewide trainings conducted by State DHR, which will be evidenced by documentation.
2. Supervisors will have monthly staffings with workers, coaching, and modeling best practices.
3. State DHR will send monthly ERD Reports regarding all safety, permanency, and well-being rates.
4. Yearly surveys will be sent to clients and families regarding their satisfaction of maintaining connections.
5. State DHR will continue to educate counties regarding Kinship Guardianship and provide necessary trainings.

Well-Being Outcome 1 Families have enhanced capacity to provide for children's needs

Item 12. Needs/Services of child, parents, and foster parents

Item 13. Child/Family involvement in case planning

Item 14. Worker visits with child

Item 15. Worker visits with parents

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 1

Includes 2022 Updates

Item 12

- The data suggest that the state has not been successful with this outcome. This has prompted statewide discussion on what is hindering progress and what strategies can be implemented to overcome practice barriers.
- The information that was collected shows the need for staff to better understand the Individualized Service Planning (ISP) process and engage with both parents in discussing the planning goals, and how, if implemented as directed in policy, the ISP process could have a positive impact on families.

- New staff, as well as staff turnover, have had a major impact on carrying out service needs, and follow through in terms of worker management of the ISP process.
- The random record reviews that have been conducted by QCWP Specialists found that county staff generally know the families they serve and the needs of those families. Also, workers have been implementing strategies to address those needs; however, thorough, and timely documentation of these services and work is limited.
- ISPs are not consistently providing completion dates for service provision, resulting in some services not being secured in a timely manner.
- The Office of QCWP has recently updated the CFA/ISP training to support the counties in strengthening case assessment and case planning for families and children. The plan is to implement the training in the districts across the state. The Office of QCWP conducted virtual training on CFA/ISP in District IV and Jefferson County (PIP Implementation Counties) in January and February 2021. The training was also completed in District V in October 2021 and in District II in January 2022. Two other districts will be trained in June 2022, and the remaining 4 districts will be trained between July and September 2022. In-person trainings have resumed. The Office continues to give feedback to county supervisors on strengthening CFAs and ISPs through ongoing QCWP Random Record Reviews in county offices and individual work with county supervisors. The Office of QCWP conducts 15 (there were 14 reviews completed in 2021) Random Record Reviews per calendar year.

2022 Update:

The PIP counties were surveyed around specific needs related to service array and resource development. It was noted that more intensive in-home services (IIHS) were needed as this was a service determined to have a positive impact the assessment of family functioning. County Directors in the PIP implementation counties submitted a resource development plan. Quarterly PIP meetings were held in November 2020, February 2021, May 2021, August 2021, and November 2021 to discuss the counties' progress, barrier, and needs, as well as resource mapping. The Center for States facilitated resource mapping training for these counties during one quarterly meeting.

Item 14. Caseworker Visits with Child

In OSRIs completed in Measure Period 10 (Aug 2021 to Jan 2022) it was identified caseworker visits are typically happening on a monthly basis and at times more often. Although children and families report caseworker visits are happening, the visits are not consistently serving to assess the needs and required services of the child. Concerning item 14, the Agency performed at 68% Strength and for item 15, the Agency performed at 28% Strength.

The scope and purpose of the visits cannot always be gleaned from the documentation to determine if well-being of the child or parents was assessed. The OSRIs have also identified that caseworker visits with children are not always private and individual, but in a group setting with other family members. It should be noted that Alabama calculates caseworker visit data on a month-by-month basis rather than the Federal method (i.e., calculating all 12 months of a fiscal year). The Department captures caseworker visits using FACTS. Workers are required to register their contacts with children in out-of-home care every month. The information captured on FACTS relative to children in out-of-home care is used to report information to HHS/ACF in the AFCARS report. A Caseworker Visit report is submitted each year. The data are as follows:

	Measure 1 Percentage of Worker to Child Visits			
	Target	Actual	Target	Actual
FY 2020	95%	97%	Over 50 %	100%
FY 2021	95%	96%	Over 50%	100%

***Data source: Alabama's CCWIS System**

Alabama standards for Meaningful Caseworker Visits include children in foster care, homes of relatives, residential facilities, childcare institutions, pre-adoptive homes, and children in ICPC placements.

Caseworker visits continue to be made each month and are both scheduled and unannounced visits to the child's living environment. Some visits include exploration of goals and examination of any changes. Caseworkers continue to contact children and families through telephone calls. Visits to children in other settings may occur to provide opportunities for private discussions.

Visits to parents and caretakers may also occur in other settings for the same reason, however these types of visits in no way take the place of the required face-to-face, in-home, monthly visits. When the goal is Reunification, the workers continue to visit parents and caretakers monthly at their place of residence. Worker visits are more common with the mother of the children or the parent from whom the child was removed. Children in intensive residential treatment facilities are to be seen by their caseworker twice a month, at a minimum, where the child resides (at least 8 calendar days apart). The OSRIs have identified there is a significant difference in caseworker visits with the father of the children.

2021 Update:

Effective July 1, 2021, Children & Family Services Division revised the Caseworker Visitation Policy to require that children placed in intensive level programs must be visited twice per month, at a minimum, where the child resides. While visits may need to occur more often in some situations in order to manage an individual child's needs, twice per month is again the required minimum. The intent of this policy revision is to promote a strong assessment and to ensure safety and well-being.

Judicial Child Welfare Summit

Judicial child welfare summits are planned across FYs 2020-2024. They are collaborative meetings between AOC and DHR, with Casey Family Programs also being involved. Topics presented have included Kinship Guardianship, engaging fathers, hearing from our former foster youth, a review of statewide data with time to review and explore local data, trauma informed practice, and others.

2022 Update:

The 2021 Judicial Child Welfare Summit was held November 3-5, 2021. Topics presented included team approaches to advocating for children, sex trafficking, the importance of team and local recruitment for foster/adoptive parents, educational advocacy, how cases get stalled and what to look for to prevent stagnation, and other areas. There is another Summit planned for November 2022 where tentative plans include a focus on areas such as permanency, timeliness, collaboration, and using data in practice, etc.

Research suggests that with a permanency goal of Reunification, regular visitation should be encouraged, families need to be supported before, during, and after visits, and attachment relationship should be supported between children, foster parents, and biological parents. Results from Child and Family Services Review Round 2 indicate a positive relationship between how well the continuity of family relationships and connections are preserved for children (Permanency Outcome 2) and the permanency and stability they have in their living situations (Permanency Outcome 1). Meaningful visits are purposeful interactions between caseworkers and children, youth, parents, and resource persons that reflect engagement and contribute to assessment and case planning processes. Children in the Department's care and responsibility must be seen by their social worker monthly in the foster home/related home, pre-adoptive home, or facility where they live or more often if needed.

Jefferson County Family Wellness Court

SDHR contributes \$202,216.00 to the Jefferson County Family Wellness Court. Of that amount, \$136, 748.00 is targeted for personnel costs and the rest is earmarked for miscellaneous expenses to include travel, training, supplies/printing, and indirect costs. The Program serves parents with Substance Abuse Disorder who have either lost their children or are at risk of having them removed. The Program provides case management services, peer recovery supports, and substance

abuse assessments and interventions. There have been no changes to this program or to the ways in which it is administered.

Item 15

The primary focus of caseworkers is to work with the child and caregiver, and to have meaningful caseworker visits each month.

Board Certified Behavior Analysts in the Behavioral Services Unit continue services within the Quality Assurance Division relative to work with parents. Their supports include individual consultation with families to assess the need for behavioral services, helping the parents manage the child's behavior in the home, and conducting a five-week parenting training for the parents. Their services show success as documented through the Tools of Choice Parenting Program outcomes. These classes are provided to any caregiver of a child involved with the Department of Human Resources to include relatives, biological parents, foster parents, and adoptive parents. Parents learn seven core skills to appropriately manage the behavior of a child who has experienced trauma. There have been no changes in this area.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

See Strengths and Challenges under Items 12-15

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT – Includes 2022 updates

GOAL:

The Department will develop Comprehensive Family Assessments that lead to the development of family plans that better instruct case participants of the achievement of the desired goals.

Strategies:

The Quality CW Practice Specialists will continue to conduct ongoing peer reviews and onsite reviews in the counties, including the review of CFAs and will provide feedback to county supervisors and staff around family engagement which will improve their ability to gather needed information to fully assess the families' strengths, needs, functioning, safety, etc. Quality Child Welfare Practice Specialists offer Family Engagement training, as well as CFA and ISP training. This was completed in District IV and Jefferson in January/February 2021. It was also completed in District V in October 2021 and in District II in January 2022. Other Districts across the state is still in the training phase, with 2 districts scheduled to be trained in June. The remaining four districts will be trained between July and September 2022. The Department has increased efforts to recruit for additional services where needed, looking closely at rural areas of the state where services may be spread out. Providers have been encouraged to develop stronger supports and to partner with additional vendors to meet service deficits including training to assist caseworkers in strengthening assessments and case planning for children and families.

GOAL:

The Department will ensure the increased efforts to involve parents, caregivers, and age-appropriate children in the ISP process.

Strategies:

- The Quality CW Practice Specialists will continue to conduct ongoing peer reviews and onsite reviews in the county, including the review of ISPs, and will provide feedback to county supervisors around enhancing and strengthening the ISP process. The review tool gives counties feedback on their concerted efforts to ensure that all case partners are invited so these partners can participate in the case planning meetings. The review tool, as well as the CFA/ISP training provides valuable information/feedback on ensuring that child safety and well-being is assessed prior to the case planning meetings for children and families and ensure that any needs identified are addressed in the case planning meetings. Training initiatives will also be developed and implemented. The Office of QCWP has plans to implement statewide training on CFAs and ISPs which will be implemented in all 9 districts. CFA/ISP training was completed in District V in October 2021 and in District II in January 2022.

GOAL:

The Department will increase the frequency and quality of visits between caseworker to child and worker to both parents which leads to better permanency outcomes for children.

Strategies:

- Quality CW Practice Specialists will conduct Meaningful Caseworker Visit training in the counties to provide instruction and guidance around the purpose, content, and documentation of visits. This training will be implemented in all 9 districts. **2022 Update:** During the 2nd half of 2022 and 2023, Meaningful Caseworker visit trainings will be facilitated across all districts.
- Quality CWP staff continues to conduct ongoing peer and onsite reviews in the county, including the review of caseworker visits with all parties, and will provide feedback to county supervisors/staff around enhancing the quality of visits.

GOAL:

The Office of Foster Care will provide support, program specific policy implementation and county improvement plan assistance to each county across the state of Alabama.

Strategy:

The Office of Foster Care staff will make regular visits to each assigned county to discuss and provide implementation strategies for:

- Barriers to timely permanency: a change in workers can cause delays while the new worker is learning the case and what has been completed/initiated by the previous worker.
- Foster parent recruitment activities/follow-up plans: Counties are submitting plans yearly and doing some of the recruitment strategies documented despite COVID interruptions. Inquiries have continued to come in and have actually increased remarkably however, scheduling participants to a TIPS or Deciding Together class has caused some delay. The Office of Foster Care continues to assist the six pilot counties with recruitment INTAKE which has yielded additional homes added.
- Kinship Guardianship case assessment: The Office of Foster Care continues to educate our staff on the importance of kinship placements and to choose this permanency plan immediately when appropriate. Some counties have most recently led a KINSHIP ONLY TIPS class to meet the unique needs of relatives. There continues however to be those relatives that are not interested in the formal TIPS training and choose to proceed without DHR involvement. State Office has assisted counties with Deciding Together leaders to expedite provisional placements.
- Permanency trends and regular case reviews: Office of Foster Care staff were involved in some permanency staffing's (i.e., ages 4-10 in PIP counties, full perm staffing's in some counties). Most children are returning home or being placed with relatives. Some are returning home with in-home services.
- Staff permanency training needs: Supervisors appear to need more training on being efficient leaders and coaches. In terms of specific permanency needs, ongoing training is provided at annual conferences for workers and supervisors.

Well-Being Outcome 2**Children receive services to meet their educational needs****Item 16. Educational needs of child(ren)****ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA****WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2****Includes 2022 Updates**

The assessment of educational needs for children continues through record reviews and child-specific directives and feedback conducted by the OQCWP. Workers are prompted to know the child's grade and reading levels and to monitor the child(ren)'s progress through the ISP process. Cases with outstanding examples of advocacy are highlighted such as ISPs held jointly with IEPs, holding ISPs at school to encourage more education participation, and communication with

teachers through emails and telephone calls. This is encouraged through every opportunity for more consistency across the state. The Office of QCWP random reviews find that workers are involved in the educational outcomes for children. Workers are aware of the child's reading level, grades, and any difficulties the child may be encountering. Workers are found to be involved in IEPs and other school meetings. The educational needs of children were being assessed and met. In the cases reviewed, where educational needs of the children were not being met, contributing factors were lack of engagement with the school, lack of advocacy when a need is identified, and lack of referral for services for children who are not yet school aged to ensure developmental progress. For foster care cases, the majority of the ISPs are attended by caseworkers and feedback is given to supervisors that there is more assessment and involvement needed in this area. In CPS cases, caseworkers do not always assess the educational needs of children in their caseloads.

Every Student Success Acts (ESSA)

The Department continues its collaboration with the State Department of Education regarding all ESSA matters. The Office of Foster Care Deputy Director serves as the liaison for ESSA case concerns or inquiries. The Agency will continue the partnership with the Department of Education as the plan is for the Deputy Director to attend and present ESSA training at the MEGA Conference in July 2022. The training will highlight the ESSA mandate that foster children will be enrolled in school expeditiously and the importance of ISP cooperation with the school system as well as the cost for shared transportation. Any upcoming revisions in local education agency plans will also be discussed.

Written Foster Care Plans continue to be a good resource between our county offices and LEAs as evidenced by the equitable resolutions that have been made. Specific case challenges brought to the state office's attention are continually being successfully resolved with additional exchanging of information by all parties involved. Revised policies to remove barriers to school enrollment continues to be successful overall. We continue our work with our LEAs on the importance of our Fostering Hope Scholarship. Fliers are made available at all trainings as well as during our quarterly State Department of Education Special Education/ESSA meetings. These meetings are now being held at the State Department of Education and are now in-person. There continues to be quarterly meetings scheduled to collaborate with the Department of Education. The purpose of the meetings is to discuss the development of a collaborative training for staff, foster parents, school counselors, and residential providers on provisions of ESSA. We participate in the Special Education Advisory Panel and offers input in the development and implementation of policies related to the provision of educational services for children with disabilities, addressing findings identified in federal monitoring reports, and advising the Department of Education of unmet needs within the state in regard to foster children. The Department of Education was provided an updated list of all DHR county office ESSA points of contact as well as an updated LEA point of contact list placed on the iDHR policy page.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS – Includes 2022 Updates

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department has an established protocol for ESSA in every county • We saw ISPs in records, appropriate services in place and, for the most part, advocating by the Agency for special educational testing or to ensure children's educational needs were met in some cases. Some of the strengths identified in the OSRI reviews have been speech therapy being provided, physical therapy being provided to address motor skills, IEPs completed and copies in the case files, testing provided, workers are aware of child's grade, and tutoring services provided (11/01/19 – 04/30/20). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In 2019 the Department began using the OSRI. We have identified that the assessment of education needs is lacking at the onset of cases. • Ensuring that DHR staff, foster parents, and providers are trained effectively on the ESSA protocol (continues to be a challenge - -not being done); Strength / Challenge Update: Some good work being done in this area, as there is some evidence of rural counties working well with LEAs and local education agencies. • The lack of availability of transportation to/from school in smaller counties. Some progress in this area with evidence of county offices paying foster parents' mileage to assist in school transportation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The timeliness of school registration continues to improve for foster youth improved and was not delayed • Educational resources such as school transportation services is being utilized to assist the Department in counties with the implementation of the ESSA protocol (not just in larger counties). • The Department has started to see increased improvement in educational outcomes for foster youth across the state of Alabama • Observation of non-school age children to assess developmental progress • Contact and engagement with education personnel • Needed testing requested • Assessment of children's educational progress • Educational needs addressed in case plan • Appropriate services to meet educational needs provided (special education, speech services, tutorial services, etc.). • Copies of grade reports and IEPs obtained and maintained in case file • Office of Foster Care is participating in quarterly calls with Dept. of Ed. Regarding ESSA to address any statewide ESSA challenges • The Program Manager from the Office of Foster Care plans to participate in a meeting that has a purpose of developing a collaborative training plan designed for staff, foster parents, school counselors, and residential providers. The training for residential contract providers was held in July and August 2021. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Young people have issues transferring from one system to another due to such issues as multiple school systems being on block/semester systems • On-site schools at residential facilities have educational programs that offer high school credits that are not easily transferrable or recognized by other public-school systems • Lack of engagement with teachers or day care providers to gain insight into children's educational/development needs • Not addressing educational needs in the comprehensive family assessment
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Includes 2022 Updates

GOAL:

The Department will increase the access to educational services to meet the needs of the children under DHRs care and supervision.

Strategies:

- Workers will ensure they receive all educational information (i.e., standardized testing results, IEP, etc.) pertaining to a child in foster care upon withdrawal and present the information to the new school at the time of enrollment. This will be documented in the narrative and entered in FACTS in the education screen. Educational staff will be invited to all ISPs. Staff will continue to provide absentee ISP forms to educational staff when they are unable to attend.
- The QCWP Specialists will continue to conduct ongoing peer reviews with county supervisors and reviews in the counties. The Office of QCWP random record reviews in counties were conducted virtually via FACTS during COVID. In-person reviews have since resumed. While conducted virtually, the Lead Specialist for the reviews was

in-person at the reviews to obtain information from the case files that may not have been entered into FACTS file cabinet, e.g., IEPs, grades for children in caseloads. These case reviews include the review of educational well-being and whether educational needs of children are being met. They will specifically review whether educational services are being implemented/initiated in a timely manner when a child's placement changes, that grade and reading levels are documented in the record, and where deficiencies are noted, that appropriate services are being provided to the child. They will also review whether educational personnel are being invited to the ISPs and being provided absentee forms when unable to attend. The specialists will provide feedback to the county supervisors around their findings.

- The QCWP specialists will conduct Meaningful Caseworker Visits training in the counties. This training will include the assessment of education needs during caseworker visits with families. As in-person trainings have now resumed, Meaningful Caseworker Visits trainings will be facilitated across the state later in 2022 and 2023.
- Training for supervisors and workers around the CFA/ISP process will be facilitated in districts by the QCWP specialists. There was in-person CFA/ISP training in District V in October 2021 and in District II in January 2022. This training includes a focus on the assessment of children's educational needs, as well as the provision of services through the ISP process to meet those needs, an emphasis on ensuring that children's educational needs are met in a timely manner, and that there is no gap in services during a change in placement or case transition. The Office of QCWP has developed CFA/ISP training for supervisors and caseworkers. The plan is to facilitate the training in the remaining districts. The training will include a focus on the assessment of children's safety and well-being to include an assessment of health/medical and mental/behavioral health needs, as well as the provision of services through the ISP process. The training was delivered in District IVE and Jefferson County via Zoom. See other updates in prior section re: CFA/ISP training.

GOAL:

State DHR will request that counties assess the educational needs of children at the onset of cases to ensure that children receive needed educational services timely.

Strategies:

- Monitor OSRI results of item 16 and identify both positive and concerning trends in counties/districts and seek ways to address areas of concern (e. g. through consultant visits, conference workshops, etc.).
- During the 2024 reporting period, we will redistribute the ESSA administrative letter and provide any training as needed per county request.
- We will request copies of all ESSA protocol from every county to be submitted by December 21, 2019 (this was completed and will be conducted annually in December. This continues to be submitted annually by the counties.
- The State Department of Human Resources and the State Department of Education are working collaboratively to develop a protocol/memo of understanding to address the education need of foster children. This is slated to be completed by Summer 2022.

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3:

Children receive services to meet their physical and mental health needs

Item 17. Physical Health of Child

Item 18. Mental/Behavioral Health of Child

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 3

Includes 2022 Updates

Item 17

Proper focus on the physical health and well-being of our children and families is stressed by specialists across Family Services and the Quality Assurance Division. As part of the CQI process the QCWP completes a random record review in selected counties. The updated QCWP record review tool provides information on the child's physical and dental needs, medication dosages, and EPSDT screenings related to Item 17. Recommendations and feedback are given to the county through these record reviews to make concerted efforts to assess and provide for the physical and dental health of

children in caseloads. The OSRI reviews completed in districts across the state identified that the physical health needs of children were being met in most cases.

EPSDT screenings are being completed timely and maintained in case records. Counties have access to pediatricians, dentists, and optometrists to meet the physical needs of children. Any specialized physical needs of children, such as surgery or ongoing medical conditions, are met through the appropriate provision of services. During MP3 (Nov 2019-April 2020) the district OSRI findings revealed that typically caseworkers are not adequately assessing benefits and side effects of children's medications.

Item 18

State staff reviewed hundreds of cases and have greatly supported improving the behavioral health of children in our custody and those at risk. Behavioral Specialists continue to provide significant support to counties in assisting them to meet the mental health needs of our children. A Behavioral Services Unit has been developed within SDHR, which includes a Program Manager with 6 Behavior Analysts strategically located throughout the state. The random record reviews conducted by OQCWP staff continue to provide counties with assessment of progress in meeting the physical and mental health needs of our children and families.

State DHR Behavioral Analysts, the Office of Foster Care, and State QA Constituent Services continue to have round table case reviews via conference calls (due to COVID). Cases are reviewed via FACTS by SDHR staff and reviews are followed up with a conference call to county staff to discuss progress and barriers to a step down to a less restrictive placement for children as well as their permanency goals. The Multi-Dimensional Assessment Tool (MAT) is also used by state staff to discuss recommendations made through the MAT assessment.

The Agency will continue to improve and support these factors in the following ways:

- OQCWP staff provided training to county staff on the ISP process in Jefferson County and District IV and has plans to provide this training in the remaining districts. CFA/ISP training was completed in District V in October 2021 and in District II in January 2022.
- One element of support in regard to meeting our children's emotional needs is an expectation that the counties monitor their medications including, but not limited to, psychotropic medications. This includes the dosage, side effects, and benefits that these medications have on our children. Foster parents are required to maintain a medication log for each child. Workers are to review the log and assess for any needs. Additionally, ISPs are required to reflect an assessment of the child's emotional needs and the referral to appropriate mental health provider or other services if indicated.
- Regarding meeting the physical needs of our children, the county agencies will receive coaching and policy reminders or development around their responsibility to monitor all screenings, including EPSDTs, to ensure that all preventive immunizations have been completed on a timely basis and that any other health concerns are addressed.
- Youth and young adults were provided information regarding the COVID 19 vaccination and recommendations provided by the CDC.

Based on OSRIs and OQCWP random record reviews, the following factors continue to contribute to this being an area needing improvement:

- Lack of engagement and assessment of needs
- Lack of monitoring for progress and measuring for effective outcomes
- Providers not sending progress notes
- Delays or disruptions in service provision. Some delays in service provision are due to lack of resources or implementation of the ISP. Some ISPs also lack dates informing the family and/or provider services are to begin.
- Limited mental health services available

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS Includes 2022 Updates

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Screenings provided• Workers' awareness of children's medications, benefits, and side effects• Follow up with caregivers to assess the effects of medication on children• Medication logs being kept by providers and caregivers• Immunizations current and up to date• Assessment of children's behavioral issues• Obtaining professional assessments when needed• Discussion of behavior or mental health concerns with caregivers• OSRI and OQCWP record reviews gives feedback in this area. The OSRI monitors progress and the OQCWP has an updated record review tool to be able to give more specific feedback in the area of children's health to include dental exams. As well as benefits and side effects of the children's medications.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Need for assessment of dental needs and referrals for dental screening• Dental care not provided during the Period Under Review• Lack of follow up with providers to address specific medical conditions• Failure to provide assistance with transportation to medical appointments• Late EPSDTs• Failure to keep and follow up on medication logs and medication effectiveness• Some foster parents were not provided information on child's medical background or current history• Failure to provide appropriate services to meet identified needs in some cases• Assessment of trauma, grief, or loss needs improvement• Lack of follow through with providers regarding medication administration, logs, and effectiveness• Statewide we experienced an inability to get routine and preventative healthcare such as physicals, dental exams, eye exams, etc., due to COVID. We will continue to assess and become current as providers are reopening• The barriers to the challenges seem to be caseworker turnover. OQCWP has training on CFAs which addresses the need to assess these areas, and Meaningful Caseworker Visits to ensure that caseworkers know that these areas need to be addressed during home visits with families. This training has been completed in some counties already with a plan to roll this training our statewide via district training. Training will be completed virtually and will ensure that all case workers/social workers, both new and veteran, will receive the needed information and training around the importance of assessing these areas.• 2022 Update: The challenges listed continue to be seen in case reviews.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT**GOAL:**

The Department will increase the access to physical, dental, vision, mental, and behavioral health services to meet the needs of the children under DHR's care and supervision.

Strategies:

- All children receive a medical within 10 days of entering care which is documented on the 10-day Foster Care Medical form and entered into the FACTS system.
- SDHR will require all counties to provide yearly documentation in FACTS of health well visit screenings. All other screenings will be provided on an as needed basis per individualized needs that will be implemented through the ISP and documented when stated goals are met.
- Children who enter care have their dental care and appointments tracked on the annual foster care medical form and that information is also entered into the FACTS system.
- SDHR Office of Foster Care, in conjunction with the behavioral analysts will continue to conduct round-table type case reviews for foster children in congregate care facilities/programs to ensure engagement and assessment by county workers and program staff. State DHR will provide additional residential visit guidelines to be utilized by county workers for their monthly caseworker visits. For FY 2021, 364 cases staffed at 8 intensive facilities by SDHR OFC, Behavioral Analyst, county staff, and program staff.
- The QCWP Specialists will continue to conduct ongoing peer reviews and onsite reviews in the counties, including the review of children's physical and emotional well-being and whether their needs are being met in these areas. They will specifically review whether medical records, including the Foster Care Medical Forms are being obtained and recorded in FACTS, as well as whether needed services are being provided to address both physical and emotional behavioral issues. The specialists will provide feedback to the county supervisors around their findings in regard to Items 17 and 18 as the OQCWP review tool now specifically addresses these items.
- The CFA/ISP training was completed.
- The State continues to monitor service provision to ensure needs of all children, youth, young adults, and families are adequately met.

GOAL:

The Department will decrease delays or disruption in service provision

Strategy:

Counties will explore additional ways to build positive relationships with community partners by including the in DHR training events and/or quarterly meetings.

The following activities will be completed with the aim of enhancing physical/mental health outcomes for children and families: Promoting the timely onboarding of new staff, developing/implementing meaningful on-the-job training activities/supports for staff, implementing a case consultation model, adopting a coaching model for supervisors, and ensuring that feedback loops are in place. While we believe these strategies can be achieved within the two-year time frame of the PIP, there are other, longer-range strategies outlined in the CFSP, which we believe will take more time to achieve.

Systemic Factor: Statewide Information System

Item 19. State is operating a statewide information system

CFSR, R3: **Area Needing Improvement**

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

In January 2009, Alabama implemented an automated child welfare system statewide known as Family, Adult, and Child Tracking System (FACTS) which is a standardized, comprehensive way to manage child welfare information. Its objectives are to: improve outcomes for children, adults, and families, improve practice, strengthen management, improve decision-making, improve reporting, and provide accurate and timely case information. This system has the capability to capture and report information about each child's removal status, demographic characteristics, location, permanency goals, and

is easily accessible in FACTS at any given time. The FACTS system is available to all child welfare caseworker, supervisors, managers, and administrators statewide. The system is fully operational and available at all times, except during periods of routine maintenance.

During periods of maintenance when FACTS is not available for data entry, users are still able to utilize FACTS Downtime to search for child abuse and neglect history, access child removal status, demographic characteristics, location, and permanency goals. The worker assigned to the case is responsible for all data entry. Supervisors have access to cases assigned to workers that they supervise and are able to enter and update any information as it relates to the case and the four key data areas (status, demographics, characteristics, location, and goals). Entries into FACTS are time sensitive and upon entry a date and time stamp are created so that data may be monitored for timely entry.

Strengths

- The FACTS system does not present any barriers to data entry. Any inaccuracies in reports generated from FACTS are typically the result of typographical errors by users or late data entry into the system. The system has the capability to comply with federal reporting requirements.
- Federal submission from FACTS includes yearly NCANDS submissions and Federal Caseworker Visits reports, bi-annual AFCARS and NYTD submissions. FACTS captures and reports all AFCARS-required foster care and adoption data elements.
- Over the last year, FACTS staff have worked diligently with state and county personnel to enhance the system to make it more user friendly, as well as to capture data important for analysis, federal reporting, and to meet requirements of new federal laws. Some of these changes are:
 - Fields added to capture the receipt and explanation of credit reports, driver's license information, and health and medical records
 - Values added to the pick list to capture allegations of sex trafficking and to show sex trafficking as a reason for removal
 - Fields added to capture a primary successor guardian in Kinship Guardianship cases
 - Fields added on the Information & Referral, Referral, and Client/General information screens for documenting when a child is missing or on runaway status, when NCMEC has been notified of this status, and when other agencies have been notified of a child's missing or runaway status
 - Enhancements require users to accurately document missing/runaway status changes in the Placement Module before missing and runaway fields can be completed
- FACTS staff have completed phase 1 of the NEICE interface which allows DHR to submit ICPC requests and responses with other NEICE states via the NEICE Case Management System instead of via mail. Phase 1 included:
 - Creating an interface with NEICE to receive information from other states to Alabama in which staff have to manually input data from NEICE into FACTS and vice versa
 - Phase 2 was delayed and in the interim the Department applied for and was awarded a grant that will provide resources to finish a bi-directional interface with NEICE. This work began in February 2020 with modification being made to FACTS to provide for functionality that is currently missing (transmittal form) but will be needed to complete the bi-directional interface.
 - During the current reporting period the transmittal form was completed and applied to production. NEICE 2.0 will be going live on/about July 6, 2021.
 - Staff from Tetras are providing both business and technical supports through a MOU with the American Public Human Service Association (APHSA).
- Additions to our interface with Medicaid have been completed
 - We can now send information to Medicaid regarding children aged 18-26 discharged from foster care to prevent disruption of Medicaid coverage
- An enhancement to the Home Removal Screen/Conditions of Removal field has been completed to include a list of specific drug types so that the conditions of removal can be accurately documented, and specific substance involved for children who were removed can be tracked.
- Development is in the process of making changes to the NYTD survey website. These changes are in response of the NYTD review and subsequent PIP. After the changes to the NYTD website are complete, there will be one more

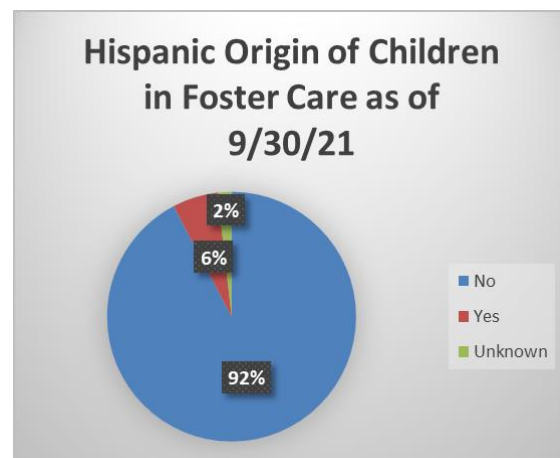
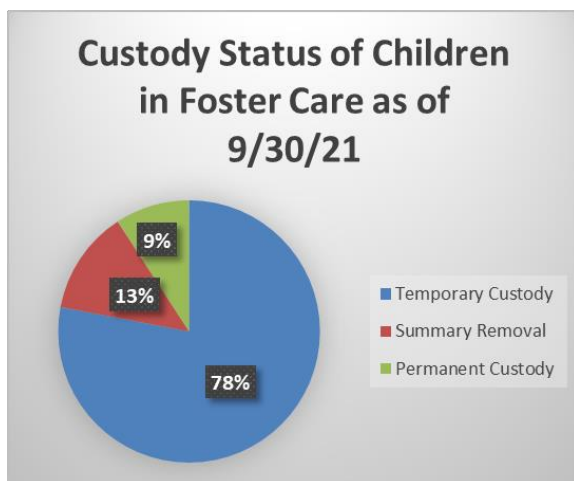
enhancement to allow users to document services provided to the youth whose case is no longer active. The first phase of the changes to FACTS has been completed and will be in production March 2020. Worker has begun on the second phase of the changes to allow users to enter data for all youth including those youth 18-21 who have left foster care. It is expected this will be completed and in production by July. Business rules for changes to the survey website were complete and approved by ACF. The updates to the website are currently in developed and expected to be complete in the next few month.

2021 Update Enhancements during the 2021 reporting period included:

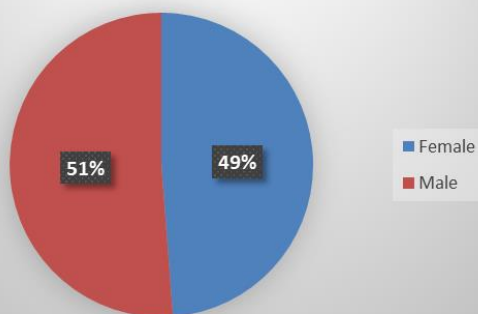
- Policy provides instruction and guidance on the quality of submissions and timeframes for data entry into FACTS.
- To ensure accuracy of data entry:
 - Narrative entries should be reviewed by supervisors in FACTS monthly
 - Placements are validated by supervisors monthly
 - ISPs and CFAs are reviewed and approved in FACTS by supervisors as often as they are completed and submitted
 - FACTS is capable of issuing alerts that are manually entered by workers and supervisors to remind workers of important due dates e.g., ISPs, CFAs, Medicaid information, court information, etc.
 - The Office of Data Analysis sends queries monthly, via email, detailing children who have entered care in the last 12 months, permanency achievement for the last 12 months, and missing placement queries.
 - Counties review and make corrections and updates in FACTS as needed
 - In an effort to reduce reliance on queries, Alabama is currently making enhancements to reports generated via FACTS to capture data that is currently being gathered via queries

Data is pulled from information entered into FACTS by workers and supervisors. The accuracy of FACTS information is examined through analysis of various reports and queries. Careful review by Office of Data Analysis staff provides opportunities for any discrepancies to be discovered. Further analysis by individual counties allows for an additional review of accuracy. When an issue is reported, the report or query is examined to see what was not pulled correctly and adjustments are made to ensure accuracy. FACTS programmers have corrected many of the data extraction issues noted in the AFCARS PIP and continue to work on addressing all issues. FACTS users are required to verify the completeness and accuracy of the AFCARS data they have entered each month via an AFCARS report that is generated on the state's reports system.

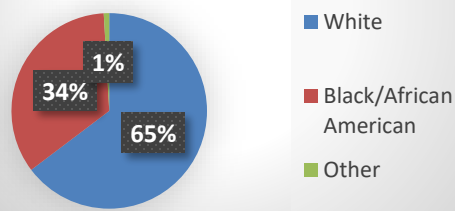
Some examples of FACTS functionality that provides status, characteristics, placement location, and permanency goals are provided in the charts below. Data provided in these charts was taken from two reports that run monthly on the state's reports application (the FC050 and FC085). This application is available to all staff statewide.



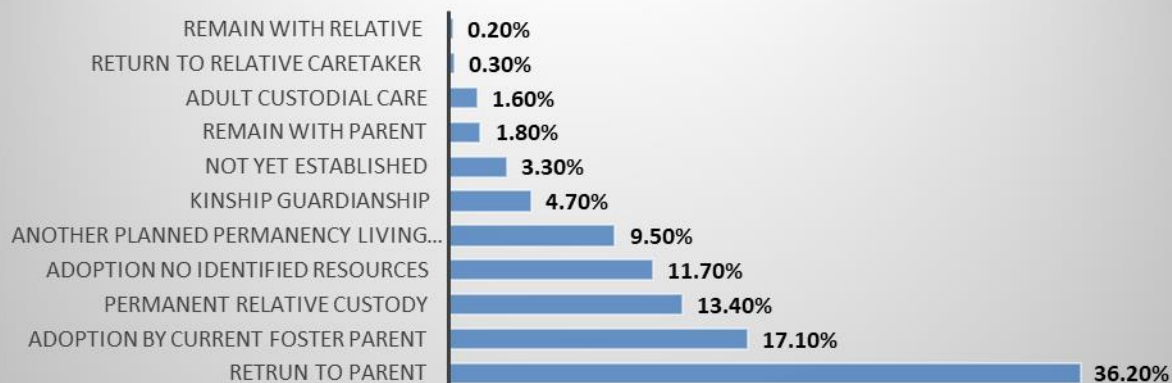
Gender of Children in Foster Care as of 9/30/21



Race of Children in Foster Care as of 9/30/21



Permanency Goals for Children in Care on 9/30/21



ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See page 89 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges include the availability of real time data that is accessible to managers statewide and ensuring that FATCS users understand the usefulness and importance of data elements as they relate to ensuring timely, accurate, and complete data reporting.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

Improve Data Quality

Systemic Factor

Case Review System

Includes 2022 Updates

Item 20. Process of ensuring written case plan in developed jointly with child's parents

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Child/family involvement in case planning

Strengths

- The Department has created new quantitative reports and modified existing reports to better capture required data elements, including the most recent case plan review dates. These reports are available to staff and managers statewide on the ERD system. The quantitative data gathered from these reports indicates that case review requirements are being met above the 90th percentile on average.
- Cases are methodically reviewed, as a result Alabama's CQI District Reviews. District reviews are completed twice each year with a total of 136 OSRIs completed. Other cases are reviewed through the course of work in the Office of QCWP. These specialists work in assigned counties often with the task of reviewing child welfare cases.
- Qualitative data is also collected by the Office of Quality Assurance by conducting stakeholder interviews annually in all 67 counties. The local QA committees assist State QA in completing the stakeholder interviews. The stakeholder interviews are based upon the 18 OSRI items and 18 systemic factor items. Feedback from these interviews is provided to each county director as well as to the state management team so that any concerns identified can be addressed. This information is also provided to both State QA and Family Services Management for review. Counties are expected to complete a feedback loop outlining how the areas of need will be addressed and submit that information back to State DHR. Qualitative data is also gathered through case reviews completed by local quality assurance committees. These cases are reviewed by the Office of Quality Assurance and feedback and recommendations are provided to the local QA Committees, as well as county staff and management. County staff are to provide responses to the local QA Committees as to how the needs identified in the reviews will be addressed.
- The Division of Field Administration has frequent contact with county directors and their upper management to review data, spreadsheets, actual case plans and reviews, and assess strengths and needs around practice relative to timely reviews and other important issues
- The OQCWP has provided support around the ISP process in all 67 counties through ongoing case reviews. Feedback is provided as well as point in time, in depth reviews in each county which occur approximately every 4 years. The OQCWP also has a training curriculum for assessment and the case planning process. This training was reviewed by the Center for States and was provided to Jefferson County and District 4 counties (Randolph, Coosa, Tallapoosa, Chambers, Lee, Macon, Russell, and Bullock). Training emphasizes engagement of the family, gathering information throughout the life of the assessment and case, and preparation for all participants going into the actual case planning meeting. This process is strengths-based, and workers are trained to build off a family's strengths to encourage participation and promote success. By promoting both protective capacities and protective factors, the Department can best ensure child safety and promote child well-being. The outcome areas to be addressed are safety, permanency, stability, attachments, visitation, contacts, crisis planning, contingency planning, concurrent permanency plans, well-being, educational needs, health needs, emotional needs, and independent living skills for youth 14 and older.
- The Office of Child Welfare Training provides training to newly employed staff in the Case Planning module of STEP Case Management Training. In the reporting period, 143 staff completed this module. This training applies a family centered approach in the assessment strengths/risks and providing feedback to the family. This session includes defining goals and steps to document the case plan. Objectives include Understanding and Developing Strategies, Facilitating the Case Planning Meeting, and Documenting the Case Plan. Full disclosure is discussed and practiced in the classroom.

BARRIERS TO A FUNCTIONAL ISP PROCESS INCLUDE:

- Information gathered from case reviews, as well as stakeholder interviews showed inconsistent engagement with parents, including absent fathers and extended families (maternal and paternal). Workers are not making concerted efforts to engage with resistant parents and involve them in the case planning process. There was an

additional need identified for workers to engage with parents to discuss progress, or lack of, towards case plan goals and discuss efforts to identify and overcome barriers to goal achievement.

- OSRI Item 13 identified the agency made limited concerted efforts to engage parents and developmentally appropriate children in the case planning process throughout Alabama's PIP, but we did see continuous progress resulting in a rating of 55% in measurement period 12 (July 2022). In some cases where parents were involved in case planning, it was reported they did not feel their voice was being heard. Information from case reviews further showed examples where parents did not feel involved in the case planning process and did not have an active part in identifying their own needs and services. It should be noted that new initiatives related to the ISP, as well as the CFA are being undertaken which should help strengthen the work the Department does with children, families, and stakeholders.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA) and Individualized Service Plan (ISP) training has and will continue to be ongoing training across the state. At the beginning of the PIP implementation phase, the PIP counties had a strength rating of 49% around engagement of parents in ISP development/case planning meetings. After training was implemented, that improved to 60% at the end of the PIP implementation phase during FY 22. The baseline for including mother's in the ISP at the beginning of PIP implementation was 69%, and this improved to 88% at the end of PIP implementation. The rating for including fathers in the ISP process remained steady at 46% from the baseline to completion, so this remains an area of need. At this point, all counties have completed the initial training which was implemented with the development of the new Individualized Service Plan form. Going forward, the training will be available to new workers throughout the state during their initial child welfare training (STEP). The training is mandatory. There will be 8 training sessions each year for new staff. The training will highlight the importance of engaging parents and stakeholders in the case planning process. With proper engagement with families, this will increase the family's buy-in which they will more likely commit to achieving goals when they help make decisions about the plan that will affect their lives.

Goals moving forward will be to provide training and support to staff around two areas:

In the coming year, training will be provided around engaging fathers and relatives throughout the life of the case. Training and support will continue to be provided to staff to increase the identification and engagement of fathers and paternal relatives throughout the duration of the case. Caseworker training has and will continue to assist caseworkers with understanding the importance of father involvement in the case and the consideration of fathers and paternal relatives as placement options for children. Emphasis will be placed on caseworkers identifying, locating, making the initial contact, assessing, and permanency planning with fathers and paternal relatives.

Additionally, in the upcoming year, training will be provided on appropriate and complete documentation of all services and supports offered through the case plan process. Through systematic reviews of cases, one on one support and modeling with supervisors, and training of front-line staff, we will target the use of case plans as a review tool during home visits as a way to keep families engaged in the process. We will also emphasize what type of documentation is needed to sufficiently record these efforts.

Meaningful Caseworker Visit training will continue to be a part of the new staff training (STEP) with 8 sessions offered throughout the year. With this training and trainings/case reviews completed by the QCWP Specialist, there will be a continued focus on the proper documentation of casework activity surrounding the completion of case plans. Emphasis will continue to be placed on the use of case plans as a review tool during home visits which keep families engaged in the process. Experienced caseworkers understand that proper casework documentation is an important part of the actual casework practice. They understand that documentation not only helps to improve outcomes for children and but also serves as a tool for protecting both the child and the caseworker.

2022 Update: Throughout 2021 and 2022, the Practice Specialists have provided CFA/ISP training across the state to current child welfare workers and supervisors, with 2 districts left to train. These trainings will be completed in September

2022, and then the training will be offered as part of the curriculum for new workers moving forward with 8 sessions offered throughout the year. Meaningful Caseworker Visit training will also be included as part of the new worker training with 8 sessions offered throughout the year as well. While these trainings will be offered to all new workers, they can be attended as refresher trainings for other staff as needed.

Item 21. Periodic administrative / judicial review

CFSR, R3: Area Needing Improvement

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

In stakeholder interviews conducted annually by the Office of QA and county QA committees, internal and external stakeholders reported a good working relationship between the Department and the court system in many Counties. However, there were some counties in which stakeholders reported a strained relationship between the Department and the court system. Worker and supervisor turnover were specifically identified during stakeholder interviews as a possible cause for this strained relationship. Judicial reviews were generally paper reviews, which occurred between the judges and the Department. There were concerns that judicial reviews were not consistently occurring timely.

Data available from AFCARS provides the following insight on the timeliness of required reviews:

Year	2020A	2020B	2021A	2021B
Percentage Timely Review	91.81	92.13	93.78%	93.37%

A review of the Department's staffing provides several potential indicators for lack of consistency in the timeliness of court reviews. New staff and staff turnover has had an impact on worker management of assigned youth in foster care. Although worker turnover fluctuates significantly, rates as high as 36.3% have been noted. See below for the separation – turnover rates for child welfare workers and county directors for FYs 2018 through 2020:

	FY 2020	FY 2021
Workers	34.52%	46.04%
Directors	3.05%	13.76%

- Worker and director turnover creates issues involving training relevant to court responsibilities as well as training on data input and management within the Department's data management system (FACTS).
- There has been continued decrease in the number of children/youth in foster care over the past four years – October 2018 (6395), October 2019 (6318), October 2020 (6202), and October 2021 (5939).
- While quantitatively hearings/reviews are occurring at frequencies around the 90th percentile, qualitatively, stakeholders continue to voice concerns over inclusion of the foster youth with meaningful participation in the hearing process.
- The Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice review tool addressed and provides for feedback regarding court-related barriers to permanency.
- Following Round 3 of the CFSR, the Office of QA added specific language to the County Self-Assessment completed by each County to address strengths and barriers related to this item for tracking purposes. Feedback is provided by Office of QA practice specialists to each County regarding barriers identified, if any.
- The Office of QA also addressed the timeliness and appropriateness of judicial reviews in case reviews completed by local QA committees to provide case-by-case feedback on any court-related barriers to permanency.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

There is currently a data sharing agreement in place between Alabama State Department of Human Resource and Alabama Administrative Office of Courts. This agreement allows for the tracking and sharing of information related to which children/cases have not experienced timely reviews in court. Through this data we can focus efforts on the counties where

there are systemic issues. There is an ongoing Judicial/Child Welfare Initiatives between DHR and the courts. Issues that the Department collaborates on with AOC as part of this initiative are improving permanency timeframes, educating on policies, and strengthening partnerships between the courts and the Department. Part of that larger initiative is iCAN which has expanded to include 23 counties. iCAN agendas are established between the county director and the local judge to reflect what they see as the specific needs in their community; each iCAN county focuses on individual issues within their county. Each iCAN county continually assesses issues specific to their individual county.

Monthly work is being done in those counties and allows for a method of checks and balances to address any issues. An annual Judicial Child Welfare Summit is held with invitations issued to county directors and family court judges in all 67 counties. In November 2021 the annual summit was held. Some topics of discussion included Sex Trafficking, Indian Child Welfare Act, and Every Student Succeeds Act. A panel of current and former foster youth also participated and provided insight into their experiences and how the agencies can better meet their needs. The next Summit is planned for November 2022.

Item 22. Process ensuring permanency hearings

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

- In stakeholder interviews conducted annually by the Office of QA and county QA committees, there were internal and external stakeholders that reported a good working relationship between the Department and the court systems. However, there were also some counties in which stakeholders reported a more strained relationship between the Court and the Department. If this was identified as a need for a county through stakeholder interviews, this is being addressed through steps developed and implemented in the CIP.
- In foster care OSRIs, there were examples of permanency hearings and judicial reviews generally being held timely. Permanency hearings were generally full hearings with testimony taken.
- Some courts schedule six-month hearings at the conclusion of the adjudicatory hearing. If county staff file on their own to get on the docket, the hearing can occur late. Hearings can be postponed or continued, and it is strictly up to the local judge's discretion to allow this. If there is an issue identified in a specific county regarding timeliness of hearings, a discussion between DHR and AOC would be initiated. Additionally, for iCAN counties, this is a prime example of what they discuss. And it is also addressed at the Judicial Conference and at the CIP meetings.
- There is a court tracking screen available on the FACTS system for workers to enter court-related data. Some counties use this while other counties don't use it to the extent that it can be used.
- DHR continues to partner with AOC to collect data on timeliness of hearings. DHR partners with CASEY to provide trainings on expediting permanency and avoiding roadblocks to permanency.

TIME TO PERMANENCY HEARINGS

*Population = Children who entered care on or after 10/01/2010 and were subsequently discharged.

NOTE: The parameter regarding population of children included remains consistent with that used to pull previous years data. Data Source: Alabama's CCWIS System.

Home Removal to Initial Permanency Hearing	FY20	FY21
Average # of Days	340	319
Median # of Days	346	339
% of Timely Hearings	67%	66%
% Untimely Hearings	33%	34%
% children >365 days with no hearing documented	15%	3%

Initial Permanency Hearing to 1st Subsequent Hearing	FY20	FY21
Average # of Days	328	274
Median # of Days	273	301
% Timely Hearings	74%	77%
% Untimely Hearings	26%	23%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	25%	9%
1st Subsequent Hearing to 2nd Subsequent Hearing	FY20	FY21
Average # Days	249	233
Median # of Days	189	203
% Timely Hearings	72%	86%
% Untimely Hearings	28%	14%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	8%	10%
2nd Subsequent Hearing to 3rd Subsequent Hearing	FY20	FY21
Average # Days	223	223
Median # Days	182	188
% Timely Hearings	88%	88%
% Untimely Hearings	12%	12%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	7%	8%
3rd Subsequent Hearing to 4th Subsequent Hearing	FY20	FY21
Average # of Days	223	199
Median # of Days	182	178
% Timely Hearings	85%	92%
% Untimely Hearings	15%	8%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	9%	6%

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The Alabama Judicial/Child Welfare Collaboration Project is a partnership between the Alabama Administrative Office of Courts, the Department of Human Resource, and Casey Family Programs, the nation's largest operating foundation focused solely on child welfare systems improvements. Our goal is to strengthen partnerships between the judiciary and child welfare to achieve safety, permanency, and well-being for Alabama's children and families. We pursue our goal

through facilitating judicial and child welfare collaboration and the use of data to drive solid practice and foster shared outcomes.

Alabama currently has 23 active iCAN Teams with two additional county teams developing. A Judicial Summit is planned for the upcoming year in which current iCAN counties will be encouraged to invite new counties to participate and explore the benefits of iCAN Team Collaboration.

Item 23. Process ensuring TPR proceedings

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Alabama law requires the TPR trial to be completed within 90 days after perfection of service of a TPR petition and for a trial judge to enter a final order within 30 days of the completion of the trial. The ADPT 90 report is available statewide on the states ERD system. The report is designed to track TPR filing dates, TPR hearing dates, TPR disposition dates, adoption filing dates, and adoption finalization date. In addition to this report, Family Services partners with the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) to exchange data via queries to look at permanency activity timeframes. The Office of Data Analysis also pulls data related to permanency time frames and makes this data available to appropriate agency managers.

The Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) has provided the data below for FYs 2020 and 2021. It is noted that the average number days from the original dependency disposition date to TPR petition file date has decreased over the past year. While the average time from TPR petition date to TPR disposition date has remained the around 181.5 days.

FY 2020 TPR Petitions	Average Days
Original Dependency Disposition Date to TPR Petition File Date	515
TPR Petition Date to TPR Disposition Date	181
FY 2021 TPR Petitions	Average Days
Original Dependency Disposition Date to TPR Petition File Date	393
TPR Petition Date to TPR Disposition Date	182

Data Source: Administrative Office of Courts (AOC)

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

The data exchange between DHR and AOC also includes case and county specific information regarding the length of time between filing of TPR and the date of the TPR hearing. This again helps us strategically approach individual counties with the need to assess local barriers and develop a plan to improve. Children & Family Services is currently working on the development of several trainings to be conducted for all child welfare staff statewide. One portion of this training will focus on case planning/concurrent planning to include timeframes around filing of TPR petitions where appropriate. Target date to begin this portion of the training will be Spring of 2020. This in person training was not able to be completed due to COVID 19. Virtual options for this training were not considered as the plan was to move forward with these trainings in person as soon as possible. This will also be a topic for our annual permanency conferences during the next five years.

2022 Updates: The Office of Child Welfare Training provides a module on Court Process in STEP Adoptions training. This training shares information on legal considerations in adoption. Objectives for participants include knowledge of the Adoption and Safe Families Act, knowledge of the Best Interest of the Child Act of 2013, understanding of Termination of Parental Rights, and understanding of the importance of legal timelines in adoption. Beginning in 2022, the Office of Child Welfare Training began developing virtual trainings for new workers around policy through the LETS system, including Termination of Parental Rights and Permanency and Concurrent Planning. These trainings will also be available for more experienced workers and supervisors to view as refresher trainings are needed. The plan is to have these rolled out by the end of 2022.

Item 24. Process ensuring notification of / right to be heard in legal proceedings

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Includes 2022 Updates

Alabama Child Welfare laws require that all relative caregivers, pre-adoptive parents, and foster parent of a child in foster care or under the responsibility of the state shall be given notice, verbally or in writing, of the date, time, and place of any juvenile court proceeding being held with respect to a child in their care. These parties have a right to be heard in any juvenile court proceeding being held with respect to a child in their care. No foster parent, pre-adoptive parent, and relative caregiver of a child may foster care under the responsibility of the state shall be made a party to a juvenile court proceeding solely on the basis of this notice and right to be heard.

Alabama's Child Welfare policy is based on this law and requires that these participants be provided notification, in writing, of juvenile court hearings. County Child Welfare staff is responsible for providing this notification or ensuring that it is provided by the juvenile court staff.

For FFY 2023 additional research and assessment will occur regarding notification of required entities and tracking capabilities. Additional comprehensive information will be provided in FFY 2024 APSR.

Systemic Factor:

Quality Assurance System/Continuous Quality Improvement

Item 25. Statewide operation of a quality assurance system

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Includes 2022 Updates

Item Assessment

The QA system monitors, evaluates, and provides feedback to the Department on the performance of the overall System of Care and whether services provided are of sufficient intensity, scope, and quality to meet the individual needs of children and their families. In addition to examining and assessing the 18 items of the Federal Onsite Review Instrument and the 18 federal systemic factor items, the QA system identifies areas of need and recommends corrective actions necessary to improve services, capacity, outcomes, and conformity with federal, state, and department program requirements. It also confirms strengths, identifies successful strategies, and recommends ways in which effective practice and/or system performance can be replicated and/or improved through the county improvement plan process. QA specialists and county QA committee members complete stakeholder interviews biannually in all 67 counties to assess the stakeholder perception of the Agency's performance in safety, permanency, well-being, and the 18 federal systemic factors. The QA/CQI system has been implemented statewide. Every county is expected to complete a county self-assessment utilizing the 36 federal items and have identified priority areas to address in their county improvement plan.

I. Foundational Administrative Structure

Alabama has a robust CQI system with 68 Citizen Review Panels when only required to have 3. The state has established a County Onsite Review process that includes stakeholder interviews, case reviews utilizing the OSRI and the state's QRI, a safety assessment, a permanency assessment, and a foster home resource record review. Members of county QA Committees, as well as the State QA Committee, are invited to participate in the County Onsite Review in the role of their choosing. Preliminary findings are debriefed with the county at the conclusion of the review week. Again, both members of the county's QA Committee and State QA Committee are invited to attend the county's debriefing of findings. Within 30 days of the review, a final report is provided to the reviewed county, the county QA Committee, Family Services Division, QA Division, and Administrations. Counties utilize the Final Report of Findings to inform their county self-assessment and county improvement plans to identify areas of needs and areas of strengths.

The Final Report is shared with the State QA Committee at their next quarterly meeting and the county's QA chair and QA coordinator are invited to attend the meeting to share the findings with the State QA Committee.

Alabama's CQI system is designed so that each county has their own QA Committee that completes 6 to 12 case reviews per year. All cases reviewed by the local committees are debriefed by the reviewers to the committee, and oversight is provided by the county QA Coordinator and QA specialist. The county QA case reviews are used to help inform the county self-assessment and county improvement plan.

There is a formalized State QA Structure including State QA staff (Program Manager, Program Supervisor, 5 QA Specialist (currently there are 2 vacancies), and a State QA Committee. There are also written procedural and practice guides in place in the form of the State QA Guide and the Federal CFSR Manuals for the use of the OSRI.

All counties have an assigned QA Specialist to assist with the training of QA Coordinators and QA Committee members. The QA specialists also provide oversight of completed county case reviews and coordinate the quarterly QA Coordinator Meetings. State QA and County QA Chairs attend at least one of the quarterly meetings per year allowing the committees to share insights and recommendations with one another.

After an onsite review, county staff, QA specialists, and practice specialists have a County Improvement Plan (CIP) pre-planning meeting to identify 3 or 4 priority areas to address and to set a date for a follow up CIP meeting. The CIP meeting consists of county staff, QA specialist, practice specialist, selected stakeholders, and the county's District Administrative Specialist (DAS) to identify specific measurable steps to address the identified priority areas. Once completed, the CIP is implemented and monitored by the county staff, QA specialist, practice specialist, and DAS. The plan is assessed bi-annually for improvement and is modified as needed.

In addition to the Office of Quality Assurance there is an established Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice and Office of Data Analysis.

SDHR leadership receives feedback on practice/system performance as assessed by the state QA process in the form of County Onsite Reviews findings, Final Reports, and Biannual County self-assessment. County self-assessment includes the 36 federal items that address safety, permanency, well-being, and the systemic factors. Each May and November the county self-assessments are filed with the state office and made available for SDHR Leadership.

Over the next year the following will be evaluated for increased opportunities for all QA entities to work together.

Annual joint State and County QA Meetings have not been held since the beginning of the pandemic. Alabama will request the State QA Committee place a Joint Annual Meeting discussion on their agenda to begin the process of reestablishing the annual meeting.

Other opportunities for the committees to gather and exchange information virtually have been established but need to be fine-tuned or better established to ensure the desired outcomes are achieved.

They are:

Quarterly regional QA Coordinator meetings have been established to ensure accurate information is provided. These meetings are led by the assigned QA Specialist for each set of counties and focuses on different areas of need at each meeting. County QA Coordinators are encouraged to network and share successful strategies with one another.

State QA Committee members and county QA Committee members are invited to observe county onsite reviews by joining OSRI co-reviewers during the interviewing process and entry of findings into the OMS.

County QA Committee members are invited and encouraged to participate in stakeholder interviews during onsite reviews.

State QA Committee members and County QA Committee members are invited to attend each county onsite review debriefing providing tentative findings of each review.

State QA Committee members are provided district review findings at each quarterly meeting.

Consistent and complete accountability for implementation and monitoring of the CIP process. A required subject of the county self-assessment is CIPs. Counties report on the status of their CIP in each County Self-Assessment with review and feedback by State QA staff. The assigned DAS is included in the feedback provided on County Self-Assessments. A revision has been included in the QA Guide for inclusion of County QA Committees in the planning process for CIPs. Quality Assurance specialists and practice specialists attend CIP meetings and can assist in the development of measures of progress and action steps respectively.

Although many of the above items are in place, the QA Division will have ongoing analysis of the above functions throughout 2022 and 2023 to ensure they are operating as intended and that useful information is a product of each function.

II. Quality Data Collection

The state collects both qualitative and quantitative data through its FACTS system as well as through CQI reviews. Frequent monitoring of system generated reports and queries ensures that data is entered completely, accurately, and timely into the system. Staff are trained on the importance of utilizing available data in the ongoing monitoring to identify both strengths and opportunities for improvement. Counties receive individualized consultation from the Office of Data Analysis when data quality issues are identified through regularly occurring reviews. Training is also provided at statewide conferences held throughout the year on the importance of entering quality data, how to enter data correctly and using data to monitor progress and improve outcomes. Also, the importance of utilizing data and reporting tools in supervision, program evaluations, and identifying opportunities for improvement is included in these trainings. Quality Data was one of the topics that was highlighted at the Supervisor Conferences held in June and July 2022.

The FACTS system is utilized uniformly across the state. Roadmaps on how to utilize the FACTS system are available to all FACTS users and include directions on how to document information in the system. Additionally, there is a reports module, Electronic Reports Distribution System (ERD) that staff across the state have access to. ERD houses summary reports derived from FACTS data that assist workers, supervisors, and managers in ensuring that data entered in FACTS is accurate, complete and timely.

Federal submission data that is pulled from FACTS includes yearly NCANDS submissions and Federal Caseworker Visits reports, and bi-annual AFCARS and NYTD submissions. FACTS captures and reports all AFCARS-required foster care and adoption data elements. All objectives listed in the states AFCARS Improvement Plan (AIP) have been completed and approved by the Children's Bureau. Additional fields and enhancements are completed in FACTS regularly as necessary to comply with new or updated federal requirements. For example, FACTS IT staff have been working over the past year on updates to the system that created new fields to capture data that will be required as part of AFCARS 2020 beginning in October 2022.

OMS: Since February 2019 Alabama has adopted the OSRI as its primary review instrument and all reviews are entered into Alabama's OMS. Reports available on the OMS are used to measure Alabama's improvement in each of the 18 items.

External stakeholders are provided data through the QA system. County QA committees receive county data during their regularly scheduled meetings and data is also shared through the County Self-Assessment process. The County Self-Assessment utilizes ERD data to support each indicator of best practice when appropriate. Once completed, the County Self-Assessment is shared with the local committee for review and comment. The State QA Committee meets on a quarterly basis and is provided onsite review data on safety, permanency, well-being, and systemic factors for review at each meeting.

Alabama received notice in January 2022 that the AFCARS Improvement Plan was successfully completed. Alabama is currently working on modifying its CCWIS system to be in compliance with federal reporting requirements that will become effective on October 1, 2022.

Reports and queries run regularly to ensure that all local, state, and federal reporting requirements are entered in FACTS. FACTS users are required to review reports monthly to ensure that data is accurate. The Office of Data Analysis reviews additional reports that reflect data quality and provide county specific consultation when deficiencies are noted. Data quality issues that are observed across multiple counties are also addressed in statewide trainings.

III. Case Record Review Data and Process

OSRI reviews collect specific case-level data that provides context and addresses agency performance. This assists staff to detect the quality of services for the children and families served and therefore focus on the assessment and monitoring of how child and family functioning is progressing in relation to the services provided. OSRI reviews include the completion of interviews specific to each case such as the child/youth, birth parent, caregiver, caseworker, or supervisor, and as indicated, health, mental health, and other service providers, educators, and Guardians ad Litem.

The reviews are conducted by staff who go through a uniform and consistent training process (cfsrportal.org, e-training platform) and whom the state determined are qualified to conduct reviews, with a preference for staff and stakeholders with direct service experience. The process prevents reviewer conflict of interest and promotes third-party (unbiased) review of cases, i.e., cases are not reviewed by caseworker or supervisor responsible for cases or who had previous involvement in the cases as well as those who may have a personal interest in the case.

Local QRI ratings are debriefed during county QA Committee meetings. The debriefings include other QRI reviewers to ensure consistency across reviewers. There is a process for conducting ad hoc/special reviews targeting specific domains when analysis and other data warrant such reviews. Should review outcomes identify a possible trend/concern in a specific population served, either the QA specialist or local QA Committees can request case pulls of the population to review to identify if the trend is true or not and identify the source of the trend.

There is a QA review process that is operable at both the county and state level that includes the conducting of OSRIs and QRIs with individual interviews being conducted with relevant stakeholders involved in the case including child/youth and family. The state QA review process is designed to prevent reviewer conflict of interest.

A process has been established by which State QA staff review and provide feedback on the QRI write-ups and ratings of practice/systemic items that are conducted by the county QA Committee reviews. The ratings are then entered into a database maintained by State QA. Should the local QA Committees or State QA Committee identify a concerning trend, there is a process in place that would allow them to complete a special study.

The State QA review process includes an assessment of the status of services to children and families, the effectiveness of monitoring, and the progress toward effective family functioning. Report can be generated from the OMS ranging from statewide to the county level. Reports can be as specific as type of case (FC or in-home) or demographics of the child or family.

Beginning in 2023, stakeholder interviews will be completed on an annual basis by the County QA Committees, with the exception of the year State QA completes an Onsite review of the county and then the stakeholder interviews will be completed by QA Specialist with the assistance of the local QA Committee. Findings of the stakeholder interviews are provided to county management and local QA Committee to be used for the completion of the County Self-Assessment and County Improvement Plan.

State QA Staff continue to train county QA committee members on the use of the QRI. County committees tend to be more lenient in their ratings. The pandemic limited the amount of time the QA Specialist could work with the committees and counties are adding new members to their committees due to loss during pandemic. County QA committees are encouraged to debrief cases during committee meetings to promote rating reliability.

As a result of the pandemic, many of the county QA committees lost some of the members and meetings were not held on a regular basis. Over the next year QA Specialist will continue to work with county QA Coordinators to add members and train new members on the use of the QRI. State QA is currently utilizing the cfsr.acf.hhs.gov e-learning platform to certify reviewers utilizing the OSRI; however, there are plans to begin the building of our own initial and on-going training of the OSRI.

IV. Analysis and Dissemination of Quality Data

There is a process for analyzing and commenting upon qualitative data in the form of QRI write-ups which are provided to QA coordinators, county workers, and supervisors by the local county QA committee. The local QRIs get analyzed then provided to the QA coordinators, county director, county supervisors, and county workers.

The Agency is utilizing the data tools on the OMS to aggregate data and is able to provide rating summaries on the county and state level. In addition to utilizing the tools in the OMS, the State QA unit assesses completed OSRIs to identify trends and practice issues on a county and state level. The State QA Unit assesses completed OSRIs to identify trends and practice issues on a county and state level. Local QA reviews using the QRI are stored in the QRI database.

The Department continues to provide data to the State QA Committee at its quarterly meetings. State QA Committee members as well as local QA Committee members are invited to county debriefings. The debriefings provide the county with tentative OSRI data, trends, and recommendations.

V. Feedback to Stakeholders and Decision-makers and Adjustment of Programs and Process

All QRIs completed by the local QA Committee provide write up with ratings and feedback with recommendations to improve practice. The state's CQI process encourages counties to include internal (frontline) and external stakeholders to review the county's self-assessment to develop the CIP. County data and progress should be reviewed at these meetings. The County self-assessment is comprised of the 36 federal items. There is an expectation the bi-annual County Self-Assessment is to be shared with the county QA Committee and signed by the county QA Committee chairperson.

When addressing Item 19 of the 36 federal items, counties are to address how they ensure accurate and timely entry of data into the FACTS system. They are also to identify any concerns the county may have in entering data timely.

On a monthly basis, data related to child protective services, child abuse and neglect reporting, and permanency are provided to District Administrative Specialists (DAS), who are to use the data in their work across all 67 counties. This data, along with trend data, is sent via email each month to the DAS from the division of QA. District Administrative Specialists are also provided PowerPoints from district debriefings and outcomes of stakeholder interviews completed by QA specialists.

Findings from Alabama's CQI District Reviews are consistently provided to the State QA Committee. In addition to the quantitative data and qualitative data, the committee is provided trends identified from the reviews.

The State QA Committee will continue to be afforded the opportunity to provide comment and recommendations on data information. The State QA Committee will now be receiving regular updates of county onsite reviews with rating summaries and trends identified from the completed OSRIs and QRIs. Since this will be a new process, some refinements may need to be made as the process is in place for some time.

Continuous Quality Improvement Through Partnership with the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice

The Office of QCWP, in partnership with the Office of Quality Assurance has initiated a Continuous Quality Improvement Process, with the intent of improving practice across the state and monitoring for outcomes. As part of the CQI process, OQCWP will complete several reviews based on county size. The OQCWP staff reviews 10 cases in the counties with smaller caseloads, 15 to 20 in the medium sized counties, and 30 to 40 in the larger counties. Cases are reviewed across the program areas of FC, CPS, and FFH cases. Family Services reviews CANs, Suspended CANs, Preventions, and Screen Outs for the Safety Assessment which is one reason the number of cases reviewed was reduced.

There were 14 random record reviews conducted by OQCWP in 2021. Some of the findings in the 2021 reviews were that case narratives need to be strengthened to support child safety and well-being, as well as the case planning goals. The feedback was given to county management during the reviews and overall averages to support the 18 items that were given to county management at a formal QCWP exit conference. A final QCWP report were submitted to the counties also with recommendations. The recommendations made by QCWP, as well as any district review findings are discussed during the County Improvement Planning meetings.

There were six random record reviews conducted January 2022 – May 2022. The decision was made in June 2022 that OQCWP will focus and concentrate on supporting county supervisors and suspend the random record reviews. The OQCWP continues to give feedback on best practice when debriefing cases through their record reviews with county supervisors.

Review Tools:

Directors and supervisors are provided the review tools (based on case type) for each case reviewed either after the review is completed or via email prior to the exit conference. The directors and supervisors are expected to follow through with the recommendations to ensure best case practice and child safety. The CPS and FC review tool captures type of case, case name, worker/supervisor name, child name, child age, date the case was opened, reason case was opened, safety/well-being, family assessment, ISP, education, narrative/contacts, ICPC, additional foster care information (MEPA, ASFA, Permanency, Connections for after-care, court hearings, placement, visitation, and siblings placed together) and the final recommendations. The OQCWP review tool for FC and CPS cases was updated in January 2021 to include the 18 federal items.

The CA/N and Prevention Review Tool

Provides case name, type of case, worker/supervisor name, intake information, preparation for initial assessment, documentation/interviews, analysis/decision making, safety, strengths, and recommendations. A reviewer given an opinion if a child is safe. This tool is used when working one-on-one with county supervisors.

- **Safety Assessments**

During each county review, Family Services conducts a Safety Assessment to identify the timeliness and thoroughness of all CANs and Prevention completed during the review period. Recommendations are provided to the county at the completion of the Safety Assessment. Any safety concerns are taken to State Management and immediately staffed with County Management to assure safety.

- **Summary/Report**

After every random record review a summary report of the review tools is provided to the county. The record review report provides percentages for each of the 18 items. The report helps identify areas of need that should tie back to the County Improvement Plan.

- **Sixty-seven (67) County Improvement Plans Reviewed or Completed**

Directors in each county have met with a Child Welfare Practice Specialist regarding their CIP and the key focus identified in their recent reviews. The specialist works with the county director and supervisors to ensure the areas needing improvement are in the CIP. The CIP will be monitored for success in these key practice areas. The CIP is a working document that is not only updated after submission of the County Self-Assessment but will be updated when progress is made on areas needing improvement. The county and the practice specialist identify three to four focus areas needing improvement and work towards the improvement of those areas. Once improvement is made, the CIP can be updated to reflect progress. The county and specialist are also mindful of the strengths identified and how practice can be built up on the foundation of those strengths. The practice specialist provides monthly support to ensure the areas needing improvement remain the focus of practice improvement.

The evaluation and effectiveness of the CIPs are completed through routine reviews of the CIP plans by county and state office staff to identify improvement or ongoing needs. The CIPs should be updated after every County Self-Assessment which are held every 6 months to monitor for progress and based on county data, findings from the CFSR reviews conducted by the QA unit, as well as random record reviews conducted by OQCWP specialists. County staff, QA specialists, practice specialists, representation from the local QA Committee, and DAS should be involved in the monitoring of the plan. The County Self-Assessment utilizes quantitative (ERD) and qualitative (QSR and stakeholder interviews) data to rate the Indicators of Best Practice.

- **Supervisor Capacity Building**

The goal is to build capacity within supervisors to improve casework, ensure adherence to policy, and support retention of staff. Supervisory Management Classroom Training was provided to all Supervisors in the state and OQCWP will follow through with implementation of the training and support the supervisors in county offices to increase their supervisor capacity. Supervisors will understand the importance of worker/supervisor conferences/working agreements, how to utilize ERD, how to review a case using the child welfare practice review tool, accountability, time management, and self-care among others.

- **Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice Program Specialists**

Program Specialists are reviewing county data on well-being to focus on areas of need and provide support through the working agreement regarding how to best address those needs in the CIP. Child welfare practice data is reviewed each month based on ERD reports and through the use of Alabama's dashboards. Each practice specialist keeps a data tracking sheet for each county they support. The practice specialist compares the data from month to month and it is discussed with the county supervisor and county director. The practice specialist works with the county supervisor to become proficient with reading and understanding the data and to ensure the work is meaningful to children and families. This is achieved through peer reviews, which is a review of the same case by the practice specialist and county supervisor. Findings are compared and recommendations are made to improve case practice. The CIPs are monitored via routine reviews of the CIP plans by OQCWP and county to identify improvement or ongoing needs. The county data are considered in the CIP plans to improve practice. Random Record Reviews will be conducted in these counties and supervisory support will focus on the needs identified from the reviews.

During Alabama's PIP and non-overlapping period, information was obtained from District Reviews using the OSRI, local QA committee reviews using the QRI (Alabama's Quality Review Tool), and stakeholder interviews. With the conclusion of Alabama's PIP, Alabama will begin conducting county specific onsite reviews. The onsite reviews will consist of case reviews using the OSRI, QRI, stakeholder interviews, safety assessment, permanency assessment and resource record assessment.

All information obtained from either the district reviews or onsite reviews is provided to the county, Family Services Division, Quality Assurance Division, and Administration.

OMS reports, QRI results, stakeholder interviews and the 3 assessments will be used to inform counties of their current functioning and along with their county data from ERD, provides them the means to complete their county self-

assessment. Each county is required to complete a county self-assessment based upon the 36 federal items twice per year. County Self-Assessments are to be submitted to SDHR Office of Quality Assurance by the end of every May and November. All County Self-Assessments are reviewed by the county assigned Quality Assurance Specialist and feedback is provided.

The Counties use the findings of their County Self-Assessments to develop their County Improvement Plans (CIPs). CIPs are developed by county management, county staff, local QA committee members (stakeholders), and SDHR staff. CIPs are to be submitted to the QA Division and Family Services upon being typed up.

Specialist from Family Services and the QA Division compare submitted County Self-Assessments and current CIPs for progress.

The Quality Child Welfare Practice Unit completes Random Record Reviews in the counties on a rotating 4 year basis. After the completion of each review, a report is generated and provided to the county and administration. All final reports have a feedback loop with the expectation that each county will provide a response to the report within 30 days of receiving. Prior to the end of Alabama's PIP, the QA Specialist and local QA Committees were completing stakeholder interviews in their assigned counties (Stakeholder interviews will now be completed during county onsite reviews). After the completion of the interviews, a report is generated and provided to the county and administration. All reports have a feedback loop with the expectation that each county will provide a response to the report within 30 days of receiving.

The local QA Committees also conduct case reviews using the state's QRI (Quality Review Instrument). After a case is reviewed, the case is debriefed by the reviewers with the QA Committee to discuss and adjust ratings if necessary. The committee then submits the reviewed case to the local QA Coordinator who reviews the case and provides oversight of the case and may request adjustments. Once the QA Coordinator approves the reviewed case, it is submitted to State QA.

The QA Specialist provides oversight of the case and may return the case to the county for needed adjustments. Once the reviewed case has completed all oversight, the completed review is provided to the county director, county supervisor, and caseworker to address Areas Needing Improvement. Each committee may set their own response time, but typically the responses are due to the committee by their next scheduled meeting.

Systemic Factor:	Training	Includes 2022 Updates
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Item 26. Initial staff development and training program for staff

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

The Office of Child Welfare Training (OCWT) is responsible for training social work and supervisory staff of county departments in the basic child welfare skills curriculum. As of March 1, 2022, the Office of Child Welfare Training (OCWT) unit consists of six trainers and a Program Supervisor. Trainers are located in Huntsville, Montgomery, Gadsden, and Birmingham and deliver training in cities throughout the State.

The Office of Child Welfare Training currently develops and updates training curriculum for new staff; provides the initial classroom training for all new child welfare workers and supervisors; provides train the trainer sessions to staff, foster parents, and child placing agency providers that allow them to train prospective foster and adoptive parents across the state; and assists other units in developing training curriculums. The OCWT has consistently provided up-to-date training to staff by developing and delivering training programs which promote the development of competent child welfare professionals.

The Striving Toward Excellent Practice (STEP) sessions equip child welfare workers and supervisors with the knowledge and skills necessary to help them to be successful in their work with families. STEP: Foundations is the initial training module, and all new child welfare staff are required to attend this training. There are additional modules in which staff can be enrolled by their supervisors/directors depending on their unit assignments within the county. These modules include Intake, Investigations, Case Management, and Adoption. Some modules have pre-requisite requirements before staff can be enrolled. Workers can be registered to attend one or all of these modules depending on their assigned responsibilities.

TRAINING	NUMBER OF SESSIONS DURING FY22	NUMBER OF STAFF TRAINED DURING FY22
STEP Foundations	19	299
STEP Intake	9	63
STEP Investigation	14	133
STEP Case Management	16	143
STEP Adoption	4	22

Data Source: LETS (Learning, Education, and Training System)

The delivery of training incorporates a blended learning approach. Prior to attending the classroom portion of the training, participants are given on-line reading assignments that assist in preparing participants for the in-person training. These assignments are accompanied by short quizzes to gauge their understanding of the material. While in class, the pre-requisite work is discussed and reinforced. Due to the onset of COVID-19, OCWT's delivery of training during 2020 and 2021 continued in a revised, virtual format. During 2022, with the exception of STEP Intake and the CCWIS training portion, in-person classroom training has resumed. See table below.

TRAINING NAME	CLASSROOM TIME	COMPUTER TIME (OFFICE)
STEP FOUNDATIONS	4 DAYS	1 DAY
STEP CASE MANAGEMENT	3 DAYS	2 DAYS
STEP INVESTIGATION	3 DAYS	2 DAYS
STEP ADOPTION	2 DAYS	1 DAY

Strengths of STEP/Activities Over the Past Year:

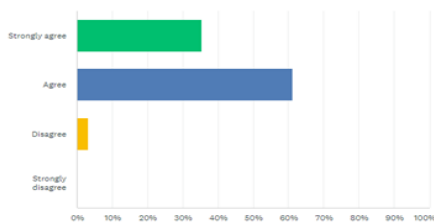
- Pre-requisite work is online
- The Office of Child Welfare Training (OCWT) includes more pertinent information in pre-service training related to Domestic Violence, Trauma, Engaging Father, and Psychotropic Medications
- Increase in number of sessions for workers
- Workers are being enrolled in LETS (Learning, Education, and Training System) as soon as they are hired, and they begin training within 3 months.
- New workers are given independent study materials as part of their training immediately upon hire to begin working on this offline.
- Workers are able to attend sessions that are specialized to best meet their specific job duties (Intake, Investigation, Case Management, Adoption).
- FACTS is incorporated into STEP training and enables workers to immediately see how the work they do is captured, and they do not have to attend a separate training.
- Approximately 97% of supervisors agreed that On-the-Job Training provided an opportunity for the worker to observe interactions in a variety of child welfare situations and for them to debrief the experience with their worker. A key component in the process of Transfer of Learning is on-the-job training. The pre-work in LETS and the classroom training are only two components in learning a skill. Once a person is hired, they receive their initial

pre-work training through our Learning Management System LETS. These include readings and self-guided online trainings to introduce the policies, concepts, and skills necessary to be successful in their roles as child welfare workers. After completing their pre-work for the STEP modules they are scheduled to attend, (Foundations, Case Management, Intake, Investigation, or Adoption), participants then complete the residential (classroom) trainings where they gain a more in-depth understanding of the skills and topics covered and have an opportunity to practice and receive feedback in the classroom setting. STEP OJT consists of activities that allow staff an opportunity to apply the skills learned in the classroom to in the field experiences with feedback provided by their supervisors. Each OJT activity is tailored to the actual duties of each worker. The OJT guides provide suggestions for these activities and a format to capture both supervisor and employee feedback around the skills. There are OJT activities completed prior to classroom training and others completed after attending classroom training (Beyond OJT). After completing the STEP OJT, the supervisor sends feedback to the training unit through a short Survey Monkey survey regarding what worked well and what did not. This continuous feedback loop helps ensure that our trainings evolve to meet the needs of the workers and their supervisors.

These strengths are based on the surveys completed by both the STEP participants as well as their supervisors, as well as internal tracking from the Office of Child Welfare Training. The Office of Child Welfare Training receives a list of new hires from the LETS Program Manager with the date that they are enrolled in training, allowing for the monitoring of timeliness of enrollment/completion of training.

The On-the-Job (OJT) component of the training provided an opportunity for the worker to observe interactions in a variety of child welfare situations and for you to debrief the experience with your worker?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 1



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Strongly agree	35.48%
Agree	61.29%
Disagree	3.23%
Strongly disagree	0.00%

Activities for the Coming Year to Maintain the Strengths:

We plan to continue to include the On-the-Job Training component of training. We hope to strengthen this process through the revision of our Training Division with more hands-on work with the county staff; and we plan to use our Quality Child Welfare Practice Specialists in this work to ensure that the activities are completed and debriefed in a meaningful way that allows for ongoing growth and retention of new workers.

We are also looking at updating the curriculum used for new workers in coordination with one of our university partners. This work is still in the development stage.

We also plan to continue to ensure that our workers are enrolled in STEP training as soon as they are hired, and we would like to decrease the time from hire to attendance in training to less than 3 months moving forward.

Areas that need to be strengthened:

One of the areas of identified need is for more initial training around the Department's policy and procedures. While our current training does a very good job of teaching our staff how to engage with families, assess their needs, and learn to develop case plans, etc., all child welfare policies are not included in the classroom training. This need has been confirmed through the worker/supervisor surveys completed over the past year as well as internal assessment in the Office of Child

Welfare Training. One way that we plan to address this is through the development of Policy Trainings that will be put on the LETS system and can be viewed by all new staff either prior to attending STEP training or after (it will not be a pre-requisite). Every child welfare policy will be included in these trainings, and there will be tests at the end of each module that must be passed for required completion. If an employee does not pass, they must re-watch the training and re-take the test until they do pass it. Completion data will be tracked in LETS. These trainings can be viewed by more experienced staff and supervisors as policy refreshers as well whenever needed. The Office of Child Welfare Training has been developing these trainings over the past several months, and the goal is to have them up and running for staff no later than the end of this year.

Through the OSRI process, we determined that all new workers need to receive the CFA/ISP training as well as the Meaningful Caseworker visit training. Our PIP baseline for Item 13, Child & Family Involvement in Case Planning, was 20%. While we did make some improvements and met the established goal of 25% during Measurement Period 1, we determined that greater improvement was needed. As such we began rolling out the CFA/ISP training to our PIP counties during 2021. We have continued roll outs to the remainder of the districts during FY 22. Our final rating, during MP 12, which ended in July 2022, was 55%, showing significant improvement in this area. Our PIP baseline for Item 15, Caseworker Visits with Parents, was 15%. We met the PIP goal of 20% during MP 5 with 21%, and our final rating, during MP 12, was 45%. While we met the PIP goal of 67% for Item 14, Caseworker Visits with Child, during MP 9 with a rating of 72%, we recognize the need for continued improvement in this area. As such, we determined that it is critical to add these trainings to the new worker requirements, and we plan to offer these sessions to all new staff during FY 23 in an effort to maintain the progress made over the past two years.

Item 27. Ongoing staff development and training program for staff

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Each county director is tasked with assessing their staff for any group training that might be needed. State DHR might discover a need for training for staff during QA reviews, a Quality Service Review, during the County Improvement Planning process or through work with the county specialists that are assigned by program area to the county. This would be communicated to the director to arrange with program staff at SDHR. This year, we have completed the following trainings: Safety Assessment, Individualized Service Plan (ISP), Comprehensive Family Assessment (CFA), Foster Care 101 (how to begin a case), Multi-disciplinary Team, Targeted Case Management, Meaningful Caseworker Visits, Medicaid Rehab, Foster/Adoptive Home Recruitment, Legal, and Adoption training at various counties through the state. Additionally, all new supervisors complete Supervisory Management training provided by the Office of Child Welfare Training. During FY 22, 62 supervisors received this training through seven training sessions.

Alabama partners with Children's Justice Task force who presented Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse training to case workers around the state. Family Service Division presents a supervisor conference annually in June and July. This year the keynote speaker spoke on leadership with other topics including using data, correct dispositions on CANs, Foster care and placements were presented.

All employees training needs as well as training credits are maintained on the LETS system. Annually, all employees are required to complete a list of courses online via LETS. The system generates emails to workers and their supervisors to highlight trainings pending completion. Those include Active Shooter Preparedness, Americans with Disabilities Act, Confidentiality in the workplace, Emergency Welfare Duties, Service and Safety from threatening behavior and Safety in DHR facilities. Caseworkers, supervisors, directors, program specialists and those ranked above must also complete the following annually: Behavioral Services for Children with special needs, TCM training, Family Services Language assistance and training for Medicaid Rehab services trainings.

Strengths Ongoing Staff Development and Training Programs

There is a variation of training available to new and existing staff as they move up the ladder and into more specialized areas of practice. A majority of staff training is captured on LETS. Each worker has a learning history that can be reviewed by the local management team and training can be requested through this system by both local and statewide

administrators. LETS can assist local and state leaders determine what training staff has completed and what elements of training are missing. Caseworkers, with their director's consent may register to take ongoing training based on office or individual caseworker need. A majority of initial training and retraining are conducted away from the staff member's work site to allow them to focus on completing the sessions without interruption. As additional training needs surface the state has a committee of county directors (all part of the County Director's Association) who can request, advise, and suggest additional and future training sessions needed. The Office of Child Welfare Training works with Departmental leadership to develop plans for how new training initiatives are implemented. During FY 22, 15 sessions of CFA/ISP trainings were offered across the state, with 245 staff members (child welfare workers, supervisors, and directors) receiving this training. As noted above, we intend to add this as an initial training for new staff moving forward.

Some of the information related to the above content has already been added to STEP and Supervisor's Training including Engagement, Time Management, and Trauma.

Simulation labs for child welfare training provide an immersive training environment that affords a realistic experience for trainees to prepare them for real-world interactions. Some of the benefits of simulation include increased transfer of learning, practice in a safe environment, improved skill retention, and opportunities to watch and learn from others. The Department is currently researching the prospect of implementing simulation labs regionally throughout the state.

Item 28. Foster / adoptive parent / facility staff training program

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

In 2016 the state began training TIPS-MAPP – Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanency in the Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting (TIPS).

The TIPS program is a mutual process built around 12 skills to be successful foster and adoptive parents. If parents are struggling with too many of the skills, they can select themselves out or can be selected out by the Agency co-leader. This data is kept at the county level. The State Office will need to determine the best way of collecting this information.

The Office of Child Welfare Training has continued TIPS certification training for leaders, certifying foster/adoptive parents and providers of residential services to our children. This program incorporates trauma-informed research, philosophy, and practice related to the roles of foster and adoptive parents. Input and materials from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network are incorporated throughout. Co-leader certification training is tracked through LETS and a spreadsheet. 9 TIPS/Deciding Together co-leader certification trainings were provided during FY 22, with 51 staff trained as co-leaders. Approved foster/adoptive parents are added to FACTS. The FACTS system also provides fields/checklists for participation in TIPS and their on-going continuing education. Counties also maintain paper documentation of applicant's pre-service training and approved families' ongoing training in their paper resource files.

All initial training and pre-service training should be documented in FACTS. The training for traditional foster homes requires thirty (30) initial hours and fifteen (15) hours of additional training over the course of a year. Therapeutic homes require forty (40) initial hours and twenty-four (24) hours of additional training over the course of a year. For the traditional homes, the specific county resource worker is responsible for tracking all on-going training hours for foster homes approved in their county. This material is maintained in the counties to ensure that required hours are met when re-approval is necessary.

TRAUMA INFORMED PARTNERING FOR SAFETY AND PERMANENCE (TIPS) LEADER CERTIFICATION TRAINING

The Office of Child Welfare Training provides Leader Certification Training in Trauma Informed Partnering for Permanence and Safety (TIPS) for Prospective Foster/Adoptive Parents to county staff and foster parents and to qualified staff of licensed child placing agencies who will lead groups of foster/adoptive applicants through the process leading to licensure or approval. The Office of Child Welfare Training continues to partner with other certified "Trainers of Leaders" to deliver the leader certification training. TIPS/Deciding Together certification is another curriculum designed for use with

foster/adoptive families and is delivered by the Office of Child Welfare Training. Deciding Together is a foster/adoptive preparation and selection process designed for use with individuals/families whose geographic location or circumstances of employment prohibit attendance at the 10 weeks of group meetings included in TIPS.

Due to the onset of the pandemic, the Office of Child Welfare Training began offering virtual Deciding Together training for TIPS Leaders from counties and contract providers. In addition, a virtual 3-Day TIPS Update Certification was approved by the Children's Alliance of Kansas that allows some TIPS Leaders to present TIPS meetings virtually.

At this time, OCWT no longer offers either of these sessions virtually. TIPS 8-Day Certification and TIPS Deciding Together sessions are all provided in the classroom. Below are results from training evaluations from participants who have completed the training sessions.

TIPS 8-DAY CERTIFICATION TRAINING	EVALUATION RESULTS
The training program was of great overall benefit to me.	99% agreed
The content of the training program had considerable practical application to my work.	95% agreed
This training program will enable time to our new ideas and skills into practice.	100% agreed

TIPS DECIDING TOGETHER CERTIFICATION TRAINING	EVALUATION RESULTS
The training program was of great overall benefit to me.	99% agreed
The content of the training program had considerable practical application to my work.	96% agreed
This training program will enable time to put new ideas and skills into practice.	100% agreed

Training for therapeutic foster care providers is offered and provided by the contract agencies which provide that service. This information is verified by the licensing staff of the Department's Office of Resource Management when they re-license the therapeutic foster care agencies. In either case, if a foster parent fails to get the required training hours necessary to maintain licensure, they are removed from the foster care rolls. IF approved for infants and young children the training must include pediatric and infant first aid/CPR. Documentation of current CPR certification training must be made available for review by the Department at annual reviews and is subject to review at any time upon request. A copy of verification that CPR Certification Training has occurred should be maintained in the provider's record by the licensing/approving agency.

Other training may include, but is not limited to:

- Child safety issues
- Crisis Intervention/Engaging Families
- Effects of Multiple Placements
- Cultural Sensitivity and Responsive Services
- Significant of Birth Families
- Substance Abuse
- Gang Activity
- Universal Precautions and Infection Control

Another component of the training conducted at the local level is to allow foster parents to have the responsibility of operating according to Reasonable and Prudent Parent Standards and allow children in their care to participate in age and developmentally appropriate activities. A training module for this has been developed by Family Services and is available to county staff on LETS and agency staff on the TIPS website.

Counties track the above training as part of the semi-annual and annual review. All foster providers must have proof of 15 hours of additional training. This proof is provided to the resource worker and verified prior to re-approving a foster provider for another year. This training can be provided by county staff, agency staff, online, or during annual provider training session.

TIPS – Strengths

- The Department requires successful completion of a pre-service curriculum for foster/adoptive applicants. No one is approved as a resources without completing TIPS.
- This same curriculum is utilized by county departments and agencies with which we contract for traditional and therapeutic foster care as well as adoptive resource homes. The Department requires continuing education hours for both traditional and therapeutic foster homes. This is monitored on a per-provider basis and documentation is kept in the provider record and on checklists in the provider module located in FACTS. The Department needs to ensure that FACTS is effectively tracking the completion of CEUs by resource families.
- This training requirement is intended to improve the skills necessary to parent children victimized by abuse and/or neglect. Resource record reviews are now a component of on-site reviews conducted by State QA. Resource records are reviewed as a part of the State QA reviews.
- The Department has a contract with the AFAPA that provides supports and services to foster/adoptive parents statewide, including training.
- The first session of TIPS certification was initiated on 05/02/16. The TIPS curriculum is trained as it was designed because it is copyrighted. Any adjustments made to the curricula will have to be made by the Children's Alliance of Kansas. Alabama cannot make changes to the curriculum. The Children's Alliance is undergoing a study at this time, seeing to have it evidenced based, but the study is still ongoing. One of the selling points of bringing TIPS to Alabama was that the Children's Alliance of Kansas said the program helped all states implementing it to get favorable ratings on the CFSR. Beginning June 2020, TIPS Deciding Together has been trained through a virtual format due to pandemic restrictions. In March 2021, the Children's Alliance approved a virtual 3-Day update certification training for TIPS co-leaders which enables them to co-lead TIPS sessions virtually. Four sessions were scheduled through July 2021. All training has returned to in-person.
- Staff and foster/adoptive parents attend the training together and build positive relationship. Participants develop an understanding of the skills required for successful application of the 12 core skills needed for approval and mutual selection process for foster and adoptive parents. The family is assessed as they go through the sessions and at least 2 family consultants are held to discuss the skills related to the 12 skills.
- Children's Aid Society/APAC (post-adoption service provider) provides on-sit and webinar-based training at no cost to foster and adoptive parents.
- Participant evaluations reflect an overall satisfaction of the TIPS Co-Leader Certification training
- The Office of Child Welfare Training staff coordinates and partners with the various providers who need the training for their staff
- Participants develop an understanding of the skills required for successful application of the 12 core skills needed for approval and mutual selection process for foster and adoptive parents
- Participants learn a variety of training and facilitation skills to enhance, empower, and engage prospective foster and adoptive parents' experience and appreciation for their role in the lives of children who have experienced abuse, abandonment, and neglect. Information from the Children's Alliance of Kansas regarding the effectiveness of the TIPS curriculum is as follows:
 - The states utilizing the PS-MAPP or TIPS Program as it was intended received the highest rating of Strength in their foster and adoptive parents training section. This rating was assigned because the state provides current and prospective foster and adoptive parents quality training that prepares them to effectively parent children in their care.
 - It was noted that foster parents receive ongoing training although documentation of the training is inconsistent. The medium/larger counties have foster parent associates which support the foster parents and also help to provide the needed training hours. In stakeholder interviews, foster parents often cite the children's case workers and their resource workers as necessary supports. Alabama does not have an indicator that reviews for the effectiveness of training, however differences in foster parents

understanding of children's needs have been observed since TIPS has begun. The Department will explore the tracking of placement disruptions to determine if trends can be noted as since TIPS is implemented.

TIPS – Challenges

State QA reviews indicate that some counties have a consistent method for tracking completion of ongoing training hours.

- Not all counties consistently have trained foster/adoptive parent co-leaders for TIPS
- Although the current Learning Management System has the capability to register county staff for TIPS Co-Leader Certification training it is unable to register foster/adoptive parents and contract providers, nor given them credit upon completion of training. The state keeps an offline spreadsheet with this data to manage those who cannot be entered into our LMS. The state needs to further develop tracking mechanisms in this regard.
- The OCWT must maintain certified trainers to train the TIPS Certification Training. There are several steps involved to become a certified trainer and the process takes about 1-2 years from beginning to certification. As certified trainers are lost, the OCWT has to be sure to fill the gaps in order to maintain capacity within the OCWT. At this time there are only 3 certified Master TIPS trainers who can certify trainers for the Department.
- If approved to foster infants and young children, the training must include Pediatric and Infant First Aid/CPR. Documentation of current CPR certification training must be made available for review by the Department at annual reviews and is subject to review at any time upon request. A copy of verification that CPR Certification Training has occurred should be maintained in the provider's record by the licensing/approving agency. Resource workers are to review them to ensure licensure compliance. The Department reviews them as part of State QA onsite reviews. The Licensing Unit reviews at least 5 personnel records, depending on the size of the child placing agency. Records are reviewed within 6 months of the initial site visits and every two years during the license renewal visit.

Counties track the above training as part of the semi-annual and annual reviews. All foster providers must have proof of 15 hours of additional training. This proof is provided to the resource Worker and verified prior to re-approving a foster provider for another year. The foster parents cannot be re-licensed without the required number of training hours; this is tracked at the county level through verifications provided by the worker/supervisor to the director at the time of license renewal and is maintained in the foster parents' records. This training can be provided by county/agency staff, online, or during annual provider training session.

Program Support

Includes 2022 Updates

The Quality Assurance Division provides technical assistance and support to all 67 counties as part of a 3 level CQI process. At the State level, once a CFSR district review has been conducted, an assessment of the 18 item areas is made, then a discussion is held with the district leadership and county directors. During those discussions information may be rolled into each county's improvement plan which will initiate QA Division technical assistance and training. The assistance and training are individualized for each district and/or county based on the needs that have been determined through the CFSR process.

The QA division also offers technical assistance following peer care reviews which are conducted by the QCWP specialists. During these reviews a strength and needs assessment is conducted based on the 18 items of best practice. The QCWP has a review tool that aligned with the 18 items with the On-site Review Instrument. If needs are determined, the county will schedule a county improvement planning meeting at which point the QCWP specialists will provide training in some areas or when appropriate, will refer training needs to the Family Services Division specialists. At this point, all QA division technical assistance and support given to the counties are provided on an as-needed basis as determined through state, district, or county level case reviews.

County directors, Field Administration, and the Family Services Division may at any time request training and technical assistance from the QA Division. Family Services also provides technical support statewide. Training is available on a variety of policy and practice issues at the request of county directors. County specific trainings and supports and statewide trainings continue to be developed to address systemic issues impacting safety, permanency, and well-being.

Staff from the Office of QA provides periodic training to county QA systems based on the needs and requests of the counties. Training is provided to new QA coordinators as well as county QA committee members from the duties of coordinators to the completion of QRIs. Additional technical assistance includes specialist review of QRI reports and County Self-Assessments to provide feedback on the merits of those reporting formats as well as on practice issues as needed.

Program Specialists and Program Manager in the Office of Adoption provide training and technical assistance to counties and stakeholders by providing a designated staff member to answer questions presented by county workers and supervisors around adoptions. This office also has a designated staff member daily to answer any questions for county workers and supervisors around subsidies for children who are to be adopted. Group training around adoption policies and procedures is provided at various conferences including the annual statewide Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association Conference. The Program Manager participates in select staffings with county workers and supervisors to mentor best practice, appropriate matches, and other permanency issues.

The Office of Adoption has been divided into two separate programs: the Office of Adoption Resources program and the Office of Adoption Recruitment program. These programs provide one-on-one technical assistance to worker and supervisors related to recruitment, adoption planning, and placement activities. They also provide on-site assessment of county staff's adoption skills.

Alabama through communication with HHS's Regional Office, has been utilizing technical support and guidance with staff from the Capacity Building Center for States. Numerous conference calls and onsite meetings have taken place since the final results meeting in December 2019. The purpose of these calls and meetings was to provide comments and guidance to the Department on the development of our Program Improvement Plan. The approved work plan that was initiated in Fall of 2020 has provided guidance and technical assistance on 2 key issues of Alabama's PIP: implementation of a safety assessment strategy and strategies related to workforce development. Safety assessment concerned itself with technical assistance on improving comprehensive assessments with families, improving engagement skills, and addressing safety concerns through the life of the case. The workforce development focus provided guidance on OJT activities, supervisory coaching, and case consultation. The Center for States also provided support around the development of evaluation methods to measure the effectiveness of the work. Surveys were developed in collaboration with the Center for States for STEP modules as part of this process, and we continue to use those surveys to measure the effectiveness of the trainings from both a staff and supervisor perspective. Additional data around training will be collected and analyzed in the upcoming year. In terms of collaboration with the Tribe and Inter-Agency Agreement continues in effect and as of 2021 and effective partnership and communication continues (see Consultation & Collaboration between States and Tribes section of the APSR).

Utilizing input from PIP groups, meetings with county staff and review of programs, several statewide training opportunities have been developed or continued to address areas where improvement has been noted. Areas such as engagement, concurrent planning, implementing prevention and primary prevention programs, more effective leadership skills within our group of supervisors are examples. In 2022, FSD conducted statewide multi-disciplinary training. Our annual Permanency Training took place in April 2021 (dates are mixed up/out of order). Statewide supervisor leadership training was held in June and July 2021. Topics designed to strengthen workforce competencies included, Engaging Fathers in Community Based Programming, Working with Families through a Cultural Lens, with a focus on LGBTQ Identities, and Kinship Guardianship. In 2021, Program Specialists in the Office of QCWP received training in coaching from the Atlantic Coast Child Welfare Implementation Center. These Program Specialists then trained all supervisors in the PIP counties. In addition, ISP and CFA training was provided in counties in 2021 and 2022.

In addition to training opportunities through our Training Division there are several trainings being provided by Family and Children's Services. District training began in Fall of 2109 and continue. Trainings have been provided statewide by district as related to Safety Assessment, Foster Care, the Multi Needs Process, and adoption Subsidy. These trainings were developed as a result of feedback from stakeholders in the PIP process as well as through internal assessment of county

and staff development needs. These trainings have been well received and will continued on these topics as well as on other areas such as ILP, ICPC, and Reasonable Efforts.

Systemic Factor: Service Array

Item 29. Service Array

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA Includes 2022 Updates

Child & Family Services Continuum

Beginning On October 1, 2016, the Department combined services formerly provided through Continuum of Care and FOCUS programs into a new formed program called Intensive In-Home Services (IIHS). The services are available in all 67 counties and the number of slots to serve families increased. There are currently 661 IIHS slots statewide. This is an increase from 527 slots during the previous year. As of February 2022, 456 families were being served through IIHS programs around the state. The IIHS services focus on achieving the outcome of successful permanency for children in a family setting through either family preservation or reunification programs utilizing evidenced-based programs. These programs have the flexibility to design individualized services that are family-driven and youth/child focused. Intensive in-home services are available to families for longer periods of time than 4 – 6 weeks as previously allowed in in Continuum of Care and FOCUS programs. All services are customized for delivery in the least restrictive manner. Programs are located in areas with a high concentration of families in need of services to address their safety and stability.

Service Coordination

There is a statewide ability to provide accessible and linguistically responsive services through the use of translators and interpreters as needed for child welfare activities such as child abuse/neglect assessments and general service intake matters. There is a gap in the number and accessibility of direct service providers (e.g., private therapists, mental health professionals, etc.) who speak the language or dialect of children and families, which impacts the capacity to provide individualized services. In terms of general practice delivery, staff demonstrate cultural sensitivity to the diverse, primarily Hispanic, populations, as demonstrated in the OSRI data provided earlier. The development/use of a culturally competent framework or model of practice, provided through training, and reinforced through ongoing supervision would better promote statewide responsiveness in this regard.

Services for children/youth are recommended through the ISP process. The ISP team determines the needs of any child and family. The ISP team is led by the county DHR office and partners with others, including the child/family and others from the community, to determine which providers can best meet the child/family needs, with an emphasis on out of home care. The Multi-Dimensional Assessment Tool (MAT) is completed on children whom the county is referring to Therapeutic Foster Care and Moderate providers to determine the most appropriate level of care. The county office provides information to the MAT assessor around the child's needs. The information provided includes a current psychological with a DSM Axis I diagnosis, a review of behaviors occurring within the last 30 days, a comprehensive family assessment, a review of behaviors occurring within the last 30 days, and a summary of the child's needs. If a child is placed in Therapeutic Foster Care or in an Intensive residential placement, a review MAT must be completed every 9 months. If a child is placed in a Moderate placement, a review MAT must be completed every 6 months.

The Resource Management Division monitors all contract provider services. The gaps in services are determined by length of stay, discussion with counties and trends/issues they see, and reviewing data regarding placements. Current gaps that are seen are services for youth aged 17-20 who are mentally ill and behaviorally challenged and children with a diagnosis of Autism Spectrum Disorder, have an IQ under 70, and have behavioral challenges at home and in the community. The Department of Mental Health has developed intensive home-based services for children from birth to age 20 with autism spectrum disorder or autism spectrum disorder with co-occurring intellectual/developmental disabilities. These services

include intensive care coordination, therapeutic monitoring, behavioral support, in-home therapy, family support, and peer support provided to child in the setting in which the child resides or a community setting. During FY 22, 15 mental health centers around the state received funds for the expansion of school based mental health services. There are currently 80 school systems and 18 community mental health centers participating in the School-Based Mental Health Collaboration Program, per the Alabama Department of Mental Health. A goal of this program is to ensure that children across the state have access to comprehensive mental health services, including early intervention, prevention, and treatment services.

It should be noted that the need for more thorough assessments around strengths and underlying needs of the families we serve was also identified as a need during the 2018 CFSR. One of the PIP strategies we implemented to address this area was the development of an enhanced Comprehensive Family Assessment/Individualized Service Plan training. That training was provided to all staff in all nine PIP counties during 2021. We have now begun the process of rolling the training out statewide, having trained staff in two additional districts thus far during 2022.

Service Decision-Making Process for Family Support Services

The Request for Proposal (RFP) is utilized for all service provisions procured in the state of Alabama unless there is an existing interagency agreement of Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) authorized by the Commissioner. The RFP process includes a review of each proposal submitted by the potential providers and grading of each proposal by select county and state office staff. The scores are submitted to the Office of Procurement and a selection process is used to determine the awarded contracts. The sites are located where there is a high concentration of families needing services to address their safety and stability issues. The Department is successful in having, developing, or coordinating for the arrangement of services for all families and understands that the need to have readily available and easily accessible services to those families and children we serve is of great importance and must be addressed. Consistency in individualizing services for families and children also needs to be strengthened, especially related to general mental health services at the local level. This would include general staffing gaps of the local mental health agencies and increased ability to offer psychiatric consultation.

Family Support Services are selected through the Department's procurement process. A solicitation is issued publicly describing the array of services to be provided and includes the requirement for the services to be community-based. Proposals submitted in response to the solicitation are assessed by a team of evaluators for their ability to meet the requirements of the solicitation. The agencies selected to provide these services have met the requirements and stipulations of the procurement.

PLACEMENT RESOURCES

Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) and TFC with Enhanced Services

Therapeutic Foster Care and TFC with Enhanced Services: These providers continue to work with our counties in placing our children in need of TFC in the most appropriate settings. There are 10 providers of TFC in the state. There are not sufficient TFC homes willing to accept and maintain older teens/young adults and children with more significant behavioral/mental health issues. The Department is currently working with the Praed Foundation who developed the MAT tool we currently use, to build out a more comprehensive framework. They have developed a draft framework and are in the process of testing it at this time. Once testing is completed, the Department will review the findings/outcomes and initiate implementation of the model as appropriate.

Total Number of Children in TFC as of 02/28/22	265
Total Number of Children in TFC-E as of 02/28/22	127
Total:	392

Residential Facilities

These facilities are licensed and appropriately able to provide and/or access appropriate services for the children with greater needs than can be met in a foster family home setting. Selected information below reflects the strengths and needs of these providers, which are vital in achieving best outcomes for the children we serve.

Congregate Care placements are being monitored in several ways. The Certificate of Need from a physician and concurrence from the ISP team, along with the Resource Management Division/Office of Resource Development and Utilization Review, are all required for placement in intensive residential. Approval by Children and Family Service and Field Administration is needed for the placement of children 12 or younger in basic or intensive placements. Family Services must also review and approve any TFC placement of a child aged 5 or younger. The Department is continuing to emphasize that discharge planning begins at the time of placement, so we can ensure that work is done to match children with the most appropriate, least restrictive placement as soon as it is appropriate based on the needs of each child.

Alabama Fatherhood Initiative (AFI)

The Alabama Fatherhood Initiative includes 20 projects statewide that are funded through a partnership with the Family Assistance and Child Support Divisions of State DHR and the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention/The Children's Trust Fund that provide a variety of services to custodial and non-custodial parents and legal guardians.

The collaboration on the state level begins with funding recommendations being made by the Department of Human Resources and the Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Preventions. We work together to assess the needs of the counties and make funding recommendations based on those needs (i.e., number of open child support cases). Together we host a mandatory annual training that provides information on local projects with our requirements and expectations for the year. Additional trainings and support are provided throughout the year to ensure program success. The Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention provides oversight through a minimum of three site visits to each site to ensure compliance. These visits include a document review of required credentials/training, followed by a programmatic visit and an annual financial review onsite. Monthly financial reviews are done as well. Major programmatic or financial issues are reported to DHR.

Locally, each program is required to form a network of public, private, non-profit, and faith-based organizations that work together to help custodial and noncustodial parents and legal guardians develop positive relationships with their children and to enhance their ability to support their children. These programs provide counseling, education, and employment opportunities. Each program is required to maintain a positive partnership with their county DHR and other community partners. Each group must meet quarterly with their local county DHR office and representatives from child support court in the counties that receive services. Minutes from those meetings are reviewed during site visits. The local programs also report child support collection numbers, and the number of individuals served each month via a monthly reporting form. All programs report monthly to Auburn University as the evaluation component for programs funded by the ADCANP to ensure that outcomes are being met.

The Fatherhood Programs are funded with TANF dollars through a MOU between DHR and ADCANP. All TANF Fatherhood Programs are funded through a competitive process. Each program focuses on workforce development and placement, parent education and support, case management, child support education and payment, and strengthening healthy relationships for families. Referrals are made through all DHR programs, community agencies, child support court, and self-referrals. Noncustodial and custodial parents and legal guardians are assessed immediately upon referral. Participants attend weekly parenting classes and workforce development components as directed by the program facilitator. These components are job readiness, job placement, GED classes, credential skills training, and other adult education and training components. Additional resources and referrals may be needed to mental health, substance abuse, and vocational rehabilitation services. The goals are to help participants develop the skills needed to support their children financially and emotionally.

Item 30. Individualization of services

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Includes 2022 Updates

BY policy and practice all services provided are individualized based on the assessed needs of each family/child. The process begins through the compilation of data within the CFA and is presented in the Department's ISP. Each child and family's needs are unique, so plans are highly individualized. All participants take into consideration services available within their specific communities and in surrounding areas. Policy dictates that the Department provides services to families when they need it, at the frequency with which they need it, and in a timely manner. Flex funding is made available to each county and is used to support individualized service planning. In addition to family foster homes, our agency has an array of residential services/options to be used relative to the recommendations and findings of the ISP team. Those services include:

- Therapeutic Foster Care Homes
- Child Care Institutions
- Group Homes
- Child Placing Agencies

These facilities are licensed and appropriately able to provide and/or access appropriate services for the children with greater needs than can be met in a foster family home setting. Selected information below reflects the strengths and needs of these providers which are vital in achieving best outcomes for the children we serve.

Family Service Centers

The Family Service Centers are administered by the Family Preservation and Support Services (FP/SS) Programs, funded by Title IV-B, Subpart 2, "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act". Family Service Center sites are in targeted counties/communities where there is a high concentration of families in need of services to address their safety and stability issues. Each center assesses the community and collaborates with DHR in developing programs that meet the needs of the community and focus on the prevention of Child Abuse/Neglect by providing educational services, job training, parenting, etc. Service interventions are based on the following set of beliefs about children and their families

- Children belong with their families if they can live safely at home
- Most parents love and want their children
- Most maltreatment is an expression of an underlying, unmet need
- Most people can change
- All children need to experience permanency in their lives
- When children cannot continue to live at home, they still need community connections

Core services provided by Family Service Centers are based on a comprehensive assessment process that results in goals identified by the families. The goal of these services is to strengthen and empower families so they can meet the needs which led to the occurrence of child maltreatment. Case management services are provided as a part of core services to facilitate access and follow-up. The variety of quality assurance processes in place indicates that the overwhelming majority of the centers are meeting community needs and enabling families to become safe and stable.

The Department is working to partner with family service centers around the state to train practice specialists, DHR training staff, and county staff on the Strengthening Families framework. A pilot training was held at the beginning of 2020 in District 6, which encompassed 6 counties. In April 2021, Alabama began the statewide rollout of the Strengthening Families training. All districts across the state had access to the Strengthening Families training which ended on 9/30/21. Frontline child welfare workers, supervisors, and directors participated in the training. "The Strengthening Families approach and protective factors framework was introduced in 2003 by the Center for the Study of Social Policy. It is a research-informed, strengths-based approach that prevents child abuse and neglect by focusing on the well-being of all families and helping families identify and build on their own protective factors," per the National Alliance of Children's Trust and Prevention Funds website.

The framework includes five protective factors:

- Parental Resilience
- Social Connections
- Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development
- Concrete Support in Times of Need
- Social/Emotional Competence of Children

All staff participating in the trainings were given information around these protective factors and how to help develop them in the children and families we serve.

Juvenile Justice Transfers – Children Exiting Care to the Department of Youth Services (DYS)

The following information was obtained from Alabama’s statewide information system (FACTS). During FY 2021, seven (7) youth in DHR custody were committed to DYS. Two of these youths reentered foster care during FY 2021 (discharged during FY and reentered during FY). The average age at entry to foster care was 14.4 and at commitment age 16.6 (Stayed the same as FY20). Ages of children committed to DYS ranged from 15 to 18.

Psychotropic Medication / Monitoring Protocol

The psychotropic medication and monitoring protocol was implemented in October 2016 in a continued effort to minimize placement moves and reliance on psychotropic medication as a behavioral control. The project began with an introductory training for seven pilot counties: Montgomery, Autauga, Elmore, Macon, Bullock, Russell, and Lee. The project expanded in FY 2018 to include Jefferson, Shelby, and Chilton counties. Additionally, the team has provided consultation and support to our residential treatment facilities by reviewing case plans and assisting in designing behavior management plans to support and stabilize placements.

The Alabama Psychotropic Medication Review Team (APMRT) consists of a part-time child psychiatrist, a nurse practitioner, four board certified behavioral analysts, and 2 graduate assistants. The APMRT continues to review monthly medication data provided through a partnership with the Alabama Medicaid Agency and identify young people who are too young to be prescribed psychotropic medications, are prescribed too many medications of the same or similar drug classes and are prescribed too many medications per set criteria. They will continue to contact the county office, share their concerns, and begin consultation to decrease reliance and use and provide behavioral support as a mechanism to safely reduce use of medications when appropriate. Additional information regarding the team’s work related to the project can be found in the Health Care Services Plan.

Though the team moved to a telemedicine services model, behavioral services, medication review or both were provided to 140 clients. Extensive training was provided to a residential treatment facility in the catchment area. The team has noted a steady increase in medication review requests, behavioral intervention services and online training and education. The AMPRT has safely resumed in-person services and will provide in-person trainings to staff and stakeholders during the summer of 2021.

AdoptUsKids

AdoptUsKids is operated through the National Adoption Exchange and one of their most popular service is a web-oriented nationwide child photo listing that can be viewed by potential adoptive families all over the world. In addition to their main photo listing, AdoptUsKids maintains the state-partner pages for public and private agencies. Through this service, AdoptUsKids is featured on the Alabama DHR page. This page includes only children legally available and waiting for adoption in Alabama. In addition to photos, profiles, and biographies, the site also provides a mechanism for posting video footage of the children. Alabama DHR has an agreement with Heart Gallery of Alabama to provide a link to their videos

from the AdoptUsKids and DHR sites. An administrative assistance in the Office of Adoption manages the AdoptUsKids photo listing website for the State of Alabama. She is responsible for responding to inquiries, receiving, and routing home studies to Adoption Specialists with placement responsibilities. She also records all inquiries of families in state and out of state despite home study status. Adoption Specialists are responsible for reviewing home studies for initial family and child matches. The administrative assistance is responsible for updating stakeholders who aid in recruitment informed of any changes in availability status for all children with TPR and a goal of adoption.

Heart Gallery of Alabama (HGA)

Heart Gallery Alabama connects youth in foster care with caring adults who provide the stability and guidance they need to thrive. Heart Gallery of Alabama continues to photograph new children as they become available. They also do photo and video updates annually on children previously photographed, but still waiting for adoption. Heart Gallery of Alabama (HGA) exhibit of waiting children travels the state of Alabama and is on display in various high traffic areas where potential families can learn about the available children. The Department entered into a contract with HGA in February 2012. The purpose of the contract is to provide funding for staff to respond to families that inquire about children on the HGA web site and exhibits. As of March 2022, they have photographed 69 children for FY22. Heart Gallery is dependent upon reports from DHR regarding goals, custody status, placements and/or finalizations for the children they photograph. In FY22, thus far they have responded to 1354 inquiries from 879 unique families.

Heart Gallery Alabama has also developed partnerships with several media outlets that promote both general awareness and child-specific recruitment for our children. They produce an electronic newsletter that is broadcast through their web site, social media, and constant contact e-mail distribution. They also provide child-specific features to television stations across the state. They currently enjoy partnerships with the FOX affiliate in Birmingham (WBRC Channel 6), the NBC affiliate in Montgomery (WSFA Channel 12), Fox 10 in Mobile to feature a different child/sibling group in a weekly Heart Gallery feature. In 2020, Heart Gallery Alabama formed a partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters and created a mentorship program for children featured on the Heart Gallery. They also expanded their mission in 2021 to support our youth through mentorship and to help our youth celebrate their birthdays or other special occasions.

Services Related to International Adoptees

For international adoptees, APAC served 5 families in counseling and 0 families attended camp last year. There is not a waiting list. The families are seen by a counselor as soon as the counselor can schedule them. DHR families receive priority.

Pre and Post Adoption Services – APAC

Beginning 10/01/18, the Pre and Post Adoption Services contracts were combined into one contract and are provided by Children's Aid Society of Alabama via a program known as APAC. This allowed for some administrative savings as well as elimination of duplicative services and requirements. The pre-adoption services component provides funds for recruitment, training, and completion of home studies for families interested in adopting children that meet the special needs definition. Counseling support has been expanded to include more counseling services to pre-adoption families when a family is the identified resource for a waiting child and the child is in the home. This pre-adoption work is utilized by DHR staff at county and state levels, to assure both child and family are well prepared for the transition into adoption. The original intent was to improve early communications within the family, increase parent confidence in parenting children with difficult behaviors, and decrease the risk of adoption disruption, and it appears this is helping when utilized.

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections is a collaborative effort between the Office of Adoption and Children's Aid Society of Alabama to promote adoption. Its specific adoption mission is to support, strengthen, and empower adoptive families. The APAC post-adoption services continue to grow in visibility and use by adoptive families. Another facet of growth is in adoption placement support services that link children and families to needed services including education and support regarding therapeutic parenting skills, support through the matching and placement process, and post finalization. Family Advocates provide these services and work in partnership with APAC counselors and DHR to meet the

needs of the children and families. The pre-adoption service component was added in 2008 and has increasingly provided adoptive family resources for waiting children.

The APAC consumers are asked for specific feedback related to the individual services they receive. This feedback is obtained by anonymous surveys for most services and direct questions and documentations of responses for others. This information as well as other consumer feedback is always reviewed by APAC staff regionally and statewide during staff meetings and shared with the Office of Adoption. In addition, APAC's Pre-Adoption Services team distribute surveys after families attend TIPS classes. Many changes have been made based on consumer feedback in one or more of these forums. Beginning in 2013, regular meetings were established between SDHR and APAC program staff to continuously monitor outcomes and review areas of concern.

For FY 20-21, the pre-adoption component provided for the following services:

SERVICE	FAMILIES	INDIVIDUALS
TIPS Orientation Attendees	428	
TIPS/DT Training Attendees	130	229
TIPS/DT Training Completed	88	159
Home Study Received	57	105
Home Study Approved	51	92
Match	42	56
Finalization	37	61

The post-adoption services contract provided for the follow services (FY 2020-2021)

SERVICE	FAMILIES	INDIVIDUALS
Adoption Information/Support	209	339
Lending Library (print/video)	67	95
Educational Trainings		2346
Adoptive Family Advocacy	48	
Counseling (including crisis line)	322	679
Trained therapist network	312	
Camp APAC	57	39
Adoptive Family Support Groups	101	281
Special Events	78	239

Quantitative QA reports from APAC noted the following services and trends regarding consumers served through the contract over the last few years. In FY 2020-2021, 1,576 consumers were served which accounted for 10,333 service units.

A. INFORMATION AND REFERRAL (The APAC report refers to this as Information and Support)

APAC continues to provide Information and Referral support to anyone who desires information about adoption related issues. During FY 2020-2021, the post-adoption team provided 1532 units of service to 339 individuals coming from 209 families. The pre-adoption team provided 39 units of service to 30 individuals in 20 families.

B. LENDING LIBRARY

A lending library on adoption-related topics continues to be available for both foster and adoptive families and the professionals who work with this population. Books, DVDs, Videos, recorded APAC webinars, journals, E-books, and printed materials are available for loan with free mailing. Resources are available via website, phone, email, or onsite office checkouts. Consumer feedback continues to guide the resource topics and formats that APAC selects for the library. During FY 2020-2021, 1043 resources were checked out to 95 consumers from 67 families.

C. EDUCATIONAL TRAININGS

APAC coordinates an annual “Permanency Conference” for DHR direct line child welfare workers. Approximately 200 DHR staff attend the conference each year, which draws national speakers and experts in the child welfare arena. This permanency conference is provided to supplement the DHR County Directors meeting and the DHR Supervisors Conference, assuring that similar overviews and targeted trainings are provided to leadership and direct line staff, providing up to 13 professional CEUs for participants.

APAC continues to provide on-site group trainings to foster and adoptive parents, DHR staff, therapeutic and child placing agencies, and other related organizations upon request. The Trained Therapist Network provides two national speaker tours each year, providing both foundational and advanced clinical information to professionals working with foster and adoptive families (see below). The most recent use of computer webinar trainings has been another successful method of educating the professional community on adoption topics. The use of webinars has provided easier access for many clinicians (and parents) who may have otherwise faced time or travel barriers to attend an onsite workshop. Examples of APAC webinar topics have been Bullying, Parenting the Net Generation, The Impact of Trauma on Child Development, The Impact of Secondary Trauma, Stress Management, Understanding Sexualized Behaviors in Foster/Adoptive Children, Sibling Rivalry, The Voice of the Adopted Child, Sleep Disturbances in Foster/Adopted Children, Lying Cheating and Stealing, Holidays with Our Foster and Adopted Children, Transracial Adoption, Practical Play Techniques, Working with Adolescents, Importance of Healthy Attachments, Family Violence and Its Impact on Foster and Adopted Children, 7 Core Issues in Adoption & Permanency, Connection Over Compliance, Effects of Transitions & Trauma on Child Development, Healing Children through Therapeutic Parenting, Achieving Safety Permanency and Well-Being by Improving Practice with LGBTQ Youth & Families, Grief & Loss in Foster and Adopted Children, Creating Safer Braver Spaces for Our Kids-Allyship Parenting and Professionalism, and more. Not including the Permanency Conference for DHR staff 15,990 units of training services for 2,346 participants were provided by APAC in FY 20-21 via live webinar and in-person trainings.

ADOPTIVE FAMILY GROUPS (AFG), SPECIAL EVENTS, ADOPTIVE FAMILY MENTORING AND SUPPORT

Through the APAC contract, Adoptive Family Support Groups are offered throughout the state. The AFGs include activities focused on parents as well as a children’s component for the adoptee and/or siblings. Each AFG has a parent support group, a children’s/youth’s support group, as well as a childcare socialization group for younger children unable to benefit from a support group. They meet in locations and times most accessible to the families, and topics discussed are driven by parents within each group. Adoptive family groups provide educational and emotional support for adoptive family groups to reduce the risk of disruption and maintain permanency.

One way of increasing the support gained through these relationships outside of group sessions is to provide occasional special events for these groups that will lead to increased interaction and friendships outside of the group setting. In FY 2019-2020, special event services were provided to 43 adoptive family members coming from a total of 43 adoptive families. This reduction in numbers was due to COVID, and APAC could not conduct in-person events for the majority of the year.

In 2013, an Adoptive Family Mentor Service was initiated as another support option for adoptive families. This service pairs an experienced adoptive parent with a newer adoptive parent who seeks individual adoptive parent phone support. This aspect of the new program is not formalized however, APAC staff throughout the program connect new families with experienced families informally as sources of support. Historically this service was only utilized by a few families. In an effort to continue to reach adoptive families that may not be interested or able to participate in monthly AFGs, APAC created a Closed Adoptive Family Facebook Support group in October 2014. IT is administered by the APAC Clinical Coordinator and the Marketing and Communication Specialist, who post new material at least 5 times per week and respond as appropriate to support parent posts. The Facebook group has grown to 866 members who offer support to one another. Rural areas were targeted for marketing the service since AFGs were not available in most of the less populated rural counties who also had fewer resources in general. APAC surmised that in addition to or in lieu of support groups and counseling some adoptive parents wish to just talk with and gain support from other adoptive parents who have walked a similar adoption path. Only a few have followed through with having an “official” mentor assigned to them

for support, but the service continues to be marketed through pre-adoption services as well as post-adoption services. In addition, a Family Advocacy Service was initiated in an effort to further support adoptive families (see E. Family Advocacy below).

As a part of the matching process, state adoption staff work with families, prior to placement, to make sure they are aware of programs and services that can meet the needs of the children they are adopting. These include post-adoption services provided by CAS/APAC, but also community resources and programs. Depending on the needs of the family, this could include the crisis hotline provided through APAC, how or when to call and seek treatment at local emergency rooms or even how/when to call local law enforcement.

D. FAMILY ADVOCACY

As increasing number of families adopt waiting children, it has become clear that there are additional challenges faced by these children and the families who adopt them, and that the risk of disruption is greater for waiting children than most of those served, stabilized, and ultimately adopted by their foster parents. To address this gap, a Family Advocate service was implemented by APAC to support APAC-prepared adoptive resources once they became approved adoptive resources. The service includes helping the family further identify their strengths and needs, gain education and confidence in areas of need, increase their support networks which include networking with other adoptive families, participate in adoptive family counseling when presented with child background summaries considered for match or times of concern after placement, connect with resources if needed to support the family or child's needs, and etc. The services are provided in office, in the home, or as needed within the community with the family. Some families have been hesitant to take advantage of the service, but once their home is being considered as a possible match for a child (by DHR), the families are eager for this support. When child placement occurs, the families have exhibited increased desire for more intensive support. In FY 2020-2021, 48 individual families utilized Family Advocacy services.

As increasing numbers of families adopt waiting children it has become clear that there are additional challenges faced by these children and the families who adopt them. The risk of disruption is greater for waiting children than most of those served, stabilized, and ultimately adopted by their foster parents. To address this gap, the Adoptive Placement Support Service was implemented by APAC to support APAC-prepared adoptive resources once they are matched with a child.

The service includes:

- helping the family further identify their strengths and needs
- gain education and confidence in areas of need
- increase their support networks which include networking with other adoptive families
- participate in adoptive family counseling when presented with child background summaries considered for match or times of concern after placement
- connect with resources if needed to support the family and child needs

The services are provided in home, in office, by telephone/email or as needed within the community setting with the family. Some families have been hesitant to take advantage of the service but once their home is being considered as a possible match for a child by DHR, the families are eager for this support. When child placement occurs, the families have exhibited increased desire for more intensive support. . In FY 2020-2021, 1,576 consumers were served which accounted for 10,333 service units.

E. COUNSELING SERVICES

APAC services also include a counseling component which was initiated in 2005 to help adoptive families through adjustment issues and crisis times throughout tier adoption journey. Initially adoptions counseling was provided after a referral was received from the county or state adoption worker or from self-referral by the parent. Over times the counseling component has become more flexible. There have been instances where state adoption workers have referred families potentially matched with waiting children to counselors at APAC to review the child/sibling group's non-

identifying background summary to help the potential family better understand the needs of the children and to discuss potential parenting strategies, etc. Also, the families recruited and trained through the APAC pre-adoption services team are now routinely asked to participate in counseling at agreed upon stages including upon home study approval, upon potential child match and placement, three months post placement, prior to finalization, and beyond as needed. As adoption of waiting children increased it became clear that more intensive counseling services were needed to reduce the increased risks of adoption disruptions. In FY 2013 APAC counseling services were increased to include 24/7 phone availability, more extensive in-home family services and more than just brief, short-term therapy. Many families receiving APAC counseling could actually be considered in crisis throughout many phases of their counseling, but those are not documented as “crisis calls”.

The above APAC services are available to all adoptive families in the state however DHR families take priority. There could be a wait time if APAC does not have anyone with space on their caseload. It should be noted that DHR is currently exploring an assurance that prompt attention will be given to children adopted from other countries.

F. Trained Therapist Network (TTN)

The APAC contract expanded several years ago to include education of the Alabama clinical community who work with foster and adopted children and families. This service, referred to as the Trained Therapist Network, has resulted in multiple all-day workshops by well-known authors and adoption experts. The intent is for this clinical community to provide more appropriate services to adoptive family members based on their increased understanding of adoption issues. These services are free to participants, which include social workers, counselors, probation officers, residential/therapeutic providers, and other interested professionals. DHR staff also attend through slots approved for mileage support by DHR. In FY 2019, 442 individuals attended the TTN workshops. IN FY 2020 738 individuals attended the TTN workshops. Due to COVID, these trainings were provided virtually. As part of the post-adoption contract with APAC, a community resource directory was developed. The directory provides information supplied by counselors, therapists, mental health professionals, and others as they have attended training sessions through the TTN.

G. Annual Summer Camp

The APAC Camp service continues to provide support for children and families adopting through the DHR system. The first Camp APAC in 2004 involved 50 campers, then was increased to 100 campers. In 2012, this was increased to 140 campers. A minimum of 140 children are served each year in a four-day-three-night camp that helps them better understand adoption, normalizes their adoption experience, provides lifelong friendships with other adopted youth, and also provides the adoptive parents a respite opportunity. Year after year, 98-100% of the parents with youth attending Camp APAC share that the camp experience provided life-changing support relative to the adoption experience.

Due to COVID 19, it was not possible to conduct an in-person camp experience. In place of the in-person camp experience, APAC developed a “Camp in a Box” for all registered campers. These boxes, filled with camp activity supplies, games, and videos from APAC staff with instructions for the activities were mailed to all campers. During FY 2019-2020, 107 campers from 66 different families received a Camp in a Box.

H. Group Preparation and Selection (GPS)

Group Preparation and Selection has been replaced by Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety (TIPS). Hundreds of families have now been recruited by APAC, trained in 10-week TIPS classes, had some studies prepared, and aided DHR adoption placement studies for the matching of waiting children with families. These classes are 10 weeks in duration with 3 hours per week sessions designed to prepare families interested in adoption. The core curriculum is trauma-informed, but the process remains the same relative to selection. Once training is completed, the families who did not select out are then assessed as potential adoptive family resources. The completed home studies are then submitted to the Office of Adoption for review and approval. In addition to the 10-week TIPS course, APAC developed a 3-hour training component called

“Therapeutic Training” to further assist families in understanding the needs of children who come from hard places. This training is designed to further assist families in developing greater skills and understanding of therapeutic parenting.

In FY 2020:

- 675 families received APAC orientation services
- 185 individuals from 101 different families attended TIPS/Deciding Together
- 118 individuals from 63 different families were approved as adoptive resources
- 87 children were matched with 56 APAC families
- 42 adoption finalizations occurred with 32 APAC families

In FY 2021:

- 428 families received APAC orientation services
- 229 individuals from 130 different families attended TIPS/Deciding Together
- 92 individuals from 51 different families were approved as adoptive resources
- 56 children were matched with 42 APAC families
- 61 adoption finalizations occurred with 37 APAC families

Wendy’s Wonderful Kids

The Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption (DTFA) award grants to public and private adoption agencies to hire adoption professionals who implement proactive, child-focused recruitment programs targeted exclusively on moving America’s longest-waiting children from foster care into adoptive families through its signature Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK) program. The program continues to be a success as evidenced by the growing number of sibling groups and older teens being adopted through WWK evidenced based child-focused recruitment model. There are 2 full-time SDHR program specialists assigned to each WWK position, a North and South recruiter. The chart below shows caseload recommendation as well as definitions for case status. It will also show the number of matches and finalized adoptions in each of the active project years.

Caseload Size: The recommended number of children for each WWK recruiters to maintain is 12-15 active children and an average total caseload of 18 children may be on the caseload in the status types below.

Active Status: At any given time, the recruiter should be intensively implementing the components of the child-focused recruitment model, actively recruiting for 12-15 children who are not matched with families. When a child is added to the caseload, they are initially place in the active status. The remaining children on the caseload may be in a less intensive phase of the recruitment process. They may not be in the active recruitment phase, but still on the worker’s caseload. See the inactive status definition below for details.

Monitoring Status: The recruiter may also be monitoring children who need additional preparation before active recruitment is possible, children who have been matched, or children who are in pre-adoptive placements and the recruiter has monthly contact with the child. These cases are not counted as part of the recommended 12-15 active caseload.

Inactive Status: A child may be considered part of the caseload, but inactive if the recruiter cannot have contact with the child during the pre-adoptive placement or active recruitment is on hold. There is room for expansion in Alabama for recruiters based on the need for child specific recruitment and based on the grant’s ongoing success rate. The WWK recruiters also have access to ACCURINT searches for youth on their caseloads. Some of those kids who have been successfully adopted would not have been if there was not a child specific recruiter involved in those cases. There continues to be a great need for a recruiter in the Northern part of Alabama however continued negotiations with the funding entity is a prerequisite if that is to occur.

- COVID presented additional challenges is spending face to face time with children as visitation requirements differed depending on local and individual placement policies. It also delayed court hearings for children who were already placed.
- Relatives of the children that are found through case digs and can become placement must go through the approval process for licensing . Some relatives are hesitant to go through the approval process.
- We have a high number of matches, but often matches do not turn into finalization due to the child not liking the family, personal problems of the family, or the child's needs exceed what the family is able to meet. We are trying to resolve with making referrals to Adoption Counseling.
- Teens deciding to change their Permanency Goal because they would rather age out of foster care then be adopted.
- Some of our teens had failed adoptions prior to being placed on the WWK caseload
- Monthly summaries about the kids on the WWK Caseloads are reviewed every month. The team often has calls with the counties to discuss barriers on difficult cases.
- The Team has calls with the WWK Program Manager assigned to Alabama to provide encouragement and new ideas.

A child specific recruitment packet has been developed that identifies the information that must be submitted to the state of ensure timely inclusion of a child into recruitment activities. With the assistance of an adoptive parent of Hispanic heritage, one of our radio public service announcements recorded in Spanish continues to be played on Spanish language radio stations through the Alabama Broadcaster's Association Public Education Program. The Department has also printed out "Open Your Heart, Open Your Home" posters in Spanish and made them available to all county departments through our general services on-line ordering system. Through the continued work of our WWK recruiters we are matching a placing children with more significant physical and developmental disabilities as well as large sibling groups.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS Includes 2022 Updates

Strengths	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department has a contract for post adoption services that includes <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Information & Referral b. Library & training services available to both families and professionals c. Nationally known speakers on issues such as attachment and trauma have provided day-long seminars in various locations throughout the state through the Trained Therapist Network. d. Adoptive Family Groups/Post Adoption Group Meetings e. Camp for children/youth who have experienced adoption f. Adoption-competent professionals who provide counseling services. • The Department's Behavioral Analysts provide services to adoptive parents around behavior management for children placed in their homes based on referrals from the State Adoption Consultants. Often, the Behavioral Analysts do prevention work with the families before the child is placed in the adoptive home. This work is done in an effort to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intensive crisis intervention for family's post-adoption is typically accessed through services outside of the Department, i.e., mental health, hospitals, other services funded by Medicaid and/or private insurance. The partnership / contract DHR has with APAC is believed to actually provide a tremendous amount of post-adoption support. For example, APAC offers groups that meet throughout the state, providing education and social interaction for adoptive families. The groups are led by a therapist, and topics for discussion are chosen based on the group's interests and needs. • Although the Trained Therapist Network provides training, the state would like to have more adoption-competent mental health providers to utilize. See also the above comments on the APAC contract. • More resource families who can parent children with significant behavioral and/or complex mental health needs • Autism services have been identified as a need by our counties, the State Office Specialists, and Resource Management Staff. Through an agreement between several state agency and ADAP, Alabama Department of Mental Health has developed services specifically

<p>ensure smooth transitions and long-term success/stability of placements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development and Maintenance of a resource directory of adoption-competent/trained mental health professionals is part of the CAS/APAC contract (Trained Therapist Network) • The Department supports keeping our particularly troubled children close to home or at least within the State whenever possible. • Providers adapt their programs/services to the child's emotional, behavioral, and educational level. • Programs are monitored for the length of stay and providers are required to routinely share a child's barriers to progress with the counties and the State Office. • Therapeutic Foster Care providers are continuously recruiting for homes that will accept teens with behavioral issues. Work is currently being done to develop a placement staffing format that will include these TFC agencies in an effort to locate the best matches possible for our children. • It is believed that a recently signed agreement with HUD will prove to be a tremendous housing resource for older youth as they exit care. • When discharge notices are received, information is gathered on why the placement has disrupted. The feedback is then used to recruit homes to handle those behaviors. • Services for children/youth are individualized by the ISP (Individualized Service Plan). The ISP team determines the needs of the child and their family. • The ISP Team led by the County DHR Office contacts providers and determines which providers can best meet the child and family's needs, especially when focusing on Out of Home care. • The Multi-Dimensional Assessment, (MAT), is completed on children whom the County DHR office is referring to Therapeutic Foster Care and/or moderate residential providers. The County Agency provides information to the assigned assessor. This information consists of a current (within the last 24 months) psychological with the DSM V Axis 1 diagnosis, and a review of their behaviors occurring within the last 30 days, along with a case summarization of their needs. • The Certificate of Need (CON) from a physician and concurrence from the ISP team, along with the Resource Management Division, and Children & Family Services and Field Administration if a child is 12 or younger, is needed to ensure appropriate intensive placement for a child/youth. 	<p>for individuals with an Autism Spectrum Diagnosis. These services in addition to other services such as Behavioral Analyst involvement are intended to improve services to and outcomes for these children/families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service development to assist with treatment of our youth aged 17-20 who have challenges with mental illness. • Service development for children with lower IQs (under 55). At the same time, there are services for this population that are available through the MRDD Waiver. • The results of the provider query indicate that counties and those registering TFC providers are not fully completing the "willing to accept" information for providers (less than 25% of the Adoptive, Foster Family and Therapeutic Homes entered into FACTS include information in all of the Willingness to Accept fields). Therefore, we do not have good information about families willing/able to accept teens, children with special health care needs, sibling groups, etc. • A lack of individualization is most prominent in the provision of services for ILP youth. The department utilizes the ILP Assessment Tool to identify areas of needs for the child; however, few of the actual needs are addressed in the ISP. The ISP typically does not address the individual needs of the child, but broadly addresses accessing ILP funding. State QA has identified through both the OSRI process and Random Record Reviews completed by Quality Child Welfare Practice that concerted efforts to provide services to families to protect children in the home and prevent removal/re-entry into foster care is an area of need. • When identified, counties are not utilizing the Resource Development staff allocation in the county to identify and craft services to meet the individualized needs. • Services that are developmentally and/or culturally appropriate (including linguistically competent), responsive to disability and special needs, or accessed through flexible funding are examples of how the unique needs of children and families are met by the agency. • An array of services was identified for the counties reviewed; however, substance abuse treatment was identified as a need in most counties. When substance abuse services were available, transportation presented a problem for some families. • Identified barriers (by state QA in recent years) included the following: Lack of referrals, lack of reassessment of family needs, transportation and the
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The TIPS curriculum continues to be utilized to train prospective foster and adoptive parents and helps prepare them to understand and meet the needs of the children in care. • The State continues to collect data on linguistically competent services provided to families served. For FY 2021, 1602 language assistance services were provided in the following languages: American Sign Language, Creole, K'iche, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese, Acateco, Romanian, Haitian/Creole, Portuguese, German, Kirundi, and Bulgarian. • An array of services identified statewide by State QA included the following: group counseling, individual counseling, drug screens, psychological evaluations, parenting classes, daycare services, early intervention, clothing, groceries, utility bill assistance, extracurricular activities, and intensive in-home services. • The State continues to monitor service provision to ensure the needs of all children, youth, young adults, and families are adequately met. 	<p>department not assisting families to secure services but leaving them to secure themselves. Supports to parents include counseling, in-home supports, drug treatment. Supports to foster parents include daycare, respite, and caseworker visits. A major barrier to the implementation of services is transportation, primarily in rural counties. Another barrier has been the inconsistent engagement with parents to have them actively involved in receiving services.</p>
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

GOAL:

The Department will revitalize the resource development function at both the state and county levels, with a focus on building the service array within the state.

Strategies:

- The State Office Divisions of Resource Management, Quality Assurance, and Family Services will jointly issue a statewide survey by county director districts (to include the provider community, birth/foster/adoptive parents) as a means of identifying needed services and assessing the viability of the county resource development position.
- Based on the survey results and in coordination with the identified state Resource Development office, the "Results and Responsibilities" of the county resource development position will be drafted and distributed to county directors.
- A training will be developed for implementation at the district level regarding identification of resource needs within the local communities/counties and how to address those needs through the development of individualized services.

GOAL:

The Department will enhance staff's ability to engage with families, accurately assess their underlying needs, and identify and provide the appropriate services to meet those needs.

Strategies:

- Quality Child Welfare Practice Specialists will train all front-line workers, supervisors, and directors on the revised Comprehensive Family Assessment and the ISP process. This training will include a focus on engaging with families to gather information, analyzing the information to create a basis for informed decision-making, identifying the nature and extent of underlying condition, and developing an ISP based on the strengths and needs identified to ultimately help the families reduce or eliminate risks and provide safe, stable homes for their children without continued DHR intervention. This training will be rolled out across the state over the remainder of FY 2021 and FY

2022. Districts 2, 4, 5, and Jefferson have been trained. Districts 1 and 8 will be trained June 2022. The remaining districts will be trained between July and September 2022.

- The Department will continue to partner with the Alabama Network of family Resource Centers to provide Strengthening Families training to front-line workers, supervisors, and directors across the state. Strengthening Families is a framework that was developed by the Center for the Study of Social Policy to prevent child abuse and neglect. The approach helps child welfare systems/staff work with parents to build protective factors, including Parental Resilience, Social Connections, Concrete Support in Times of Need, Knowledge of Parenting and Child Development, and Social and Emotional Competence of Children. This training will be provided through the end of FY 2021 to 7 districts across the state. All districts were provided Strengthening Families training during 2021.
- Quality Child Welfare Practice Specialists will continue to work with supervisors across the state to build capacity around the CFA/ISP process and enhance the supervisors' skills related to delivering feedback to their staff regarding the quality of the work completed. The specialists will provide this feedback through coaching sessions held monthly with supervisors in each county and will be based on peer reviews and observation of supervisor/worker conferences. This work is ongoing across the state. This work began in Jefferson and District 4, and positive improvements were seen in the work, particularly in District 4.

Through these endeavors, some of the gains we saw in the PIP counties throughout 2022 included safety being assessed more frequently (at least monthly) and at critical junctures in more cases; threats and protective capacities included more frequently in CFAs and ISPs; more frequent efforts to locate and identify fathers and more attempts to locate and identify both maternal and paternal relatives; more frequent monitoring of safety and well-being in workers' monthly visits with children and families; more frequent assessment of permanency options during workers' monthly visits; and improved practices at the point of case transfer, including minimal disruption of services and protocols to identify and address management of safety risks in more cases.

PIP and CFSP

The service array is addressed both in the PIP and CFSP. In the PIP, the strategies outlined were more immediate action items, while the items outlined in the CFSP involved longer term work and long-range planning. The PIP plans call for activities taking place to initiate the Resource Development work within the counties in the next two years, by developing Resource Development plans to improve capacity for services needed in the respective areas. Work was also initiated by holding a statewide Resource Development training in October 2019 for all counties, including directors and resource development staff. We also plan to address the need for crisis intervention services statewide by working to increase the availability of these services within the next 2 years. Over the next 5 years, we will be working with the counties in districts to enhance their ability to identify service gaps, develop local resources, and enhance their collaboration with community partners. While we believe that the work around resource development is critical, and some aspects will begin immediately, we also recognize that some of the work involves longer range planning via the CFSP. For further updates in the area of service array, see the APSR section on "Plan for Enacting the State's Vision".

Changes in Services and/or Program Design

Although information on services provided over the last year are found elsewhere in the APSR, the below content provides a summary of ways in which practice enhancements were delivered to county child welfare staff. Practice enhancements are delivered to counties via training and individual meetings with practice specialists assigned to the county. Family Services Division developed district trainings around Safety Assessment and Response, Documentation, Home Studies, Multi Needs Policy and Process, Adoptions, and Subsidies and throughout the year has provided this training in multiple counties when requested by the Director or when arranged by Family Services due to case concerns identified during QA reviews.

The third annual 3-day CPS conference was held in May 2021, specifically designed for front line staff with the theme, *Initial Safety and So Much More*. Conference topics included sexual abuse, fatalities, planning from the beginning, and

mental health services. The annual 2-day Supervisor's Conferences are being planned for June and July 2022 with the theme, *Leadership – Showing the Way*. There will be sessions around safety assessment, narrative, and dispositions.

The QA Division began offering and facilitating virtual district trainings in September 2020 in the following areas: CFA/ISP training and Meaningful Caseworker Visit training. All districts will receive this training for frontline staff and supervisors and administrators. Virtual STEP trainings for all new hires began in September 2020. The TIPS Certification training for staff who will teach the TIPS classes in their counties are held in person, in Birmingham and Montgomery, and are presently occurring. Earlier this year, the Children's Alliance offered certification in Virtual TIPS classes for our master trainers, who in turn have been able to certify our county and child placing agency leasers to teach TIPS virtually. Counties and child placing agencies have been encouraged to continue in-person TIPS classes and use the virtual sessions as additional sessions to help reduce the backlog of prospective foster and adoptive parents as in-person classes are limited in number to allow for social distancing during COVID. In-person trainings resumed during 2022.

Systemic Factor: Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Item 31. Ongoing engagement and consultation with community stakeholders

Consultation with Community Stakeholders through Quality Assurance

In addition to having a QA committee in each county with stakeholder representation, the State SQ Committee also has representation of stakeholders across the state and meets on a quarterly basis.

The Office of QCWP continues to conduct random case record reviews with count supervisors across the state. The review tool used provides detailed information that will be beneficial to the supervisor to use during worker/supervisor conferences. These reviews give OQCWP the opportunity to work one-on-one with supervisors to help them understand how to engage and empower their works to produce family centered case work that is in line with policy. In turn workers feel hears, valued, and become invested in good outcomes for the children and families they serve. The Office of QCWP also provides support to supervisors across the state in structuring individual conferences with their workers. This is an avenue to support supervisors and their caseworkers to discuss needed services to address the underlying conditions of families that come to the attention of the Department. Those outcomes should be beneficial to staff retention, thus offering stability with families and community partners.

The Alabama Department of Human Resources has continued with its process for community consultation through its quality assurance operations. Birth parents, relative caregivers, and youths are interviewed during OSRIs and QRIs when appropriate. The OSRIs are completed during district reviews by the State QA unit in conjunction with county staff that has been trained in the OSRI process and QRIs are completed by the local QA committees. The OSRI results from district reviews are shared with county directors, DAS, and county QA committees. The QRI results are shared with the county director, supervisor, and worker. Birth parents, relative caregivers, and youths are also provided an avenue to give input through satisfaction surveys and each county DHR has an independently functioning QA committee with Jefferson County having an additional committee for their Bessemer region. While each county QA committee completes QRIs to measure and monitor outcomes for children and families, it is an expectation that each committee also complete stakeholder interviews with the assigned QA specialist annually to measure and monitor systemic issues. Stakeholders interviewed include juvenile court judges, juvenile probation officers, foster parents, law enforcement, education personnel, service providers including mental health and child advocacy centers, attorneys and Guardians-ad-litem, and Agency staff. Information and any resulting recommendations from OSRIs, QRIs, and stakeholder interviews are provided to each county department to strengthen their practices toward better outcomes.

The Office of Quality Assurance routinely conducts CFSR District reviews to evaluate the quality of service and the outcomes achieved by children and families. Children and Family Services is assisting conducting a safety assessment as a

part of the OQCWP record reviews. The Office of QCWP also conducts regular record reviews with county supervisors to promote best practice and build supervisory capacity.

The Office of Adoption continues to partner with a number of stakeholders in public awareness activities and in their efforts to recruit additional foster and/or adoptive families. These stakeholders include adoption, foster care and ILP staff, members and volunteers of heart Gallery Alabama, Children's Aid Society's APAC program, Kids to Love Foundation, Wendy's Wonderful Kids Recruiters and the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association.

Alabama Children's Justice Task Force (CJTF)

The CJTF continued to be active during the past year. Five CJTF meetings were held virtually via the zoom platform during this reporting period.

Although the on-going COVID health crisis has impacted the implementation of the planned Children's justice trainings during this reporting period, trainings have continued, and projects have moved forward. Due to the increasing number of COVID cases and hospitalizations, trainings were postponed until the final quarter of FY 2021. Two sessions of Family Violence Assessment and Safety in CPS Training were held July 28-29 and August 18-19, 2021, in Montgomery, which is centrally located in the state. This training audience is child welfare staff, domestic violence shelter staff, and law enforcement officers. This training works to help attendees better work collaboratively on these complex and volatile cases and provides a conduit for training on the continually changing laws regarding domestic violence. Fifty (50) people were trained during the course of both trainings. An additional three trainings are scheduled for FY 2022.

The Substance Abuse Assessment two-day training was held three times in the third and fourth quarters of FY 2021. The training was held in Montgomery, which is centrally located, May 24-25, July 19-20, and August 2-3, 2021. The training attendees are child welfare staff, supervisors and administrative staff and focuses on the complex nature of families that are struggling with issues of substance use and how to assess for child safety in these cases. Further, this training increases knowledge about substance abuse training assessment services throughout the state and the importance of collaborative work between multidisciplinary team members to meet the many needs of families struggling with substance use issues. More than 65 persons were trained during these 3 trainings. An additional four trainings are scheduled for FY 2022.

The Medical Aspects in Child Abuse/Neglect Investigations/Assessment training was offered virtually on two days, each day from 9:00am-noon for a total of 6 training hours. The training covered topics such as "Bruising, Burns, and Neglect", "Abusive Head Trauma/Abusive Abdominal Trauma", "Fractures and Neglect", and "Sexual Abuse/Torture and Recognition Signs and Symptoms of Human Trafficking". The trainer was nationally renowned child abuse expert Dr. Melissa Peters, a specialist from UAB Children's Hospital, the CHIPS Program. Almost 500 participants were trained during this 2-day training. Training attendees included child welfare staff, prosecutors, law enforcement, children's advocacy staff, medical staff, and other multidisciplinary members as identified by the multidisciplinary teams.

Child Death Training was held on August 16-17 and August 19-20, 2021. One training was held in Birmingham and the other in Montgomery. A total of 33 attendees including social workers, law enforcement, coroners, and deputy coroners were trained. This training, conducted by the Alabama Department of Public Health, Alabama Children Death Review Systems, trained investigative staff and coroners in the skills and procedures in investigating child death cases, specifically helping them to learn Alabama's Sudden Infant Death Investigations (SUIDI) protocol.

The Investigation and Prosecution of Child Physical and Sexual Abuse Seminar was held February 14-15, 2022. This training, designed for social workers, prosecutors, and law enforcement included such topics as "The Search for Corroborating Evidence", "No Words Needed: Working with Recanting and Nonverbal Victims", "When Dad Hits Mom: The Intersection of Domestic Violence and Child Abuse", "A Very Particular Set of Skills: Investigating Human Trafficking", "The Matrix Reloaded: Predicting Trends in Technology-Facilitated Child Abuse", and "Ethical Considerations in Crimes Against Children Cases". Fifty-four (54) attendees participated in this two-day virtual training.

In addition to the trainings, the Children's Justice (CJ) Task Force continued to be active during the past year. Four CJ Task Force meetings were held virtually via the Zoom platform during this reporting period.

One of the longstanding projects the CJTF has approved is to provide mini-grant opportunities for the local child abuse multidisciplinary teams in the state. The primary purpose of the mini grants is to assist the county multidisciplinary teams in improving the systems responses to the assessment, investigation, and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases. In October 2021, an application to apply for local project or training mini-grant funding was sent to each county DHR. The county multidisciplinary teams were required to involve, at a minimum, representatives from law enforcement, child welfare, district attorneys, and child advocacy centers in providing information related to the team's mini-grant application.

Mini grant applications were received in late October 2021 from 57 local multidisciplinary teams. Fifty-three (53) of the child abuse multidisciplinary teams requested registration slots for the International Symposium on Child Abuse, sponsored by the National Child Advocacy Center in Huntsville, AL. This year's conference was conducted virtually on March 21-24, 2022. The CJTF approved 403 slots for multidisciplinary team members to participate. With the use of CJ Grant funds, 332 local multidisciplinary team members, representing 55 counties participated in the virtual International Symposium on Child Abuse. The registered attendees were multidisciplinary and represented DHR child welfare staff (115 participants), DA/ADA staff (32 participants), law enforcement (62 participants), child advocacy center staff (102 participants), and mental health, legal aide, medical, education, domestic violence staff, and CJTF members (21 participants). The International Symposium of Child Abuse is considered one of the elite child abuse training opportunities in the country.

Additionally, ten (10) multidisciplinary teams requested and were approved by the CJTF for local child abuse training projects or other child abuse projects e.g., printing, and phone service for a rural area. One of the local training projects was for a regional child abuse training encompassing 4 counties. All approved local training projects are encouraged to include adjoining counties when possible.

A requirement of the CJ grant is that every 3 years a comprehensive review and evaluation of the investigative, administrative, and both civil and criminal judicial handling of cases of child abuse and neglect is conducted. The purpose of this Three-year Assessment is to guide the training and policy recommendations made by the CJTF and subsequently direct the projects to be approved for funding with CJ Grant monies. Alabama was required to conduct this Three-year Assessment during FY 2021 .

One of the major sources of information for the CJTF's Three-Year Needs Assessment was completion of a survey by county multidisciplinary teams. The survey was included as a component of the mini grant application process, which provided responses from 52 county MDTs including the four largest counties in the state. A segment of the survey requested feedback on specific child abuse training needs from the different disciplines. For child welfare staff the following training topics were ranked in descending order of need with number one being identified as the greatest need for training:

1. Assessing for child safety in cases of child trafficking
2. Assessing safety in cases involving child death
3. Testifying in court on child abuse/neglect cases
4. Understanding the medical aspects of physical and sexual abuse
5. Assessing child safety in cases of domestic/family violence
6. Assessing child safety in cases with substance abuse issues
7. Determining a dispositional finding on child abuse/neglect cases

The Three-year Needs Assessment was completed and submitted with 2021 Children's Justice Grant application in May 2021. Projects approved by the CJTF for Children's Justice Grant funding over the next three years will be based on the FY 2021 Three-year Needs Assessment.

Alabama Judicial and Child Welfare Collaborative

Statewide Judicial Child Welfare Summits have been an annual event since 2014. The focus has been around timely permanency for children and has included presentations around areas such as child development, child welfare federal and state laws, case plans/ISP process, fatherhood initiatives, kinship guardianship, working with children who have experienced trauma, and more. Judges and County Directors have participated regularly with a representation of supervisors, DHR attorneys, parent attorneys and guardians-ad litem attending as well.

The Judicial Child Welfare Summit was last held November 3-5, 2021, with more than 50 counties represented. Topics presented included Working with Foster Youth and a panel of current and former foster youth participated. There was a Fishbowl exercise involving a parent attorney, a GAL and a DHR attorney. Statewide and local data presentations were made, and a guided team time allowed for a deeper dive into county data. We partnered with the FBI for a presentation around Sex Trafficking. ESSA/Educational information was provided and there was time for an open forum as well.

Alabama currently has twenty-four teams of child welfare and judicial members who are dedicated to the mission of this collaborative which is to safely reduce the number of children in out of home care and place them in forever families. iCAN continues to be one component of our ongoing work with the courts and embraces a philosophy that has been accepted and incorporated into practice at the statewide level and in many counties. iCAN represents a partnership between child welfare and out judiciary that includes open and frank dialogue regarding barriers to optimal outcomes for our children and families as well as what changes are necessary to overcome those barriers. iCAN is one of several initiatives that can be credited with children spending less time in out of home care. These meetings help strengthen the partnerships between the judiciary and child welfare to achieve permanency for Alabama's children and families.

Another such initiative is a statewide permanency project. Child welfare staff and legal staff schedule detailed trainings with county staff to look at individual cases to assure safety, well-being, and ultimately permanence. These staffings often bring to light overarching issues within a county or district that may be impacting case outcomes. This allows for SDHR to support the counties with trainings and other supports crafted to address individualized needs. These efforts have included things such as working to decrease continuance in court, perfect service in legal cases, expedite the receipt of orders, and increase an emphasis on kinship guardianship. This type of work has led to statewide sustainable changes. An example was passage of a law within the past year that removed some of the obstacles to finalizing kinship guardianship placements such as the parents no longer being required to give consent to this as a permanency plan as well as making state funding available for kinship guardianship placements when a child is not eligible for federal funding.

Adoption Recruitment Partners – See also Permanency Outcomes 1 & 2 – Stakeholder Collaboration

The success in recruitment, matching and placement of children in permanent custody with a goal of Adoption No Identified Resources (ANIR) continues to be greatly due to the high level of cooperation and continued collaboration among the recruitment partners that help us promote the need for more adoptive families. We continue our quarterly partners meetings that include staff with recruitment responsibilities from the Office of Foster Care, Heart Gallery Alabama, Children's Aid Society/APAC pre-adoption program, and volunteers from the AFAPA. The location and host for meetings rotate between all agencies involved. These collaborative meetings have proven to be very informative providing updated staffing changes, conference schedules, recruitment activities, and adoption success stories. Each host provides an opportunity for all partners to place an item on the upcoming agenda as well as forwarding meeting notes after each meeting.

Collaboration with Foster Parents – Conflict Resolution Team

The Out of Home Care Policies & Procedures Manual includes a section on Supports to Foster Parents. A process for dealing with conflicts that may occur between foster parents and the Department is outlined in this policy which was updated in May 2020. The Conflict Resolution Team (CRT) meetings that have occurred over the most recent fiscal years, requiring state office assistance are as follows:

- FY 2020 – 4 CRT meetings
- FY 2021 – 1 CRT meeting (as of 03/12/2021)

The State's CRT has two facilitators (a state Office of Foster Care Liaison and AFAPA President) along with the CRT comprised of 2 independent county directors and 2 foster/adoptive parent representatives. All team members are presented with pertinent case information in advance to assist in fair feedback as well as prepare questions.

Foster Parent Advocates are available regionally to help foster parents at the time they file a complaint with their county office. Due to the advocates' involvement in the local process, complaints are often resolved locally rather than referred to the state team. The AFAPA and Office of Foster Care continue to be available to provide county social workers and foster parents training on the Conflict Resolution Process and Alabama's Foster Parent Bill of Rights.

The Alabama Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative (CWCI) and the State Quality Assurance Committee

In addition to the regular and in-depth involvement of internal and external parties in QA, Children & Family Services relies on a range of individuals and groups to assist in providing input into the ongoing planning and service delivery system. The 2 key stakeholder groups from whom the Department seeks input are the State QA Committee and the CWCI. Information regarding the stakeholder membership in both groups is provided under their respective headings. Since the initiation of the PIP in December 2019, ongoing opportunities have been provided to both groups to offer input to the APSR. Members of the CWCI and State QA Committee were also included in the Joint Planning Meeting held on June 9, 2022. Included in the membership of the CWCI is a member of the SDHR Adult Protective Services (APS) staff. This inter-departmental partnership is important and promotes a merging of CPS and APS issues in child welfare work. Some youth with significant developmental delays and/or mental health issues need ongoing support and assistance after they age out of care. Referrals to APS may be appropriate as children transition out of foster care into adulthood. In those cases, APS staff are included in case planning for the youth.

Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative (CWCI)

Alabama's Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative is a team of Department and other agency staff that typically meet on a quarterly basis. In addition to CFS staff and staff from other divisions within SDHR, partner agencies that are represented in the membership include the Alabama Court Improvement Staff, the Department of Child Abuse/Neglect Prevention (CBCAP), the Department of Rehabilitation Services, the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, the Alabama Network of Children's Advocacy Centers, the Poarch band of Creek Indians, the Alabama Department of Public Health, VOICES for Alabama's Children, Children's Justice task Force, SDHR Adult Services, Housing & Urban Development, and the Department of Youth Services.

A useful outcome has been sharing across agencies information regarding current activities, upcoming training sessions, etc. Input was sought from this stakeholder group for the 2020-2024 CFSP and subsequent APSRs, and this input was shared with Management Teams of the Quality Assurance and Family Services Divisions of SDHR. In the past year 2021-2022, new members of the Team have been added to include a foster youth with lived experience and representatives from the AL State Department of Education. There are CWCI members that were involved in planning and provision of input for the CFSR PIP. The CWCI team also serves in an advisory capacity to the ADCANP CBCAP grant.

The State Quality Assurance Committee (SQAC)

The State Quality Assurance Committee is an independent body of statewide representatives of the child and family service delivery system whose functions include monitoring outcomes and agency performance from a statewide perspective. This Committee serves as a link between the community and SDHR, promotes an effective child welfare system that supports positive outcomes for children and families served, and issues reports as part of its Citizen Review Panel responsibilities or for any other purpose. The SQAC is also a stakeholder group from which input has been sought for the APSR and current CFSP. The Committee meets quarterly and data updates from Family Services and Quality Assurance are provided at each meeting. More detailed information on the work of the SQAC can be located in the Alabama SQAC Annual Report. The current SQAC consists of representation from the Department of Children and Neglect Prevention, a foster/adoptive parent, the Department of Sociology and Social Work , APAC, a county QA committee

member, the Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parent Association, ADAP, Children First Foundation, the Alabama Network of CACs, Children's Aid Society, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, the Alabama Child Death Review System, the United Methodist Children's Home, Montgomery County Sheriff's Department, the Department of Youth Services, Administrative Office of Courts, Alabama Department of Mental Health, community volunteer, a county supervisor/QA coordinator, and a county director.

Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP), also known as the Children's Trust Fund, is a stand-alone state agency created by an Act of the Alabama Legislature in 1983 to address the State's growing problem of child maltreatment. The ADCANP secures resources to fund evidenced-based community programs committed to the prevention of child maltreatment and advocates for children and the strengthening of families. The ADCANP also serves as the state chapter for Prevent Child Abuse America and is the state lead agency for federally funded Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs as part of CAPTA. The ADCANP Director and CBCAP Program manager serve on the CWCI team. In addition, ADCANP's Director services on the SDHR QA Committee as well as on the sub-committees of Child Death Review and Foster Parents, as a part of the SQAC. Participation in these committees allows input around prevention work to be a part of the PSSF, IV-B, CFSP/PIP, and CFSR planning.

The ADCANP has worked collaboratively with other state agencies as well as public and private sector agencies to strengthen the systems of service delivery to children and families. The ADCANP is active in many state initiatives and coordinating councils that seek collaboration among state agencies and groups working on behalf of children and families. Through these partnerships, ADCANP continues to expand partnerships as well as share resources. The Commissioner for DHR serves on the ADCANP Board of Directors. Through a strong partnership with DHR, ADCANP receives TANF funding to support community-based fatherhood programs to focus on parenting, healthy relationships, and economic stability. The ADCANP continues to partner with the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers in promoting its Strengthening Families work through a network of Strengthening Families certified trainers. This partnership has trained current DHR supervisors and frontline workers, and this training will continue through the current fiscal year.

All ADCANP funded programs (grantees) have updated their mandatory reporting policy and have trained all staff members on the new legislation that strengthened the mandatory reporter obligations. All ADCANP grantees continue to be required to receive and incorporate the Strengthening Families/Protective Factors training into their communities throughout the state.

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP) uses CBCAP funds to support various parent education and support programs. This includes two programs serving the underserved population of incarcerated mothers through prenatal and parent education classes, doula support, and opportunities for the mothers to stay connected with their children. CBCAP funds also support Children's Aid Society in providing the EPIC parenting classes to pregnant and parenting runaway and homeless youth through the Project Independence program, as well as providing the class in Spanish to parents in the Hispanic and Latino communities. Finally, CBCAP funds support the Alabama Parenting Assistance Line that provides information and support via phone call, texting, or chatting online to anyone in Alabama wanting to become a more confident parent.

CBCAP funds also support parents by funding a Healthy Families America home visiting site in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This home visiting model, offered through Prevent Child Abuse America, is implemented across the United States and internationally through its comprehensive accreditation and training program that yields significant research showing positive outcomes for families. Until recently, Alabama had only one Healthy Families America site, but the use of CBCAP funds enabled a second site. Additionally, CBCAP funds support the ongoing efforts of the Alabama Parent Advisory Council, a 9-member council of diverse parents across the state who further parent involvement in the planning and implementation of our agency's prevention programs and activities.

CBCAP dollars help serve Alabama's children with disabilities through seven HEARTS respite programs. The HEARTS respite program is offered across the state through United Cerebral Palsy affiliates and offer vouchers for respite services to parents of children with disabilities up to age 19, which allows the parent a short break from caring for a person with a disability or chronic illness so they can take time for themselves, their other children or spouse, or to tend to their own medical/personal needs. The purpose of the program is to reduce the stress of full-time caregiving associated with raising a child with a disability or with special healthcare needs, strengthen families, and reduce social isolation.

Another critical use of the funds will be for the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers (ANFRC) to develop new Family Resource Centers in underserved areas of the state, as well as increase the capacities of existing centers through the Family Centered Coaching training and the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support training. Finally, funds will go to Charles Henderson Child Health Center to "address ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and toxic stress in youth and families" among the community they serve in Troy, Alabama. This work is led by a local pediatrician who identifies and assesses patients exhibiting signs of ACES and develops a treatment plan for them. The program provides positive parenting workshops and therapeutic expression sessions for children that includes art therapy, yoga, and creative writing therapy. These innovative efforts to foster a "resilient community" for the children and families served is not being offered in any other community in the state.

Alabama Foster / Adoptive Parent Association

The Department continues its strong partnership and contract with the Alabama Foster/Adoptive Parent Association to support improved outcomes for children through joint training sessions, regional meetings, and various recruitment and fundraising activities. The Association has nine (9) regional representatives who serve as trained advocates and liaisons with the Department. This organization provides additional training for foster and adoptive resources and develops them to become trained parent advocates. These identified advocates receive increased training around policy and practice to serve as advocates and empower foster/adoptive resources in supporting the children and their needs. In addition, regional foster/adoptive representatives are identified through the AFAPA to help provide support and training and offer resources in the specific region. The AFAPA has a very comprehensive website with guidance around this and other areas of advocacy for foster/adoptive parents. The Foster Parent Bill of Rights is posted for the convenience of our partners in caring for foster/adoptive children. See <https://afapa.org/> for more information.

The AFAPA representatives have continued to provide trainings statewide to include Reasonable and Prudent Parenting Standards (RPPS). State DHR office staff have co-trained RPPS to foster parents with AFAPA representatives. The AFAPA staff meet quarterly to train their advocates. Membership and services are offered to kinship care providers. The AFAPA was instrumental in collaborating with State DHR to revise the Conflict Resolution Policy (CRT). Our CRTs continue to be a platform where out foster parents have an opportunity to be heard regarding any grievance not settled from their county of origin. The AFAPA advocates on behalf of foster, adoptive, and kinship care parents. More attention has been placed on assisting counties throughout the state who do not have a local association. The AFAPA has been an active member of our provider quarterly meeting series. The Association was not able to hold their annual conference in 2020 due to the pandemic but has been able to restart mini conferences with less people in attendance. There have been 2 mini conferences with more scheduled in May and September 2021. The Association will host their annual conference in May 2022.

Item 32. Coordination of CFSP services with other federal programs

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Court Improvement Program

Alabama DHR staff works closely with the Administrative Office of Courts staff to address policies and practices of both the court system and the child welfare system. The AOC was a key partner in the implementation of Alabama's CFSR, Round 2, PIP through assisting in identifying and implementing steps to improve dependency case flow management and educating judges and guardians ad litem. They have continued to partner with DHR in the Round 3 CFSR through assisting

with survey distribution and collection of responses that were incorporated into the Statewide Assessment, providing stakeholder input during the CFSR, and having staff serve on 2 of the 4 PIP work groups, including being a co-leader of one of the work groups. Alabama DHR and AOC have shared data relevant to permanency hearing timeliness, TPR filing, hearing and disposition timeliness, foster care entry, and permanency achievement. The data is beneficial in identifying areas where additional resources may be needed to ensure that appropriate services are provided within required time frames. The AOC staff provided input and assistance in drafting Alabama's Kinship Guardianship Subsidy Act which passed in the FY 2010 legislative session and assisted in organizing videoconferencing training on several legal topics for attorneys, court employees, and child welfare staff. In addition, DHR staff has partnered with AOC staff to monitor the timeliness of permanency hearings and other timeframes in the dependency and TPR case process through sharing of data which will be used to develop future trainings. Discussions have been held with AOC and internal state DHR legal staff regarding training.

Local onsite trainings have occurred in some counties and the State DHR Legal Office has been involved in adoption cases throughout the state conducting onsite reviews and having discussions with local attorneys and with some judges. The Legal Office has been a significant source of support for the counties around permanency in general and particularly adoption. Department staff is represented on the Probate/Juvenile Subcommittee on Adoption issues of the Court Improvement Program, which was formed to bring juvenile and probate court judges together to discuss issues that may arise in processing adoption cases. Training initiatives provided by AOC include the following activities:

- Training sessions for newly appointed or elected juvenile court judges that typically will include a summary of subject matter jurisdiction in Alabama juvenile courts, as well as an overview of the Juvenile Dependency and TPR processes in Alabama (statutes, court rules, regulations, caselaw, etc.).
- Training events take place for guardians ad litem by means of initial certification courses and recertification courses. The 7-hour initial certification course will generally include topics such as dependency and TPR law. The 3-hour recertification course generally consists of juvenile law updates and information on other pertinent child welfare issues such as child abuse medical evaluations, interviewing children, and human trafficking.
- In a project that has now ended, Court Improvement Program staff with funding support and partnership from Casey Family Programs, was involved with the Reimagining Dependency Courts Project in Jefferson and Mobile Counties. In this initiative the National Center for State Courts worked with the State of Alabama Judicial Branch of government to strengthen the leadership and governance of dependency courts and improve case management of dependency cases with the aim being to transform dependency courts into family focused courts.
- Other training events provided by AOC included parent's attorney training, family court Judges seminars, and Chief Juvenile Probations Officers/Juvenile Court Administrators trainings.

SDHR FAMILY ASSISTANCE DIVISION – TANF

The SDHR Family Assistance Division administers programs pursuant to the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Block Grant. Services and benefits are provided consistent with the four statutory purposes of the Block Grant and encourage the care and support of children in their own homes or in the homes of relatives by furnishing temporary financial assistance and other services to strengthen and maintain family life.

The Family Assistance (FA) Program

This is Alabama's time limited cash assistance program for low-income families with children. During FY 2021, a monthly average of 7,644 families received assistance representing about 13,677 children and 2,932 adults. Adult recipients of FA and certain former recipients are also served by the JOBS Program which provides services and assistance with finding and retaining employment. Supportive services include assistance in overcoming barriers to employment, increasing marketable skills and employability, gaining and/or retaining employment so as to transition from welfare to work. The Department contracts with the Alabama Coalition Against Domestic Violence to provide services to TANF eligible clients who may be victims of domestic violence. Services are provided statewide under a program known as the Special Assessment, Intervention, and Liaison (SAIL) Project. The SAIL program provides services to families involved with domestic violence to help them remove barriers to becoming self-sufficient in a safe manner. Services are provided

through a Domestic Violence Specialist who conducts assessments, provide counseling, and assists with safety planning. Services are available as needed to all counties that do not have an on-site Domestic Violence Specialist. During FY 2021 the SAIL program received 1,807 referrals. Those referrals came from every DHR program and from the community with most DHR referrals coming from FA eligibility workers as a result of a domestic violence screening tool. The coalition worked with 812 SAIL participants, helped 444 participants acquire employment, and provided financial assistance to over 400 low-income individuals.

Alabama Army National Guard

The Alabama Department of Human Resources entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with the Army National Guard in June 2016 establishing a partnership to improve outcomes for children in foster care, specifically helping youths aging out of care who have limited connections to their community and minimal job skills. The focus of the partnership involves working with the Alabama National Guard to share job and mentorship opportunities for our young people. The Alabama national guard provides recruitment and retention personnel that provide marketing products, subject matter experts, client counseling and recruitment information to DHR representatives. The Department provides opportunities for the National Guard to attend, instruct, and host events that will cultivate potential job opportunity training. On December 6, 2016, based on this partnership which demonstrated strong community relationship, the Alabama Department of Human Resources was recognized at the Army Community Partnership Award ceremony in Washington, D.C. The partnership with the Alabama National Guard as well as the Alabama Department of Education's team of high school college and career counselors continues. Representatives from the Alabama National Guard are encouraged to participate in all state-wide Independent Living events and regional Dream Council Meetings.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING – DESCRIPTION OF USE/PLANS

Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief

Please see Disaster Plan

Supplemental Funding – FFPSA Transition Grant

During the week of June 14-18, 2021, the State Department of Human Resources released Requests for Proposals with the hope of developing additional specialized placement resources.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Alabama will explore ways in which the current collaborative relationships will be maintained and enhanced. In line with the CFSR findings above, Alabama will demonstrate concerted efforts to solidify working relationships with the Departments of Education and Labor, Head Start, Medicaid, and state/federal agencies whose partnership will strengthen the work done with Alabama's children and families. There is for example, a representative from the Alabama State Department of Education on the State QA Committee which will help advance collaboration with our education partners.

PIP & CFSP

Agency responsiveness to the community is addressed under Goals 3 and 5 of the approved PIP. A collaboration emphasis in Goal 3 which related to timely achievement of permanency for children in care 12-23 months, includes strategies and key activities that outline the agency's partnership with the Administrative Office of Courts as well as partnership at the local level between county DHR offices and the local judge/court system to improve the engagement of fathers and paternal relatives throughout the life of the case which will not only improve permanency outcomes for children but also strengthen overall practice and service delivery to families. Under Goal 5, a key activity that serves to strengthen collaboration is that of expanding membership of both the State QA Committee and the CWCI team, affording both groups regular opportunities to provide input to the CFSP/APSR. See the update under Quality Assurance System for further information. The CFSP also outlines the collaborations that are planned/ongoing between the agency and various community partners. These collaborations include the Alabama Judicial & Child Welfare Collaboration Project which includes ongoing work around the iCAN project, local and state QA committees, the Alabama Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative, the Alabama Department of Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention, the Alabama Foster/Adoptive Parent Association,

the Alabama Law Institute, and others that are outlined in the CFSP. It is our belief that these collaborations lead to better outcomes for families and children as they help address a number of critical areas of practice, including timely achievement of permanency, well-being, prevention of child abuse, and placement stability.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
See under items 31-32	See under items 31-32

Collaboration Through Joint Planning

A Joint Planning Meeting was conducted on June 9, 2022. Please see Appendix 3 for summaries of the three breakout sessions that were conducted.

Systemic Factor: Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Item 33. Application of standards to all approved homes / institutions

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

The Department addresses the quality of care that foster parents provide to children by ensuring all staff document their contacts on FACTS in the provider narrative. This is accomplished during semi-annual and annual visits by the county resource worker as well as monthly visits from the foster care worker assigned to the case. Specific recommendations are also made by State QA on specific case reviews.

The Department and contracted providers still train, assess, and approve traditional and therapeutic foster homes according to the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes. All foster homes in the state are approved by any of three entities. The county DHR office may approve traditional foster homes located in their specific county. Contract entities offering Therapeutic Foster Care (TFC) will approve all homes providing services under the agency's purview.

Private child-placing agencies (CPAs) may approve foster homes for their own use or the use of the Department. In all cases, these homes must comply with the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes or the Alabama Therapeutic Foster Care Guide if the home is to serve TFC children. The specific process for approving a home including required materials and clearances can be found within those standards.

Child Placing Agencies providing traditional family foster homes and adoption services must comply with Minimum Standards for Child Placing Agencies and Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes. There are copies of the site visit reports in the provider's files to demonstrate the standards are applied equitably. Child Placing Agencies providing therapeutic foster homes services must comply with Minimum Standards for CPAs, Minimum Standards for Family Foster Homes, and Alabama Therapeutic Foster Care Guide. There are copies of the site visit reports in the provider's files to demonstrate the standards are applied equitably.

Residential care facilities must comply with the Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities. There are copies of the site visit reports in the provider's files to demonstrate the standards are applied equitably. If an inspection/evaluation indicated non-compliance with the Minimum Standards, or the situation warrants, a corrective action plan may be developed to allow the licensee to achieve compliance with the Minimum Standards while continuing to care for children. The corrective action plan shall include the following:

- A statement of each deficiency
- A description of how the deficiency shall be corrected
- The date by which corrections shall be completed
- The signature of the Department's representative and licensee/facility representative

If the Licensee fails or refuses to comply with the corrective action plan, the Department may initiate adverse action such as suspension or revocation of the license/permit/approval. SHDR tracks all violations.

The Office of Licensing, Resource Management Division, will review and evaluate initial applications and supporting documents for completeness of contact and accuracy to ensure compliance with standards. Site visits, announced and unannounced, are made to verify compliance for the operation of a childcare facility or a child placing agency have been met, a six-month permit will be issued by the Department. Within six months, the Department will re-examine and re-evaluate every area of the facility included in the initial application. A renewal of a license, good for 2 years, will be issued if the Department is satisfied that the provider continues to meet and maintain Minimum Standards prescribed and published by the Department.

The Office of Licensing utilizes internal worksheets utilize to review personnel records, children's records, foster parents and adoptive records of residential childcare facilities and child placing agencies. Copies of the site visit reports are in the provider's files.

The Office of Licensing also provides support services, technical assistance, consultation, training, and interpretation of the Minimum Standards to prospective and existing childcare providers. The Office of Contracts also make monitoring visits to contracted providers to make sure that are in compliance with their contracts with the Department.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Alabama Bureau of Investigation (ABI) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) criminal record checks and Central Registry Child Abuse/Neglect (CAN) clearances shall be completed for each foster parent, adoptive parent, and staff members of child placing agencies and residential childcare facilities. The results of the criminal history checks must be received and deemed suitable prior to approval of foster care and adoptive parents. All applicants and holders of a childcare license or six-month permit, all applicants for employment in a paid or voluntary position, and all current employees in paid or voluntary positions must be suitable and of good moral character in order to operate or work in a childcare facility and child placing agency. Any staff family members living in the home or visiting overnight in the children's living units shall also be of good character and suitability and as such, a criminal background check shall be obtained for these persons as well.

The state ensures the safety of foster care and adoptive placements by working collaboratively with community partners. In addition to DHR, law enforcement, the courts, mental health agencies, physicians, school, day care centers, medical facilities, and public health agencies will have occasions to observe the results of child abuse and neglect. IF safety issues are identified in a foster home, they are assessed immediately, and dispositions are made within 30 days. When children have been placed in an adoptive home and report that they were abused or neglected while in a previous placement or in their birth parents' home, the county department receiving the report shall notify SDHR Office of Adoption.

Item 35. Process for ensuring diligent recruitment of potential foster/adoptive homes

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRSS / DATA

The child register and the provider register provide race and ethnicity information on both the population of children in care as well as current approved foster homes. This information is available to all counties on ERD reports which are accessible via FACTS. Counties are encouraged to consider any disparity in these numbers when developing recruitment strategies. The counties that participated in the market segmentation-driven recruitment planning sessions looked beyond race/ethnicity in their foster family and foster child population. Diligent Recruitment Planning was completed utilizing county wide demographic information as well as Lifestyle Segmentation Information provided through Tapestry (a program of ESRI) and developed strategies that delivered the message about the need for more foster parents to groups of people more likely to say yes to fostering.

State office staff will continue to participate in recruitment efforts at sporting events, festivals, and community events that families frequent. We will work in partnership with our county offices to support their efforts related to recruitment and retention, offering additional trainings, services and supports to our foster parents, and encouraging the use of the Permanency Roundtable process to assist counties and the placement staff with recruiting for our older foster youth who have permanency plans of Adoption No Identified Resource.

Recruitment for private agencies: Recruiting viable homes to provide foster care services for children/youth is vital. State DHR encourages vigorous and innovative recruitment initiatives by CPAs to maintain an adequate pool of foster parents to facilitate appropriate matching of children and foster homes. Advertisements, whether by television or radio announcements, by newspaper articles or by billboards or individual signs, should be focused on the services that a respective agency is providing to vulnerable children or youth in the state. To place a dollar amount for reimbursement for services or to imply that a provider earns a wage for providing a home for a child does not appear to exhibit sensitivity to the children and families that DHR and the provider community serve. It is certainly permissible to discuss the payment with the prospective foster parents. It is not appropriate to openly advertise rates to entice recruits. Recruitment of the foster parents of another licensing agency or a representative of that agency is unethical and is prohibited. If a provider engages in such activity, they will be placed on a corrective action plan to cease the activity and to monitor any staff who may be involved in it.

Alabama DHR continues to utilize the Recruitment Responsive Team (RRT) model for responding to families requesting more information about becoming a foster/adoptive parent. The RRT is provided through contract with CAS/APAC, but their staff do not have access to FACTS. They continue to record family intakes into the RRT database created by AdoptUsKids. That database underwent changes a few years ago and is now known as the Family Intake Tracking Tool (FITT). In the area of recruitment and retention of foster family/adoptive resource homes, it is believed that timeliness of response is a key component to retaining families. Families who contact the recruitment response team reach the team either by calling our toll-free recruitment hotline (1-866-4AL-KIDS / 1-866-425-5437) or by submitting an inquiry form through the DHR web site (www.dhr.alabama.gov). It is our expectation that a member of the RRT will respond to the family asking for general information about fostering/adoptive within 5 business days.

The Office of Adoption has an Administrative Assistant who has the responsibility for responding to child-specific inquiries on the following sites: www.dhr.alabama.gov, www.adoptuskids.org, and www.adoption.com. The Administrative Assistance is required to respond to child-specific inquiries within two weeks. Our partnership with Heart Gallery Alabama has been very beneficial in raising overall awareness of the need for more adoptive families but more specifically in providing another avenue for families to submit child-specific inquiries for children featured on this site. Heart Gallery utilizes donated time and talent from photographers around the state to capture the likeness of children waiting for forever families. They also raise funds from a variety of sources such as grants and fund raising, to fund the service they provide to Alabama DHR. Alabama DHR has had a contract with Heart Gallery Alabama that primarily funds staff to provide timely response and accurate information to families who inquire about children on their web sites or featured in on-site exhibits.

2022 Update – Joint Planning Meeting June 9, 2022

See Appendix 3, for session summaries

Item 36. Process in place for effective use of cross jurisdictional resources

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Home study requests received from another state for an adoptive placement in Alabama are not completed within 60 days, with one primary reason being the completion of TIPS typically takes 10 weeks. However, a status preliminary report typically would be provided within 60 days. Currently in FACTS, there is no way to track the percentage of preliminary reports that are received.

Data / Data Trend – Item Assessment

Geography is not a barrier to achieving permanency for children in the custody of the Department. The children with TPR and a goal of Adoption No Identified Resource are included in photo listing web sites and Alabama receives and responds to any inquiries. Inquiry data from Heart Gallery Alabama is already reported in an earlier section. The inquiries on that site are a good mix of both in-state and out-of-state families. The inquiries received and responded to through www.adoptuskids.org are primarily from out-of-state families.

The expeditious processing of referrals will allow permanency for children in a timely manner and reduce delays which are a barrier to permanent placement of children. We will continue to monitor workflow of staff. Tracking is accomplished through internal spreadsheets that are maintained. Barriers to processing include case crises, worker absence, and increased workload.

Continue to Provide ICPC Training and Case Consultation to County Staff

Permanency for children through the use of cross-jurisdictional resources continues to be completed. Home study requests for adoptive studies from other states are generally not completed in 60 days due to the ten-week requirement for completion of training. However, preliminary reports are requested within 60 days to meet the federal guidelines. While there is currently no mechanism for tracking the percentage of preliminary reports received, our FACTS unit has been asked to look at ways to access this information through enhancements to the FACTS system. Our ICPC staff have continued to provide training and daily case consultation to county staff. County staff have indicated their knowledge and skills regarding the ICPC process have been improved with training. The ICPC unit will continue to maintain interagency collaboration with the American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) as well as AAICPC, and other state ICPC offices. ICPC will continue to request permission to attend the annual ICPC Conference which provides training and federal updates for implementation of the ICPC process to state ICPC staff. Two ICPC Specialists attended the 2018 ICPC Conference. It is anticipated that two specialists will also attend the 2019 Annual Conference.

Inter-Jurisdictional Placements

Placements are made across county lines within the state as well as inter-jurisdictional placements through ICPC. Adoption studies on out-of-state families continue to be received for families who see our children on www.AdoptUsKids.org, www.heartgalleryalabama.com, www.adoption.com, and www.dhr.alabama.gov sites, resulting in a number of out-of-state placements. With increased recruitment efforts and matching to Alabama families, a higher percentage of placements are being made in the state as well. When a child is potentially matched with an out-of-state family, placements are made through the public or private adoption agency working with the family. When a resource is identified, in an effort to facilitate a successful placement, the specialist and the child's planning team determine the number of pre-placement visits necessary for the child and the out-of-state resource to feel comfortable in making the transition to a successful placement. The office of Adoption has increased efforts to identify and develop in-state resources for placement of waiting children to assist in expediting permanency for these children. The state is aware of inter-jurisdictional resources are being utilized and are occurring statewide through the use of internal spreadsheets, FACTS, and the Office of Adoption reporting forms.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

STRENGTHS	CHALLENGES
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. The state plans to maintain the Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes which apply to all foster family homes. There are guides for TFC and other types of residential services.2. The Department maintains an Office of Criminal History that ensures compliance with applicable federal regulations in this area. Criminal History	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Recruitment and Independent Living Services need to partner in a campaign focused at increasing the number of families willing/able to foster and adopt older youth in care.2. The Department needs more resource families of Hispanic ethnicity or with Spanish language skills.

<p>Check Letters of Suitability are on the Resource Record Review checklist.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The Department's administration expects counties to regularly deliver a message about the need for more foster/adoptive parents. 4. Annually in February, each county is expected to develop and implement a foster parent recruitment plan. 5. Each county has an identified Office of Foster Care Recruitment Consultant. This person is responsible for on-on-one dialogue with each county resource staff as well as quarterly reports regarding recruitment activities in their assigned county. The consultant also encourages counties to partner with neighboring counties for TIPS or Deciding Together classes when necessary. Many counties implement recruitment activities year-round. The majority of the county recruitment plans include delivering a message to communities of faith, social, and civic organizations and to other groups based on the market segmentation lifestyle grouping data we have on existing successful foster families. 6. The Department has executed a contract for recruitment of families interested in adopting children that meet the special needs definition. This vendor has coordinated recruitment efforts in communities of faith that include large churches in urban areas of the state as well as smaller rural congregations in the area of the Black Belt of the state. 7. Alabama has two Wendy's Wonderful Kids Child-Focused Recruiters. One for the Northern region of the state and one for the Southern region. 8. The Department and out post-adoption services program were recognized at a national meeting for linking pre-adoption (recruitment) and post-adoption services (hosted by NRC/AdoptUsKids & NACAC) 9. Heart Gallery Alabama partnership and the services they provide continue to grow. They continue to photograph, and video waiting children and allow use of these photographs and videos in other recruitment venues throughout the state. 10. The Kids to Love foundation continues to partner with Alabama in increasing the awareness of the needs of foster and adoptive children through the medium of television. 11. Kids to Love and CAS/APAC have developed a partnership. They recruit together in the 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. We need to increase the number of foster families willing/able to parent older youth in care. 4. We need to increase the number of foster families willing/able to parent children with special health care needs 5. We need to increase the number of foster families willing/able to parent sibling groups of three or more. 6. Review and confirm existing data collection mechanisms for families currently providing foster care services to medically fragile children/youth and investigate/develop options for identifying and tracking foster families willing/able to accept a child with special healthcare needs.
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<p>geographic area served by Kids to Love, and then APAC provides GPS training and home study services.</p> <p>12. The staff in the Office of Adoption are well-versed in the use of ICPC for cross-jurisdictional adoptive placements. Children with TPR and a goal of ANIR are featured on 4 different web-based photo-listings. Families from all over the country can see photos, videos, and written bios on our waiting children. Home studies from out-of-state families are received and processed on a regular basis. Once received, we acknowledge receipt back to the Agency that sent them and then the studies are forwarded on to placement staff for review and consideration as potential matches for our children. Adoption team considers out-of-state families on a regular basis and when children are matched with potential families living out-of-state, ICPC packets are submitted. The adoption placement staff has developed good working relationships with a number of home study agencies in other states. Our Wendy's Wonderful Kids recruiters routinely submit profiles on children in their caseloads to paper march sessions held by out-of-state agencies.</p> <p>13. The Department has a policy in place for releasing courtesy copies of home studies on families approved as a potential adoptive resource through DHR to other states.</p>	
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DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

- State will address Systemic Factor of **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention** through implementation of the Diligent Recruitment Plan as follows – See 2022 APSR Diligent Recruitment Plan:
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 33:
See DRP, Goal 9 – Objectives 1 & 2
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 34:
See DRP, Goal 12 – Objective 1
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 35:
See DRP, All Goals & Objectives
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 36:
See DRP: Goal 10 – Objectives 1 & 2
- State will address Systemic Factor of **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention** through implementation of the Round 3 PIP as follows – See Round 3 PIP most recent submission of July 1, 2021. In particular note Goal 3, Strategy D, Activities 1-8:

- The county improvement plan will include an assessment of the foster provider needs within the district and each county, as well as the assessment of needs of children in care who are 4-10 years of age. The recruitment process will be individualized.
- Each PIP implementation site will convene a team comprised of state and county staff to evaluate and determine the current state of available homes who are open for children ages 4-10, specifically those not yet legally free for adoption.
- Develop informational training on Recruitment Needs and how to formulate a plan in the PIP implementation sites.
- Train PIP implementation site resource supervisors and directors on the recruitment needs and plans.
- Each county in the implementation site will implement their recruitment plan.
- Recruit, train, and approve foster/adoptive families for children ages 4-10 to include homes that are willing to accept placement of children not yet legally free for adoption using established recruitment methods and resources using the established county recruitment plan.
- Monitor and evaluate using the county self-assessments conducted twice a year.
- Based on strategies found to be successful, develop a plan for statewide, phased implementation, that upon leadership approval would be initiated during the CFSP.

2022 Updates:

- Alabama's State Office most recently added The Office of Traditional Placements and Specialized Support. This unit supports statewide recruitment, retention, and support of homes. This unit also offers extended collaboration with counties, other state entities, tribal and local communities. The R & HCP unit is under the management of a Deputy Director and comprised of 2 full- time Program Specialist and 5 part-time retired employees.
- The Office of Traditional Placement and Specialized Support developed a Statewide TIPS availability map. This map will be updated and distributed quarterly.
- Continued collaboration with faith-based organizations to highlight population of youth in care
- Continued collaboration with Alabama's 211 -Kinship needs
- Continued collaboration with Family Resource Centers- Kinship Needs
- Continued collaboration with State Dept of Education- re: KINSHARE and KINSHIP
- Awareness of the Kinship navigator Website available in both English and Spanish
- Kinship Online Inquiry via Website- someone responds within 24 hours to questions or concerns. It's not just informational
- Continued collegiate recruitment campaigns at 4 of Alabama's largest Colleges and Universities
- Continued collaboration with an Alabama based National LGBTQ organization
- Higher Level Marketing Campaign which provides online recruitment using digital media
- Hosted 1st annual collaborative state office Spring Resource Fair

Monitoring and evaluation are occurring in various ways to include:

- Creating and using a spreadsheet for tracking purposes
- Receiving weekly updates from TIPS trainers regarding potential inquiries and enrollment status
- Increasing efforts to reach out to the public as needed through public appearances and advertisement
- Bi-weekly tracker for pilot counties
- Emails for updates
- Phone calls with county directors and resource staff to build the rapport that SDHR is a support
- Achieving licensed homes timely, typically within 90 days of completing TIPS training
- County staff are given suggested timeframes and follow up is being completed by SDHR
- County staff should have work plans to ensure that licensing is completed timely
- County DHR directors and supervisors along with SDHR staff attend orientation and Panel Nights to evaluate a county's progress

PLAN FOR ENACTING ALABAMA'S VISION

Please see the 2020 – 2024 CFSP for details on the data and rationale that supported the original selection of goals and objectives that comprise the Plan for Enacting Alabama's Vision.

Goal 1:

State DHR will support and further the development of the child welfare workforce to improve child welfare best practices.

Objectives:

State DHR will conduct focus groups and statewide surveys for staff, clients, community stakeholders, and providers in each county to solicit the strengths and needs of staff, which will help identify the areas that need improvement.

State DHR will review and conduct statewide trainings on the Alabama Practice Model. The Alabama Practice Model has 7 guiding principles: 1) Safety and Protection 2) Permanency, Stability, and Sufficiency 3) Well-Being and Development 4) Family-Centered & Culturally Responsive 5) Individualization of Services 6) Community Collaboration and 7) Professional/Organizational Competence.

The Department's current Practice Model, released on 09/30/2011, restated the principles, values, and best practices of the Department. The Practice Model guides service delivery and decision making at all levels and its purpose is to improve outcomes for the child and families of Alabama.

2022 Update:

Every new employee is trained on the Practice Model as part of the Striving Toward Excellent Practice (STEP) Foundations Training. This year 299 new child welfare employees were trained. Many aspects of the Practice Model are trained in more detail in other STEP modules.

- ***The Intake Module*** trains workers on assessing vulnerability and risk factors, gathering all pertinent information from reporters, and clearing agency records for relevant history. This module assists employees in assessing and ensuring safety and protection of children. This year 63 new employees completed this module.
- ***The Investigations Module*** trains workers on the dynamics of child abuse, trauma effects of abuse and neglect, medical evidence of abuse and neglect, actively involving the family/team in the safety assessment process, first contacts with parents/caregivers, safety planning, and interviewing. All of these topics assist employees in assessing and ensuring the safety and protection of children. This module also trains employees on identifying needs, developing and Individualized Service Plan (ISP), building and ISP team, conducting an initial ISP, and legal issues. These topics help workers better respond to and engage with families and children, and to identify families individual needs to offer appropriate services. This year 133 staff completed this module.
- ***The Case Management Module*** trains workers on providing services via the ISP Process, involving the family and team in crisis, building attachment and the impact of removal, gathering assessment information, assessing and treating the effects of abuse and neglect, contacts and visits with children and families focusing on meaningful case worker visits, assessing the child's strengths and needs, monitoring, evaluating, and revising the family's ISP, goals for permanency, and safe case closure. Each of these topics align with the Practice Model and assist employees in providing services, engaging with families and children, assessing for well-being, and working towards timely permanency for children. This year 143 staff completed this module.

Staff Training, Technical Assistance, and Evaluation

- State DHR is available for peer-to-peer consultative meetings as needed
- State DHR provides technical assistance, such as FACTS/ERD reports that focus on permanency, safety, and well-being
- State DHR conducts permanency staffings as need
- State DHR monitors progress through observation, documentation reviews, and ERD reports

GOAL 2:

State DHR will establish a resource development position to support all counties in identifying, recruiting, and assessing needed service providers to meet the needs of each county's children and families.

Objectives:

State DHR will conduct a statewide survey for staff, clients, community stakeholders, and providers in each county to solicit needed services, which will help identify what service providers are needed to strengthen families.

2022 Update:

- Quarterly Resource Development meetings with PIP counties are continuing.
- State DHR has identified Program Specialists to support county resource developers in trainings and recruitments. This Program Specialist also meets quarterly, or as needed, to assist with developing and/or monitoring resource development plans.
- A breakout session was conducted during the Joint Planning Meeting regarding Resource Assessment. This session focused on services and resources that have been found to be beneficial for children and families, barriers, or challenges to accessing/receiving services for children and families, and how these challenges can be addressed. For further details from this session, please see **Joint Planning Meeting**.
- Resource Development Plans were submitted for PIP counties. Quarterly PIP meetings were held in PIP counties. The Center for States facilitated resource mapping training in the PIP counties during one of the quarterly meetings.
- Alabama has had an increase in IHS slots available from 527 last year to 661 as of this APSR submission (June 2022).
- The Department of Mental Health has developed intensive home-based services for children from birth to age 20 with autism spectrum disorder or autism spectrum disorder with co-occurring intellectual/developmental disabilities. During FY 22, 15 mental health centers around the state received funds for the expansion of school based mental health services. There are currently 80 school systems and 18 community mental health centers participating in the School-Based Mental Health Collaboration Program.
- Alabama is in the process of rolling out CFA/ISP training statewide.

Staff Training, Technical Assistance, and Evaluation

- State DHR program specialists provide monthly ongoing training to county resource developers through peer-to-peer consultative meetings to enhance the service array at the local level
- State DHR Program Specialists provide technical assistance as needed
- State DHR Program Specialists prepare the county resource developer to train local service providers as needed
- State DHR Program Specialists prepare county resource developer to train local staff
- State DHR Program Specialists collaboratively provide feedback with county resource developer and staff during the implementation and monitoring of resource development plan

The Office of Data Analysis and the FACTS IT Division worked collaboratively to evaluate the states CCWIS system during the previous year to determine the capacity to collect and report on new data elements required by the AFCARS 2020 Final Rule. Coding updates were initiated for data elements that could be extracted from fields already existing in the

system. CCWIS enhancements were designed and incorporated into FACTS to collect data that was not previously collected by the system. Some of the areas that fields and coding were updated include demographic information on adoptive parents, ICWA related information, and additional information regarding conditions present when children enter foster care. Data collected from these additional fields will be utilized to inform the state where progress toward goals is sustained and identify and highlight where goals are not being met or sustained.

The next Data Quality Plan Biennial Review will focus on data elements that are related to goals identified in the CFSP to further improve the quality of data collected. Areas of review will be assessed for accuracy, timeliness and completeness. Technical assistance will be provided to individual counties where discrepancies are noted and frequently noted data quality issues will be included in annual statewide trainings. Additionally, The States Data Quality Committee will review data currently available and evaluate its effectiveness in measuring progress toward achieving and maintain CFSP goal progress.

SECTION C4 QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

Enhancements have been completed in Alabama's CCWIS system in the previous year to better capture information around specific drugs present in assessments involving substance abuse. Additional enhancements were completed to capture information for runaway episodes. The new fields will assist county managers and state administrators in ensuring required notifications are completed and documented in the system. Any deficiencies noted will prompt individual county consultation and will be included in staff trainings throughout the year. Additional enhancements are planned in the upcoming year to further improve the state's ability to capture more specific relationships when children discharge to Kinship Guardianship.

Alabama's Data Quality Plan includes on-going monitoring of CCWIS data generated reports and queries that in conjunction with data collected from Quality Service reviews help identify strengths and areas of potential improvement and monitors progress toward goal achievement.

The next Biennial review will focus on data elements that are related to goals identified in the CFSP to further improve the quality of data collected. The States Data Quality Committee will review data currently available and work toward identifying areas of potential improvement, with an emphasis on goals outlined in the CFSP.

During Alabama's PIP and non-overlapping period, information was obtained from District Reviews using the OSRI, local QA committee reviews using the QRI (Alabama's Quality Review Tool), and stakeholder interviews. With the conclusion of Alabama's PIP, Alabama will begin conducting county specific onsite reviews. The onsite reviews will consist of case reviews using the OSRI, QRI, stakeholder interviews, safety assessment, permanency assessment and resource record assessment.

All information obtained from either the district reviews or onsite reviews is provided to the county, Family Services Division, Quality Assurance Division, and Administration.

OMS reports, QRI results, stakeholder interviews and the 3 assessments will be used to inform counties of their current functioning and along with their county data from ERD, provides them the means to complete their county self-assessment. Each county is required to complete a county self-assessment based upon the 36 federal items twice per year. County Self-Assessments are to be submitted to SDHR Office of Quality Assurance by the end of every May and November. All County Self-Assessments are reviewed by the county assigned Quality Assurance Specialist and feedback is provided.

The Counties use the findings of their County Self-Assessments to develop their County Improvement Plans (CIPs). CIPs are developed by county management, county staff, local QA committee members (stakeholders), and SDHR staff. CIPs are to be submitted to the QA Division and Family Services upon being typed up.

Specialist from Family Services and the QA Division compare submitted County Self-Assessments and current CIPs for progress.

- QA Specialists and QA Committees conduct Stakeholder interviews and all of the information gained is compiled and shared with the county staff and the County QA Committee. This work is completed in an effort to strengthen practice in the county.
- We continue to try and get parents and youth on local QA committees. A number of counties have been able to get grandparents and relatives to serve on their committees.
- Members of the County QA Committees are provided opportunities to attend meetings to develop the County Improvement Plan.

STEPS BEING TAKEN TOWARD A STATE-CONDUCTED CFSR FOR ROUND FOUR

Criterion 1: Alabama has demonstrated the capacity to operate an internal case review process that assesses state child welfare system performance in the domains of safety, permanency, and well-being.

1A - Although not currently in place, the state is in the process of establishing OSRI Reviewer and OSRI QA training. Once established, the training will be held on a regular basis to ensure an adequate number of reviewers and those completing QA are available and properly trained to conduct reviews.

1B - Throughout Round 3 of CFSR, Alabama has shown its ability to adhere to instructions contained within the federal OSRI for rating of cases. Alabama's feedback from federal oversight supports Alabama's ability to rate cases using the instructions provided for each item.

1C - During Round 3 of CFSR, Alabama established a system to report and address any safety concerns identified during a case review. If any child is observed to be at imminent risk, the reviewer should report the situation immediately to the DHR County Director, or his/her identified county contact person. The situation should also be reported to the designated SDHR contact person. The same method of reporting is to take place should the reviewer identify conditions for a child/family that would raise a level of concern, even if the concerns are not about the review child.

1D - Alabama has identified conflict of interest as a circumstance in which a DHR reviewer's personal interest or direct professional involvement with a case / case participant materially could affect (or give appearances of affecting) the objectivity or capacity of the individual to serve as a reviewer in carrying out the associated duties. Alabama will require any reviewer having a conflict of interest to report such to either the Program Manager of the Office of Quality or the Program Supervisor of the Office of Quality Assurance and the case will be re-assigned. Alabama will continue to ensure reviewers do not conduct reviews or QA of any cases from their own county of origin to prevent anyone who has had direct contact, supervision, oversight, or consultation of any review cases.

1E - With the conclusion of Round 3 of CFSR, Alabama will continue to use the OSRI as the review tool for the state. Alabama will continue to use the OSRI to collect information on all CFSR items and implement and adhere to guidance CB provides to accompany the instrument.

1F - Alabama will continue to include case-related interviews of key informants on every case to inform the ratings; including all of the following individuals: age and developmentally appropriate children, parents, caregivers, foster care providers, and caseworker or supervisor. Alabama will continue to follow the written protocol developed in Round 3 for Potential Exceptions to Conducting Interviews.

Criterion 2: Alabama has an established uniform sampling process and methodology in place from Round 3 CFSR.

2A – During Round 3 of CFSR, Alabama established a sampling method that coincided with the Round 3 review schedule and agreed upon sites, which was statewide. The state will ensure the sampling method will coincide

with the agreed upon Round 4 schedule. The statewide sampling will consist of the state's population subject to review. Sites will consist of Jefferson County (Alabama's largest metropolitan area), key program areas operating in the state, Tribes with significant case populations served by the child welfare system, and a geographical cross-section of the state.

2B – Alabama has an existing simple random sample design from Round 3 CFSR. This simple random sample design can be adjusted to select samples statewide or stratified to achieve an adequate number of cases for review. It can also be adjusted to renew sampling either monthly or quarterly depending on the state's decision for Round 4. Alabama is prepared to work with the CB to identify the sampling approach for Round 4 of CFSR.

2C – During Round 3 of CFSR, reviewed 68 cases (43 foster care and 25 in-home) every 6 months. Alabama is prepared to review the required 65 cases (40 foster care and 25 in-home) or more during each sampling period.

2D – Alabama's sampling frame for the foster care population will consist of children served statewide.

2E – Alabama will continue to ensure the sampling frame for the in-home services case population will consist of the listing of family cases opened for 45 or more consecutive days of service provision and /or case management directly by the agency or through federally funded contracts during the sampling period. Alabama will ensure no children in the families were in foster care for 24 hours or longer during any portion of the sampling period.

2F – Alabama has an established process in place to consistently address and document CB required and state-specific case elimination requirements. The established process would continue into Round 4 CFSR and any requested adjustments can be made.

UPDATE ON SERVICE DESCRIPTION

Stephanie Tubbs Jones child welfare services program – Also see Outcomes/Systemic Factors & CFS – 101 forms

Alabama's statewide information system known as FACTS (Family, Adult, and Child Tracking System), is a standardized, comprehensive way of managing child welfare information. It is available to all child welfare caseworkers, supervisors, managers, and administrators statewide and provides the opportunity for staff to manage their work in a data-informed manner. See Item 19 of the Final Report for more detail on enhancements made that have improved the system's ability to impact outcomes over the past five years. Also, Item 19 of the 2022 APSR provides a description of current and planned activities for improvement across the next three years.

Alabama's case review system has a foundation that includes the ISP process and a strong relationship with Alabama's Administrative Office of Courts (AOC). Across the last five years, the ISP process provided a model for utilizing family input in framing goals and strategies, though QA findings reflect the importance of ongoing emphasis on engaging families and actively seeking their involvement. The relationship with the AOC across the last 5 years has been maintained and continues to be enhanced with the focus on improving permanency outcomes. See Items 20-24 of the 2022 APSR for more details around the strengths and challenges of Alabama's case review system going forward as well as Item 31, under "Alabama Judicial & Child Welfare Collaborative".

Alabama's design for children is that they have a safe return to families from which they have been removed, or if that is not possible that they be placed in a relative/kinship home, placed for adoption, or another planned permanent living arrangement. Timely achievement of permanency for children remains a challenge. The case review findings of the CFSR found cross-cutting issues that affect timely permanency, particularly challenges in engaging parents in assessment and case planning, caseworker visits with parents that were not of sufficient frequency or quality, and inadequate service provision to children and families. Timely permanency through adoption was a most significant challenge for the state. Case reviews revealed that factors affecting timely adoption including a lack of timely filing for termination of Parental Rights, court delays in docketing TPR hearings, lengthy TPR appeals, a lack of concurrent planning, delays in changing permanency goals, and in some cases refusal of the court to hold TPR hearings. These issues contributed to a lack of timely

adoptions in over half of the applicable cases with this goal. The timely achievement of permanency for children continues to be a focus for the state.

Alabama recognizes the importance of having preventative services that are designed to help children at risk of foster care placement remain safely with their families. The Alabama Child Welfare System embraces the philosophy of service delivery in home-based or community-based settings, while maintaining the child in the least restrictive environment. Following an incident of maltreatment, decisions must be made if it is in the best interest of the child to remain with his/her family or to be placed in an alternate setting. If the child is to remain in his/her home, the variety of factors that precipitated the maltreatment must be sufficiently assessed to ensure child safety. When a child is kept in the home, he or she is able to maintain the sense of attachment to loved ones that allow for one's sense of identity and belonging to develop. Typically, family preservation is comprised of intensive in-home or wrap around services. Family preservation can be comprised of a variety of services such as teaching parenting skills, child development instruction, assistance with emotional well-being, financial assistance, teaching budgeting skills, crisis intervention, providing services such as payment for utilities or provision of food through utilization of flex funds, respite care, or medical services. Family Preservation can also include the follow-up care provided to a family after reunification has occurred to ensure that the family remains intact. While Alabama does have a diverse array of in-home supports to address many issues throughout the state, the intensity of needs prompted by substance abuse pose unique challenges.

2022 Update: Attention to resource development was provided in Goal 1 of the PIP and ongoing quarterly Resources Development meetings were held with PIP Counties. The Office of Resource Management is working to develop regional trainings to address ongoing resource and service needs across the state.

Permanency for children through the use of cross-jurisdictional resources continues to be completed. Home study requests for adoptive studies from other states are generally not completed in 60 days due to the ten-week requirement for completion of training. Preliminary reports are requested within 60 days to meet the federal guidelines. While there is currently no mechanism for tracking the percentage of preliminary reports received, our FACTS unit has been asked to look at ways to access this information through enhancements to the FACTS system. In terms of the CFSR findings, information in the statewide assessment and collected during interviews with stakeholders indicates that the state is effectively utilizing cross-jurisdictional resources to support the permanent placement of waiting children through AdoptUSKids, Heart Gallery Alabama, and Adoption.com. There are concerns about the state's response to requests from other states to complete home studies in order to facilitate permanent placements in Alabama of children from those states. The state was unable to provide data demonstrating timely completion of home study requests received from other states. Also, the Foster and adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan (Goal 10) provides an emphasis.

This grant pays for some of the staff at the DHR state office. Currently there are 19 employees being charged directly to the grant. Their salary and benefits, and subsequently any travel they may do (unless there is another grants identified for it) is paid with IV-B Subpart 1.

- CPS Legal Services
- Professional Court Services
- Printing
- Interpreter Services
- DHR portion of the MNC Shared Services

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN ADOPTED FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) services including counseling and Adoptive Family Groups (AFG) are open to all adoptive families. This includes families who have adopted from the foster care system as well as families that have adopted through private means. Families that have adopted domestically and internationally can receive services from APAC. The only restriction on APAC's services is related to the post-adoption camp. Families who adopted children from private means may only participate in camp once the applications (and waiting list) for children adopted through DHR have been served.

When children come to the attention of Alabama DHR through a CAN investigation or a prevention, the family is assessed for the services required to alleviate the safety risk for the children. This is true for families with their birth, domestically, or foreign adopted children. Alabama has contracts with language assistance providers and interpretation services to provide translation services in all counties with families in their native tongue; that would include children adopted from a foreign country. The state provides the same services that include but are not limited to: counseling, psychological evaluations, foster care, visitation programs, parenting classes, transportation, day care, etc.

Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections (APAC) services including counseling and Adoptive Family Groups (AFG) are open to all adoptive families; including families who have adopted from the foster care system and families that have adopted through private means whether that be domestic or foreign.

SERVICES FOR CHILDREN UNDER THE AGE OF 5

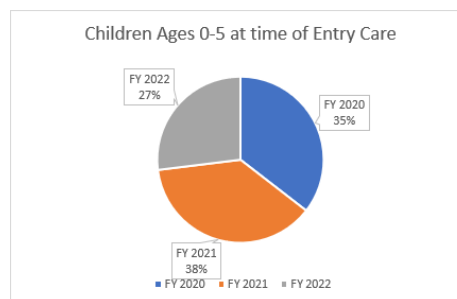
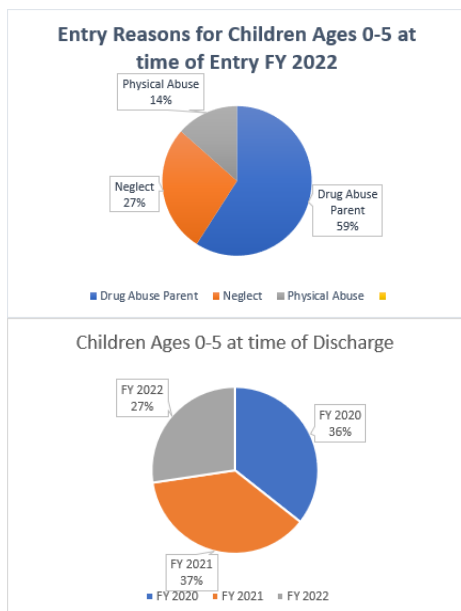
In reviewing data, Alabama knows that children ages 0-5 enter care due to substance misuse by parents at a rate almost double any other entry reason. Based on that information, Alabama has partnered with Children's Justice Task Force to create and present training for front line workers around substance abuse. We also continue our partnership in Jefferson and Jackson Counties with drug court.

In Alabama, children ages 0-5 move to permanency at almost the same rate as they enter care. We know that as children age, their time in foster care increases; so as a part of our PIP we facilitated meetings with counties as a way to model in county staffings with directors and supervisors. We saw success in moving these children to permanency in a more timely fashion so we are working on expanding the staffings statewide and including all children ages 4-10 without regard to their current length of time in care. The Office of Foster Care continues to review and use the Children Under Five Receiving Services Query spreadsheets created in January 2018 to capture all services authorized through FACTS for children under the age of five. These are not services unique to children under 5 but are the services that are available to children of all ages. The report provides data on 62 unique services and can be specifically individualized by each county or consolidated to capture statewide totals. Consultants use this information to monitor trends as well as assist counties in developing unmet needs.

Children & Family Services continues our partnership with specific state organizations who serve children ages 0-5 and their families and work to address the developmental needs of the children. Referrals are made to each of these agencies when working with families who have young children.

- Head Start Child Development and Early Learning
- Women, Infants and Children, WIC (supplemental nutrition program for pregnant women and their young children)
- Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention/Children's Trust Fund- Programs: Cribs for Kids, Mentoring New Moms, and Jefferson County Pilot Project to Prevent Child Maltreatment, Baby Box
- Early Intervention (reviews developmental needs by utilizing a checklist for children from birth to age five)
- Wendy's Wonderful Kids (recruits for an appropriate match for foster care children under age five)
- Alabama School Readiness Alliance (receives appropriations for pre-K programs).
- Individual Service Plans
- Behavioral Analysts supports and assessments
- Protective Service Daycare
- Information and Referrals

See charts below: data source Alabama's CCWIS System



Community Partner Stakeholder Group for Children Under the Age of Five (Foster Care & Receiving In-Home Services) **– See also under Item 5**

2021 Update:

The 0-5 stakeholder group will be expanding prior focus to look more closely at children aged 0-5 who entered care with parental substance abuse as one of the contributing factors. The Office of Foster Care will be contacting counties to determine if these families are involved with drug court where available and appropriate. The group will also be looking at current services being provided to these families, in particular, if there is any trend indicating that one or more service is more often in place in families where there is a successful reunification. If service implementation is a barrier, a stakeholder group will be created to include Board Certified Behavioral Analysts, in-home service providers that offer substance abuse services, as well as family drug courts to discuss what the barriers are and way to assist our families with being successful.

Beginning March 1, 2022, cases began being pulled from Russell, Jackson, Lee, and Baldwin counties to review case outcomes and service utilization. These counties were chosen in part based on availability of drug court services. The cases that are being pulled include children ages 0-5 with the entry reason into care including parental substance abuse. The permanency goals targeted will be Return to Parent or Adoption. Up to 45 cases meeting these criterion will be reviewed. Additionally, if in care less than 12 months, tracking will be completed to monitor the utilization of services and when they are implemented. If children are in care more than 12 months, a case review will be completed. This information is important as we need to determine the barriers of children achieving timely permanency. The information gathered from these case reviews will be shared where appropriate and will also be included in discussion within the APSR.

EFFORTS TO TRACK AND PREVENT CHILD MALTREATMENT DEATHS

Child maltreatment fatalities reported to NCANDS are those children for which the Department has investigated the child death. The circumstances of the child fatality are entered into our CCWIS system as a CAN report and multi-disciplinary teams confer during this process. Multi-Disciplinary teams are composed of DHR staff, law enforcement, district attorneys, medical professionals, and county corners. Alabama receives reports of child deaths from many reporters including law enforcement, hospitals, and the general public. Coroners, law enforcement, and medical examiners are among Alabama's legislated mandatory reporters. Child death reports are taken and investigated per Alabama Child Welfare Policy. These allegations are investigated with the assistance of law enforcement and any other agency or individual that may have information related to the child's death.

Each county in Alabama also has a child death review team. County child death reviews must be completed in situations where a child death occurred due to alleged child abuse or neglect and the Department has any child welfare involvement with the child or the child's family within 12 months prior to the date of the child's death. The purpose of the child death review is to strengthen and improve future child welfare practice. The review should be comprehensive and evaluate system performance prior to the child's death. Any recommendations resulting from the review should be specific and focused solely on remedial efforts to prevent future deaths. The make-up of the county teams includes the county director or designee, the county QA coordinator, a county QA Committee members, a State Office of Quality Assurance Division's representative, and a Regional State Office Representative from the Family Services Division, Office of Administrative Record Reviews. This review process is to begin within 30 days of the receipt of a report of a child death unless good cause is established due to unusual or extraordinary circumstances. The review must include at a minimum a case record review and a meeting of the child death review committee. The review process consists of an objective discussion of DHR's involvement with the family and an analysis of the Department's performance as it relates to policy, procedure, services, and best practices. The final report should be completed within 90 days of the county department being notified of the child's death.

Alabama also has a State Child Death Review Team composed of 28 members. The Alabama Department of Human Resources and the Alabama Department of Public Health are two of the departments represented on the state team. This team reviews the circumstances and underlying factors of all non-medical infant and child deaths in order to identify those deaths that could possibly have been prevented. The state team is responsible for coordination and efficient operation of the review process using the following causes of death: Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, Motor Vehicle Involvement, Fire Related Deaths, Suffocation Related Deaths, and Weapon Related Deaths.

Alabama also has a Governor's Task Force on Infant Mortality which was created in 2017 to address the infant mortality rate in Alabama. One of the recommendations made was for a pilot program in 3 counties (Montgomery, Macon, and Russell counties) that would focus on nurse visitation programs, safe sleep initiatives, utilization of a screening tool to identify substance use, depression, and domestic violence. The goal of this pilot program, which began in 2018, is to reduce infant mortality rates by at least 20% in these three counties within the next 5 years. The data below reflects the number and rate per 1000 live births.

Overall Infant Mortality Rate*				
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Montgomery	6.0	9.2	10.1	8.9
Macon	5.5	5.6	12.9	5.4
Russell	13.4	5.1	9.7	9.1
Alabama	7.4	7.0	7.7	7.0

*Rate is per 1,000 live births.

Data Source:
Alabama
Department of
Health Website

Total Infant Deaths and Infant Mortality Rates by County*				
	2017	2018	2019	2020
Montgomery	19	29	32	28
Macon	1	1	2	1
Russell	11	4	8	7
Alabama	435	405	449	404

Data Source:
Alabama Department
of Health Website

Alabama has created a Committee for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment Fatalities. A primary goal of this committee is to create and implement a Child Maltreatment Fatality Plan that will direct targeted work toward reducing the number of child deaths due to maltreatment occurring in the state.

This Committee is comprised of community partners including members from:

- State Public Health, Child Death Review System
- State Public Health, Perinatal System
- State Office of Prosecution Services
- State District Attorney Association
- Administrative Office of Courts
- State Department of Education
- State Rehabilitation Services, Early Intervention Services
- State Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention
- State Department of Human Resources Quality Assurance Committee
- Department of Human Resources County Quality Assurance Committees
- State Department of Human Resources Administrative Staff
- Department of Human Resources County Staff
- Law Enforcement
- State Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse Treatment
- American Academy of Pediatrics
- Children's Hospital Intervention and Prevention Services (CHIPS)
- Medical Profession specializing in Child Abuse

Additional sub-committees, have been created to explore available data, review relevant literature, and provide recommendations to the Committee at large.

Over the past year, SDHR Leadership has met to review existing data and the recommendations provided by the Committee for the Prevention of Child Maltreatment Fatalities.

In the coming year, Alabama plans to further explore fatalities in children ages 1-3 months, who comprised the highest percentage of child fatalities in Alabama (per DHR child fatality data). This will be accomplished by exploring the causation of death in children 1-3 months of age, comparing child death data maintained by DHR with that kept by the Alabama Department of Public Health to identify any common/related themes and points of contrast (e.g. related to causes, persons allegedly responsible, age of child, family location, etc.), examining the location of Family Resource Centers and/or other in-home service providers in relation to the location of child deaths of children aged 1-3 months, exploring months of the year in which fatalities for this age group occur to see if any variables related to higher-frequency months appear noteworthy of further examination, and reviewing any other work, studies, etc. being done in Alabama related to child fatalities by the Department and/or any partner agencies.

In the coming year, Alabama plans take a deeper dive into data previously reviewed around contributing factors to child maltreatment fatalities. Some of these factors to be further explored are the age of child, relationship of perpetrator and time of year the incident occurred.

Based on the above explorations, the Committee will develop a prevention program that can be piloted in a (data) selected area(s) of the state, that includes use of specific intervention/prevention strategies, collaborative approaches,

monitoring/measurement mechanisms, and time frames. The plan will be posted to the State's Website and a link provided in next year's APSR update.

Supplemental Funding to Prevent, Prepare, and Respond to COVID-19 (CARES Act)

Alabama received CARES Act funding in the amount of \$794,578.00. Alabama used these funds to support educational well-being of children in the Department's custody, in assisting the transition of foster children back into day care, pre-Kindergarten, and school settings, beginning in the Fall of 2020. Children returning to classes in-person required additional personal protective equipment such as masks and hand sanitizer. Children returning in-person, as well as to virtual or hybrid settings required access to technology that was not previously considered essential (e.g., internet access, tablets/computers, printers, etc.). The design of this utilization of funds was to help children and families make a successful transition in the educational settings. Over the past year, funds were used to provide one-time allotments to foster parents for COVID supplies and expenses related to transition children to virtual learning.

Mary Lee Allen, Promoting Safe and Stable Families – Provide the following services using PSSF funds:

FAMILY PRESERVATION:	IIHS contracts; Family Service Center contracts (Res. Management Div. - RMD)
FAMILY SUPPORT:	Family Service Center contracts (RMD)
FAMILY REUNIFICATION:	IIHS contracts (RMD)
Title IV-B (2) fund expenditures:	The following services will be offered under each category in IV-B, subpart 2

Family Preservation

Children in need of services by Alabama DHR are provided those services through our Investigation and Child Protect Services units. The needs of each family are assessed and the services needed are implemented through the ISP process to help children be maintained in their own home or the home of a relative but not in foster care. Currently, Alabama has 4276 open cases providing a variety of services to 8454 children to ensure their safety.

One service provided via contract is Intensive in-Home Service (IIHS). These programs provide short term intensive in-home interventions in all 67 counties in Alabama to help alleviate situations and conditions within families where removal of children from the home is imminent or the plan is for the child to return home after being in foster care. Providers may serve families for 6-9 months and may request extensions from SDHR if additional service time is needed. Families also receive aftercare services for 90 days and are tracked at 3, 6, 12, and 24 months. There are 12 vendors who provide IIHS services in the state with a total of 661 slots which was increased from 2021. In FY 21, 367 families were provided family preservation services; that included 535 adults and 815 children.

Family Support

One area in which Alabama provides family support to our residents is through our partnership with the Alabama Department of Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect. This agency funds Family Resource Centers through the Family Preservation and Support Services (FP/SS) Programs, funded by Title IV-B, Subpart 2, "Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act".

Family Service Center sites are in targeted counties/communities where there is a high concentration of families in need of services to address their safety and stability issues. Each center assesses the community and collaborates with DHR in developing programs that meet the needs of the community and focus on the prevention of Child Abuse/Neglect by providing educational services, job training, parenting, etc. This is an ongoing partnership with services that are continually adapting to the needs of the community. In FY 21, services were provided to 36,132 families through the Family Service Centers.

The Department further trained our practice specialists, DHR training staff, and frontline child welfare workers, supervisors, and directors on the Strengthening Families framework in partnership with the Alabama Department of Child Abuse/Neglect Prevention. All districts across the state had access to the training by 9/30/22.

SERVICE DECISION MAKING PROCESS FOR FAMILY SUPPORT SERVICES

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP), also known as the Children's Trust Fund (CTF), was created by the Alabama Legislature in 1983 to address child maltreatment. The ADCANP is the lead agency for federally funded Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) programs as part of CAPTA.

The ADCANP partners with the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers (ANFRC) to provide community-based supports and services to families and children. There are approximately 23 Family Resource Centers located throughout the state as of this writing. The centers values include stability for children, individualized services to families, strengths-based partnerships with families, collaborative approach with families and other agencies, a focus on equity for all, a localized approach to meet the individual needs of those served, prevention first, and a commitment to high quality operational standards.

Alabama's Network of Family Resource Centers offer services via the Strengthening Families strategy, which includes building 5 key Protective Factors: parental resilience, social connections, knowledge of parenting and child development, concrete support in times of need, and social and emotional competence of children. Along with these factors, family resource centers also offer workforce development including assistance in obtaining employment and/or GED certificates, arts/dance lessons, and housing assistance. Centers are also able to make referrals to other local agencies if there are other needs or resources families may need that cannot be provided through the centers.

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP) uses CBCAP funds to support various parent education and support programs. This includes two programs serving the underserved population of incarcerated mothers through prenatal and parent education classes, doula support, and opportunities for the mothers to stay connected with their children.

CBCAP funds also support Children's Aid Society in providing the EPIC parenting classes to pregnant and parenting runaway and homeless youth through the Project Independence program, as well as providing the class in Spanish to parents in the Hispanic and Latino communities. The EPIC parenting classes include topics such as understanding children and their behavior, encouragement and self-esteem, and effective discipline. The Children's Aid society has offices in Birmingham, Huntsville, Mobile, and Montgomery.

Finally, CBCAP funds support the Alabama Parenting Assistance Line that provides information and support via phone call, texting, or chatting online to anyone in Alabama wanting to become a more confident parent. The Parenting Assistance Line is available statewide and is a free service. It can be accessed via telephone

Alabama also utilizes Intensive In-Home Services through the Family Service centers. These intensive services are available in all 67 counties of the state. Over the last year, the available in-home services slots were increased from 527 to 661. These services are geared toward family preservation or reunification in the home setting.

POPULATIONS AT GREATEST RISK OF MALTREATMENT

Alabama recognizes that many factors create a heightened risk for a child to be maltreated; parent functioning, child functioning, family dynamics and family support or outside stressors. Alabama accepts what we call prevention assessments when there are concerns reported to a county that do not rise to the level of a child abuse/neglect report. We assess safety of the children, protective capacity of the parents and community supports and can open a case to provide extra services to prevent child abuse/neglect if the assessment warrants. Alabama further assesses each of these factors in our Comprehensive Family Assessment tool that is created on each opened case and is a working document used throughout the case to assist in assessment and provision of services.

Alabama has a 2-tiered response time on child abuse/neglect investigations that are based on vulnerability factors. Any report received involving a child under the age of 6 or who has a disability or a medical condition making them vulnerable

or in which the reporter is unsure that there is a protective person available to protect the child from immediate harm requires an immediate response.

In Alabama, children whose parents abuse substances can be at a greater risk for maltreatment. When infants are born who are substance affected, Alabama has the option of accepting a prevention in order to assess the situation and possibly provide services or accepting a child abuse/neglect report and assessing for safety in that way. All workers must complete a plan of safe care in those cases. Our Family and Children's Tracking System (FACTS) requires it as part of the case information prior to resolving the referral.

Representatives from Alabama DHR sit on committees for a variety of community partners that work with at risk families including the Governor's task force for Safe Sleep, Children's Justice Act Grantees Peer Group and Children's Policy Councils around the state. Alabama DHR also facilitates the Child Welfare Collaboration Initiative (CWCI) quarterly meeting with stakeholders. Alabama DHR also partners with the Alabama Department for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect which funds regional Family Resource Centers to serve at risk families.

Alabama has not seen any major shift in trends identifying those most at risk. The demographics of children in care align with the demographics of the state as a whole.

KINSHIP NAVIGATOR FUNDING

Please see the FY 2021 Kinship Navigator Funding Update in the APSR for accomplishments. Alabama has dedicated Kinship Program Specialists in place, training has been provided to Family Resource Centers, Spanish translation was added to the Kinship Navigator site, and Kinship Guardianship Desktop Tool was created, and Kinship trainings have been presented to staff, courts, and other local agencies.

The State Kinship Specialist follows up with the State DHR TANF Consultant monthly to receive information regarding Kinship TANF applications in the counties.

One.alabama.gov is the official app of the Alabama Department of Human Resources whereby individuals can quickly and easily apply for family assistance online, specifically those community members who need to apply for Kinship Assistance. As of July 2022, the One Alabama system has created 16,555 accounts and it has received 15,925 TANF applications since its inception in 2019.

MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISIT FORMULA GRANTS AND STANDARDS FOR CASEWORKER VISITS

Alabama standards for Meaningful Caseworker Visits include any child with an open case or referral including children in foster care, in their own homes, in the home of relatives, in residential facilities, hospitals, childcare institutions, pre-adoptive homes and children in ICPC placements. Alabama requires that children in intensive level program must be seen twice per month at a minimum.

Caseworker visits continue to be made each month and are both scheduled and unannounced visits to the child's living environment. Some visits include exploration of goals and examination of any changes. Caseworkers continue to contact children and families through telephone calls. Visits to children in other settings may occur to provide opportunities for private discussions.

2021 Annual Caseworker Visit Data Submission for Alabama.

- The percentage of monthly caseworker visits was 95.9%
- The percentage of visits made in the residence of the child was 99.7%
- The total population of Alabama children in foster care for at least one month during FY 2021 was 8,109.

Adoption Incentive Funds – Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Funds – 5-year Goals:

Alabama has consistently been awarded Adoption (and Legal Guardianship) Incentive funds for moving children to permanency. The state office utilizes a portion of these funds to pay for recruitment and public awareness activities nationwide for children in permanent state custody. Heart Gallery of Alabama's contract and the contract for CAS/APAC's pre-adoption contract, which provides for recruitment, training/preparation, and home studies for families interested in adopting children meeting the Department's special needs definition are funded through these monies.

All counties receive an allotment of Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive funds based on the number of adoptions completed by their county the year before. This money is used for local adoption recruitment and training efforts. Additionally, county and state office staff use the funds to address barriers to permanency for specific children including but not limited to counseling, diagnostic testing, behavioral management services, and other items to help the child integrate into placement, etc. If a county's allotment is exhausted or obligated, a protocol is in place to ensure they can secure more funds through the Office of Adoption. The 2019 Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive grant was issued in part for \$1,662,500 on 9/18/2019 and 10/24/2019. The FY2020 Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive grant was issued \$880,607 on 09/18/2020 and \$547,893 10/21/2020 for a total of \$1,428,500.

Alabama has until 09/30/2022 to obligate the grant and liquidate it by 12/30/2022. DHR's practice is to use the oldest monies first until the grant period expires and then move on to the next grant award available. The 2020 award is available until 09/30/2023 and must be liquidated by 12/30/2023. There are not any anticipated issues at this time that would affect expenditures being exhausted.

ADOPTION SAVINGS

Adoption Savings Expenditures

Alabama has used the CB method for calculating the Adoption Savings each year; no change has been made from last year's submission. The spending of the Adoption Savings is done by the Finance Division by applying the savings as payment for a contract for Psychotropic Medication, \$489,993.29. The contract is annual, and spending is done within the year. The updated information for Adoption Savings will be calculated for 2019-2020 in October 2020. The same contract is used for the savings earned. There are not any challenges currently.

2022 Update: The spending for Adoption Savings with AL Psych Medication Team, contract #1881 is historically: **2017** spent \$224,132.63; **2018** spent \$439,253.43; **2019** spent \$798,785.18; **2020** spent \$713,250.56; **2021** spent to date \$1,154,703; **2022** spent to date \$630,972.

DIVISION X ADDITIONAL FUNDING FROM SUPPORTING FOSTER YOUTH AND FAMILIES THROUGH PANDEMIC

The Department used the bulk of funds provided to serve over 700 current and former foster youth to support housing and transportation costs. The Agency also purchased a digital Independent Living app. The remainder of the funding will be used to continue to support young people with any identified needs until all funds are expended no later than December 30, 2022.

The Agency will continue to use all data collected to develop appropriate supports and services to young people. NYTD data and other pertinent data will be provided to youth, foster parents, care providers, and service partners.

We have begun a process of more closely monitoring NYTD data and IL fund use in one of our counties in order to identify trends. We will expand that tracking to all of our counties beginning in FY 2023. The information gleaned will be shared with youth across the state to continue to develop services, supportive trainings, and education for our youth and those providing them care.

We have partnered with several public and private organizations during the reporting period. Our partners (National Social Work Enrichment Program, Children's Aid Society, Alabama National Guard, and representatives from the 2- and 4- year college system) collaborated with us in our first annual Transition Fair. The Fair provided our young people the opportunity to complete their FAFSA on-site. The Administrative Office of Courts afforded our young leaders and former foster youth

to present in a panel format at two Judicial Summits. Our DREAM leaders and former foster youth presented training for the social work community at their annual Social Work Conference. Gaps continue to persist regarding mentor opportunities. We will continue to re-engage our community partners and Alabama Workforce partners regarding mentoring and job opportunities.

LGBTQI+ youth were provided training at our annual youth camps. Information as shared with them regarding specific supports and services. Information regarding resources to these youth is available on all of our social media platforms. Placement vendors are advised to promote our youths' self-expression. Consultations are provided to our county offices should issues arise. The Department will continue to provide focus groups and sessions at State ILP events to address ongoing LGBTQ+ needs. Plans have been made to have follow up sessions at the 2022 and 2023 Camp Life events.

Housing needs were the prevailing issue related to the use of the Division X funding. Young people requesting housing were often in leases that far exceeded their ability to pay. Rental assistance was provided to over 300 young people at an average of \$525 per month. Assistance was provided for no less than 3, but no more than 12 months. Over 50 young people requested assistance a second time. The Program has continued its work with HUD and the FYI program to address these complex housing needs. We also worked very closely with our Foster Care Independent Living providers Brantwood, Gateway, Eagle Rock, Alabama Mentor and SAFY of Alabama, by initially suspending required rent payments, and later providing Division X support to our youth in the supervised Independent Living placements.

We also worked with our post foster care providers, Second Shift Alabama, Youth Towers, Kids to Love to provide housing and other Division X support to the young people whom they served. Young people who were eligible were assisted with referrals and information regarding HUD and FYI.

Homelessness and housing instability remain a serious challenge for our young people. Barriers included unemployment, underemployment, high housing costs, criminal history, and mental health challenges. We will continue to work with our current supervised Independent Living vendors, our HUD and Public Housing Authority partners to improve transitions into safe and stable housing for our foster youth.

The focus of the State's Youth Camps and DREAM Council Meeting for FY21 was Mental Health. Young people who participated were provided content related to mental health needs and management. Staff were provided training regarding mental health needs and the use of psychotropic medication at the annual ILP Networking Conference in April 2022. Information and links regarding mental health and mental health services are available on our social media platforms, ILConnect.org and on our IL app for current and former foster youth.

Information regarding the Medicaid to 26 eligibility across state lines will be provided to former foster youth via our social media platforms, our ILP app, shared on our partner agencies' website; to include AFAPA, Alabama Reach, Kids to Love, Second Shift Alabama, Youth Towers and on our DHR website on October 1, 2022. The information will be provided to all eligible foster youth leaving care upon their discharge.

The State has been working case-by-case with other States to assure former Alabama Foster Youth can receive Medicaid while living in other States. We are still working within our own State to provide Medicaid for former foster youth from other States. Ongoing correspondence has been maintained between the Department and Medicaid's Policy and Training Division to address the expansion of Medicaid.

The Department continues to utilize the social media tools through IL Connect to inform and educate current and former foster youth regarding enrolment in Medicaid. Through our contract provider who manages these social media sites there are quarterly reminders and articles posted that give ongoing updates and information of how youth can access Medicaid. Links to Medicaid's application is also provided on these social media platforms.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING VOUCHERS PROGRAM

All former foster youth were provided Division X ETV support and funding. Youth were encouraged to re-engage with the Agency. New opportunities shared around education trainings were also shared. An emphasis was placed on the opportunity for young people who previously received ETV and Fostering Hope to re-enroll in school, if they were no longer attending. Information shared and referrals made included: the grant opportunity, FYI, Medicaid to 26, NYTD, employment and unemployment information, daycare services available, SNAP application processes, Section 8 and other housing options, free and low-cost mental health services, education opportunities, and support to include our Fostering Hope Scholarship.

All eligible youth were encouraged to apply for the CAA funding. Each county was provided a listing of their eligible youth. A press release was issued and our Children's Aid Society partners, placement vendors, AFAPA, our post foster care service providers and county offices were advised to share the grant opportunity information with eligible youth. All of our partners provided information on the respective social media platforms and webpages. Youth were also invited to apply for all other services available to them and encouraged to access information available to them regarding the grant and other services and supports on our website and social media platform. When young people applied directly with the State office, information was provided both by telephone call and email. Our ETV vendor Foster Care to Success, also provided all of the young people who received funding with information regarding services and supports available to them. available, SNAP application processes, and Section 8.

ETV has always been administered through a third- party provider. Foster Care to Success is our current provider.

DIVISION X ADDITIONAL FUNDING

As of the submission of the APSR, the expenditures tracked by the state office totaled over \$2.1 million dollars provided to more than 650 current and former foster youth. The program also purchased an app(\$138, 000) to improve information sharing capability and support . Information regarding eligible youth was provided by our Data Analysis Team. Per the information provided, each county office was provided \$3000 per eligible youth. Youth could apply for assistance based on their needs directly to the State Office or any of the 67 county office. The individual needs were assessed, supporting documentation per local funds policy was collected and financial assistance was provided according to the Children's Bureau's guidance. Information regarding grant eligibility was shared via our ILP vendor on all our social media platforms, our partner agencies' social media platforms, via stakeholders and community partners. Young people were encouraged to apply based on their specific needs related to housing, transportation, medical bills, past due bills, etc. Partial financial report is attached. Total expenditures and demographic information will be provided at the end of the next reporting period. The full report provided by our ETV vendor noting young people they served and their assessment is attached. The state intends to continue to support based on their specific needs until all funding is exhausted. All funding will be encumbered and allocated per CB guidelines by September 30, 2022 and expended no later than December 30, 2022.

CHAFEE TRAINING

Training was provided to all cohorts noted: Independent Living and Transition training is provided annually to foster parents, kin guardians and adoptive parents at the annual AFAPA conference.

Workers in group homes, vendors who provide supervised independent living services and our partner providers are trained at our annual Independent Living Networking Conferences. Content includes mental health services and supports, specific counseling needed for older youth, building relationships with youth over their life of their foster care experience, case consultation and support, higher education support, appropriate placement, and support for LGBTQ+ youth.

During our annual camps, special optional break-out sessions were held to address LGBTQ+. Both sessions, one held at our camp for 14-16 years old, and the other for 17-20 years old, was led by our State Foster Care Program Manager, who had previously worked to identify state-wide LGBTQ+ resources . Youth were provided the opportunity during these 60-

minute sessions to share how they felt their placements, county staff, and community responded to any needs they felt were unique to them. As a result of these sessions the Department provided connections through our IL and DHR social media platforms to report unfair treatments. Training was provided to county and providers with an emphasis on understanding the need to support youth in the LGBTQ+ community, to advocate for them when they felt they were being bullied or mistreated and for staff and providers to respect their choice to be called a different name or identify with a different gender. The Department also included an LGBTQ+ Best Practice training session at the supervisor's conference and has begun ongoing planning meetings with AFAPA to discuss best practices and advocacy for youth in LGBTQ+ community.

SECTION C6 TRIBES

CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN STATES AND TRIBES – INTRODUCTION

As of June 2018, the one federally recognized tribe in Alabama is the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI), whose office is in Atmore, Alabama located in Escambia County. Alabama's Indian Child Welfare Policy and Procedures has been in effect since September 2007 with the latest revisions being made in September 2013. This is a substantive policy that provides counties with a knowledge base for working with Native Americans.

While counties continue to contact the Office of Child Welfare Policy, they do have policy that directs their work with Indian children and families. In addition, ICWA is in the record review tool used by staff from the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice, which assesses applicability. At the initial involvement with a child and family, the issue of whether the child has any Native American ancestry is to be addressed. To facilitate this a Notification of Involvement should be sent to PCI in Alabama during a child abuse/neglect investigation or prevention assessment. The Notification of Involvement process is used to consult with PCI and allows relevant information to be obtained from PCI. The process also provides an opportunity for PCI to be involved in case planning early in the investigation. It is considered best practice to notify PCI of Departmental involvement with an Indian child and family and seek Tribal involvement in case planning. Specifically, Amanda Montgomery, the Director of the Family Services Department of PCI is notified.

The Notification of Involvement is not the formal notification to a child's tribe as required by the Act. When county departments are working with a child and family who fall under the ICWA requirements, Indian parents, custodians, and tribes must be notified.

2022 APSR: Collaboration / Coordination between the State and PCI
Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI) & Alabama Department of Human Resources (DHR)
2022 Annual Meeting Summary
Date: May 17, 2022 Location: Virtual via ZOOM

Meeting Plan

Due to the COVID 19 pandemic, and the restrictions imposed, the annual meeting was held via ZOOM with the following individuals participating:

Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI) Staff:

- Amanda Montgomery, Family Services Director
- Synethia Thomas, Child and Family Services Coordinator

Escambia County DHR (ECDHR) Staff:

- Lynn Barnes, Director
- Mary Sullivan, Service Supervisor II
- Jessica Jackson, Service Supervisor I

State of Alabama Department of Human Resources (SDHR)

- Jonathan Schlenker, SDHR Legal
- Karen Smith, Deputy Commissioner, Children & Family Services
- Emily Jones, Director, Quality Assurance Division
- Amanda Mancuso, Deputy Director, Children & Family Services
- Holly Christian, Deputy Director, Children & Family Services
- Valencia Curry, Deputy Director, Children & Family Services
- Misty Macon, Office of Data Analysis

The results of the annual meeting held on May 17, 2022, are reflected in the content that follows.

Inter-agency Agreement (IA)

The Inter-agency Agreement between the Poarch Band of Creek Indians and the Department of Human Resources signed on 10/10/2017 is reviewed annually by DHR and PCI to determine if any revisions are needed. No revision have been made as of the writing of this APSR.

Guidelines for State Court Indian Child Custody Proceedings

The guidelines are discussed annually by DHR and PCI to determine if any revisions are needed. As of the writing of this APSR no revisions have been made. These guidelines were discussed at the 2015 Annual Meeting of PCI and DHR staff. As comments have been nationally received on these guidelines, and as they are not yet final, no discussion occurred on them on this date. After such a document is finalized, and the legal ramifications reviewed, joint discussion between PCI and DHR staff can occur.

Plan for Enacting the State's Vision – from the 2020-2024 CFSP

Copies of the Plan for Enacting the State's Vision are distributed annually prior to the meeting for review. There were no issues presented for discussion or revision as of the writing of this APSR.

Alabama DHR and The Poarch Band of Creek Indians, met jointly in May 2022. This joint meeting is the only formal meeting of the year between the State and the Tribe. The Tribe is a part of other committees including Alabama's Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative (which meets quarterly) and County QA Committee meetings.

The Poarch Band of Creek Indians is responsible for providing child welfare services to children who reside on the reservation, to include prevention services and foster care services. Alabama DHR can also provide services to these children as needed. If children who are living off the reservation become involved with the Department, the Tribe has the ability to assume jurisdiction and provide services as they find necessary. PBCI has a Family Services Division to include children and families and adult protective services. They also have a Financial and Community Services Coordinators to provide further supports to those who are affiliated with the Tribe.

The Tribe currently has no children in foster care and have four approved foster homes. Services to children who are in foster care are available on the reservation, If there are services the Tribe does not have, then they will reach out to Escambia County DHR for assistance. PBCI make every effort to keep children with family rather than placing them in foster care and use the Tribal Court System if needed.

The Tribe offers many preventative services on the reservation to include medical, dental, mental health, and financial assistance. If a service is needed and not provided on the reservation, Tribal representative report they are able to access services through a collaborative relationship with Escambia County DHR. The Tribe reports they do have counselors they are able to access off the reservation and a behavioral health counselor through the local Health Department.

Travel Restrictions were lifted on the reservation in March 2022 which will allow for more participation in meetings, trainings, and other collaborative measures. The Tribe participates in Alabama's Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative which meets quarterly. They also serve as members of the Escambia, County QA Committee. Tribal members were invited and attended the Joint Planning Meeting held in June 2022.

Over the past year, Tribal representatives report that truancy rates have dropped. The Tribe does not have any jurisdiction over the local school systems, but report having no educational concerns that are unable to be addressed. If there are needs, the Tribe can collaborate with the county DHR office for assistance. The Tribe reports there are no issues with obtaining or providing services to children under the age of five. If services are needed for any children, and they cannot be provided on the reservations, then families are referred to other providers and gas vouchers are provided for travel.

Race and Ethnicity are captured at initial contact with families and children via Alabama's CCWIS system. If American Indian/Alaskan Native is selected, workers are prompted and required to notify the child's tribe of involvement with the Department. Families and Tribal Leadership must be notified in writing of Alabama's involvement with tribe affiliated children. Alabama's policy provides that tribes have an absolute right to intervene in child custody proceedings defined in ICWA, but tribes can decline jurisdiction if they wish. They can also request to be kept informed of and participate in planning for children and families. There is no formal overlapping system available to know that PBCI or DHR has a history with a family, but PBCI and the Department are able to share information as needed to ensure coordination of services and case planning. The Tribal Court also has access to Alabama's Court Information Systems as needed. Since the last submission, Alabama has not had Tribe participation regarding Chafee training opportunities and collaborations. Moving forward, Alabama will provide the Tribe with invitations and information regarding our regional consultations, our annual networking conference, and ILP youth camps.

Process for gathering input for the 2022 APSR

The Tribal members Services Division Director, as well as the Director of Family Services for the Tribe are members of the CWCI Team which provides ongoing opportunities for exchange on information and collaboration with both the Department and other agencies represented on the team/committee. PCI staff continue to serve as members of the Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative Team and are involved in the Joint Planning Meetings when they occur. Due to Tribal travel restrictions necessitated by COVID, the PCI staff are able to participate by phone or video conferencing. Restrictions were lifted in the month of March 2022. PCI reports the travel ban was lifted in March 2022. They are hopeful that in-person meetings and trainings can resume later in the year. PCI also reports they feel they are getting all the needed information from DHR.

SECTION D. CAPTA

Alabama State Liaison Officer (SLO)

Julie Smith, Program Manager, Child Protective Services
State DHR – Children & Family Services
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There have been no substantive changes to state laws or regulations that would affect the state's eligibility for the CAPTA State Grant.

Alabama will continue to analyze and evaluate information over the coming year and will report on any new information for FFY 2024.

Use of Grant Funds

CAPTA funding provides salaries and benefits for seven (7) Program Specialists and 3 ASAs and travel for CPA staff to attend the annual Children's Justice Grantee meeting in Washington, D.C.

1. Intake, assessment, screening, and investigation of reports of child abuse or neglect and procedures for appealing and responding to appeals of substantiated reports of child abuse or neglect.

The primary plan for CAPTA funds continues to be maintain the CAPTA due process requirement through the Administrative Record Review (ARR) process. The ARR process allows for any person, not entitled to an Administrative Hearing, who has an Indicated disposition to request a record review. This program improves the child protective services system by establishing procedures for appeal and responding to appeals of substantiated/indicated reports of abuse and neglect. CAPTA funding has been the cornerstone of many of the projects that continue to grow as well protect children. This includes the Central Registry/Adam Walsh Act. Importantly, due process for those individuals with indicated/substantiated child abuse/neglect reports is one of the largest services provided. The record review process allows the Agency to identify and review Plans of Safe Care and determine if appropriate referrals/services are implemented. In addition, Plans of Safe Care are monitored through the Safety Assessments completed each year.

The Administrative Record Review program is a partnership between the county departments and the state office. State office and ARR reviewers and the county director or designee review the case record and any information submitted by the person allegedly responsible for abuse/neglect (PARAN) to determine if the record supports a finding of abuse or neglect. The PARANs are given written notice of their right to an ARR. They are informed that the review process will be completed by a DHR independent panel, members of which are not directly involved in the case and have authority to overturn the decision of the worker/supervisor if the record does not support the finding of abuse or neglect.

The State Central Registry on Child Abuse and Neglect continues to be widely used by potential employers who work with children to screen applicants for employment and for the screening of foster and adoptive parents. CPS staff continues to assist in providing accurate information to other states who are requesting Adam Walsh Clearances so pending placements can be completed timely.

2. Enhancing the general child protective system by developing, improving, and implementing risk and safety assessment tools and protocols, including the use of differential response

The Department continues to recognize that supervision is crucial to good social work practice. We continue to work on increasing capacity of supervisors to assist their staff in making sound decisions around safety planning, case planning, and using the comprehensive assessment to improve case practice and case outcomes. The Department has created a Safety Assessment Desktop tool as well as conducted specialized training on Intake, CA/Ns, and Safety Assessments including Plans of Safe Care to counties by request. The Department continues to utilize a prevention track as a differential response, in that reports taken as preventions are assessed as not rising to a level of a child abuse/neglect report, and yet a safety assessment by department staff (using defined initial contact time frames) is still conducted. If an assessment finds that child abuse or neglect is occurring in the home, then the assessment is reclassified as a Child Abuse and Neglect report, and those policies and procedures then apply.

3. The services to be provided to individuals, families, or communities, either directly or through referrals aimed at preventing the occurrence of child abuse and neglect.

The Department continues to support Alabama's Parenting Assistance Line (PAL). The PAL is a collaborative service of the University of Alabama Child Development Resources and the Alabama Children's Trust Fund. When citizens call the toll-free number, 1-866-962-3030, a Parenting Resource Specialist provides helpful information and support. Callers can also request free literature. The PAL website can be accessed at <http://pal.ua.edu/>.

Community Based Child Abuse Prevention

The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP) uses CBCAP funds to support various parent education and support programs. This includes two programs service the underserved population of incarcerated mothers through prenatal and parent education classes, doula support, and opportunities for the mothers to stay connected with their children. CBCAP funds also support Children's Aid Society in providing the EPIC parenting classes to pregnant and parenting runaway and homeless youth through the Project Independence program, as well as providing the class in

Spanish to parents in the Hispanic and Latino communities. Finally, CBCAP funds support the Alabama Parenting Assistance Line that provides information and support via phone call, texting, or chatting online to anyone in Alabama wanting to become a more confident parent.

CBCAP funds also support parents by funding a Healthy Families America home visiting site in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. This home visiting model, offered through Prevent Child Abuse America, is implemented across the United States and internationally through its comprehensive accreditation and training program that yields significant research showing positive outcomes for families. Until recently, Alabama had only one Healthy Families America site, but the use of CBCAP funds enabled a second site. Additionally, CBCAP funds support the ongoing efforts of the Alabama Parental Advisory Council, a 9-member council of diverse parents across the state who further parent involvement in the planning and implementation of the agency's prevention programs and activities.

CBCAP dollars help serve Alabama's children with disabilities through seven HEARTS respite programs. The HEARTS respite program is offered across the state through United Cerebral Palsy affiliates and offer vouchers for respite services to parents of children with disabilities up to age 19, which allows the parent a short break from caring for a person with a disability or chronic illness so that can take time for themselves, their other children or spouse, or to tend to their own medical/personal needs. The purpose of the program is to reduce the stress of full-time caregiving associated with raising a child with a disability or with special healthcare needs, strengthen families, and reduce social isolation.

Another critical use of the funds will be for the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers (ANFRC) to develop new Family Resource Centers in underserved areas of the state, as well as increase the capacities of existing centers through the Family Centered Coaching training and the Standards of Quality for Family Strengthening and Support training. Finally, funds will go to Charles Henderson Child Health Center to "address ACES (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and toxic stress in youth and families" among the community they serve in Troy, Alabama. This work is led by a local pediatrician who identifies and assesses patients exhibiting signs of ACES and develops a treatment plan for them. The program provides positive parenting workshops and therapeutic expression sessions for children that includes art therapy, yoga, and creative writing therapy. These innovative efforts to foster a "resilient community" for the children and families served is not being offered in any other community in the state.

American Rescue Plan

Section 2205 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 authorizes some supplemental funds/appropriations to provide additional relief to address the continued impact of COVID-19 on the economy, public health, state and local governments, individuals, and businesses. While no additional application was required for the supplemental CAPTA funds, language included in ACYF-CB-PI-21-07, indicated that a brief narrative describing the Department's planned use of these funds must be submitted as part of the annual report on CAPTA. While the program instruction notes that the Children's Bureau will provide additional information on how to report information in the APSR later, the format for this brief narrative appears to be one of choice. It is Alabama's intention to use these supplemental funds as briefly detailed below and will address items 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, and 14 of the CAPTA State Grant Program purposes.

Alabama DHR has initiated a state-wide multi-disciplinary training program that will allow the Department to bring together local county teams of DHR CPS staff, law enforcement, and prosecution staff in an effort to improve the overall state CPS response. Training includes provision of information on primary prevention services, more thorough assessment of allegations of maltreatment, and court preparation. Training also provides information around the impacts of poverty and other factors on systems and on the experiences specific populations have without systems. Two training sessions have been completed with a third session scheduled for August 2022.

Alabama believes this can have a significant impact on those agencies involved in the CPS process. Additionally, from this funding source Alabama proposes expansion of the existing Intensive In-Home Services program providing wrap around services to families in their homes. Additional slots would be dedicated to preservation referrals to those programs in several counties statewide to include several rural areas where access to services is limited and where poverty is more

prevalent. This will allow identification of maltreatment or likelihood of future maltreatment and greater access to services targeting prevention of removal from the home and entry into out of home care.

4. Referral of Infants and Toddlers (under 36 months) to Alabama's early Intervention System (AEIS)

Child welfare staff, under provisions in CAPTA, shall refer all infants and toddlers from birth to 36 months, with indicated abuse/neglect reports received on or after June 25, 2004, to AEIS. The Alabama Early Intervention System, a division of the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services, is funded under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Early Intervention evaluates infants and any toddlers to identify those with a 25% delay in the major areas of development (e.g., physical, social, adaptive, cognitive, or communication skills) or a diagnosed condition likely to lead to delay and provides early intervention supports and services to eligible children.

An AEIS-DHR CAPTA referral form is required for all children who meet eligibility requirements (i.e., must be under 36 months at time of indicated disposition). Due process requirements must be completed for the PARAN before disposing of a CAN assessment and before sending the DHR-FCS-2121 to Child Find. Referrals are sent directly to the attention of ADRS/EI, 602 South Lawrence Street, Montgomery, Alabama 36104, or faxed to (334) 293-7393. Alabama Early Intervention System staff may contact the DHR caseworker for additional information needed to process the referral. Under Code of Alabama 1975 § 26-14-8 © (9) child welfare staff can share information with WEIS. *Refer to Child Protective Services Policies and Procedures, Central Registry, E. Use and Disclosure of CAN Information.* Referrals to AEIS are documented in the service case record. Parental consent is not required when making referrals to AEIS, but the referral should be discussed with the parents or primary caregiver. Alabama Early Intervention System assumes responsibility for obtaining written parental consent needed before AEIS can conduct an evaluation for referred infants/toddlers not in the custody of the Department. Child welfare staff shall pursue parental consent only when the referred infant/toddler is in the custody of the Department.

Note: Part C of IDEA recognizes foster parents as surrogate parents eligible to give written consent for evaluation when an infant/toddler is in foster care. Child welfare staff are not recognized as surrogate parents under Part C and therefore cannot give written parental consent for children in foster care even if DHR holds custody. In order to satisfy both AEIS and Departmental consent requirements for children in foster care, both the foster parent(s) and child welfare worker must sign the consent forms. The CCWIS report to generate data on this item is still under development. In all CAN reports where there is a child victim under 36 months, who is also indicated as having been abused or neglected, the referral is required before the investigation can be disposed.

The following data is obtained from the Alabama Early Intervention System State Office

The Department continues to work closely with the Alabama Early Intervention System to ensure that children are appropriately referred for services. The two agencies believe that it is important to heighten the awareness of line supervisors about the need for appropriate referrals to the Early Intervention Programs and increase awareness of services available to benefit children who are victims of child abuse/neglect who may have a developmental delay.

Of the 632 referrals made in **FY 2021**, 387 found no concerns. Two children were referred by the DHR Social worker as action needed, and 7 children were already in the system. Five children were activated for a Child Find referral. Sixty-one children were closed by Early Intervention with no further action needed, and 161 were closed due to unsuccessful contact. There were 2 referrals sent to EI that were children over the age of three years, and 7 children that were from other states.

5. Policies and procedures regarding the use of differential response, as applicable

Code of Alabama 1975 § 38-2-6 (10) mandates that DHR seek out and aid minor children in the state who are in need of its care and protection. Furthermore, Code of Alabama 1975 § 26-14-2 clarifies the legislative intent that protective services shall be made available in an effort to prevent further abuse and neglect, and to safeguard and enforce the general welfare of such children. Child Protective Services' primary role is to intervene when suspected child abuse/neglect reports are received; however, there are situations when individuals contact DHR to report what they consider abuse/neglect, but the information they provide:

- Does not risk to the level of child abuse/neglect according to statutory and departmental definitions; or
- Is insufficient to determine whether a CAN report exists

When these situations occur and the Intake information reveals the children may be at risk of maltreatment, the information is considered a CPS Prevention referral and an evaluation of the child/family situation is needed. The evaluation process is known as CPS Prevention assessment. Risk of maltreatment is defined, for purposes of this policy, as “family conditions or circumstances that, if left unchanged, can cause child abuse/neglect.” The CPS Prevention process is designed to determine whether ongoing protective services are needed to prevent child maltreatment. At any time, safety threats or abuse/neglect are discovered during the CPS Prevention process, child welfare staff must follow *CAN Assessment Policies and Procedures*.

Number of Families that Received a Differential Response as a Preventative Service During the Year:

The data for prevention reports received is as follows:

FY	Preventions Received	Number of Children Involved
2019	10,614	15,462
2020	9,927	14,289
2021	9,323	13,274

*Data Source: Alabama’s FACTS System

6. Guardians ad-Litem (GAL)

The staff at the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) has conducted GAL certification and recertification training sessions since grant year 2003-2004 in order to fulfill the requirements of 42 U.S.C.A. Section 5106a(b)(2)(B)(xiii) and Ala. Code 1975, § 12-15-304 (c) that all guardians ad-Litem must be trained as to their role. The federal law conditions the Department of Human Resources’ receipt of CAPTA monies on an assurance in the form of “certification” by the Governor that the state has a state law or a program including items listed in Section 5106a(b)(2)(B) which includes that GAL in these cases be trained in their role. This training requirement is just for GAL who wish to represent children in dependency and termination of parents rights cases and not for GAL who may be appointed in domestic relations, probate, or other type cases.

As of April 20, 2022, there were 1093 attorneys on the master GAL appointment list. Judges bring GALs to the annual Judicial Summit that is held in the Fall of each year.

The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (CARA)

On July 22, 2016, the President signed into law P.L. 114-198, The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act of 2016 (CARA). This Act aims to address the problem of opioid addiction in the United States. Amendments to CAPTA’s provisions relating to substance exposed newborns and Plans of Safe Care were thereby enacted. County Directors continue to communicate with local medical providers, hospital staff, and substance abuse professionals to discuss the requirement that DHR is to be contacted in all cases when a medical determination has been made that a newborn has been affected by substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms. Plans of Safe Care are included in CAN investigations and/or the ISP process. In Prevention Assessments, (Alabama’s differential response) if children are found to have been exposed to substances, Plans of Safe Care are utilized at that time. Alabama’s FACTS system captures and tracks Plans of Safe Care. Plans of Safe Care are included on the Quality Child Welfare Practice review tools and are monitored through Safety Assessment reviews, random record reviews and peer reviews.

Alabama’s FACTS system captures parental substance abuse as an entry reason into care and also which substance(s) were involved. There is also a Plan of Safe Care court in two counties - Jefferson and Jackson. This is being provided through a grant and the AOC is heavily involved. The referral process allows for the Courts to become involved with expectant mothers who are struggling with addiction prior to the birth of the baby to provide preventative services. The Agency does not have a mechanism to track costs related specifically to CARA. There is not a code on the work sampling forms to capture Plan of Safe Care or related duties, but rather this would be captured under Case Management. The Office of Child

Protective Services continues to gather data to track the numbers of reports involving Substance Exposed Infants, coupled with the Agency's response and delivery of needed services and supports. The QCWP Case Review Tool for Foster Care and CPS cases addresses whether there was evidence that Plans of Safe Care were formulated for children born affected by substance use. Feedback is then immediately shared with the county as needed.

The Department continues to track the data in FACTS. The Plan of Safe Care courts have not resumed at this time. Clients are referred to a Safe Care program that provides wrap around services to mothers who have children that were substance exposed at birth.

Number of children referred to CPS under Policies and Procedures Established to Address the Needs of Infants Born with and Affected by Illegal Substance Abuse, Withdrawal Symptoms, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (number of children with each of the identified symptoms/allegations who were subjects of a child abuse/neglect report received by the Department). Data and time frames are provided below for the number of children in CAN reports received by allegation, for the following allegations (Note: Referral Intake date was the method used to assign children to the yearly cohort groups):

- Chemical Endangerment (methamphetamine)
- Positive for Drugs at Birth / Drug Withdrawal
- Positive Test for Alcohol at Birth / Fetal Alcohol Syndrome

FY	TOTAL	Chemical Endangerment	Positive Drugs at Birth	Positive Alcohol at Birth/FAS
2019	685*	127	546	12
2020	732*	132	593	7
2021	746*	162	568	16

Data Source: Alabama's FACTS system

2021: *725 unique children, 21 children had multiple allegations, 1 child with all three

2020: *717 unique children, 15 had duplicate allegations

2019: *663 unique children, 22 children had duplicate allegations

SDHR continues to work in conjunction with the Children's Justice Task Force to implement the Substance Abuse Training model. The Substance Abuse Assessment two-day training was held three times in the third and fourth quarters of FY 2021. The training was held in Montgomery, which is centrally located, May 24-25, July 19-20, and August 2-3, 2021. The training attendees are child welfare staff, supervisors and administrative staff and focuses on the complex nature of families that are struggling with issues of substance use and how to assess for child safety in these cases. This training continues to educate our staff on the importance of understanding and monitoring substance abuse to guide in the implementation of Plans of Safe Care. Further, this training increases knowledge about substance abuse training assessment services throughout the state and the importance of collaborative work between multidisciplinary team members to meet the many needs of families struggling with substance use issues. More than 65 persons were trained during these 3 trainings. An additional four trainings are scheduled for FY 2022.

CHILD FATALITY AND NEAR FATALITY PUBLIC DISCLOSURE POLICY

Family Service Administrative Letter No. 7452, dated March 19, 2015, addresses the reporting and public release of records in cases of child fatality or near fatality. It was released to County Directors of Human Resources on March 30, 2015, for immediate implementation. The DHR Guidelines for reporting child deaths and near fatalities included guidance on the composition of county Human Resources Child Death Review Committees, and procedures for child death reviews. It includes:

- Cause, date (of death/near fatality) and circumstances regarding the child fatality or near fatality
- Age, gender, and race of the child

- Child welfare involvement with the child/family during the 12 months prior to the date of the child's death or near fatality incident. Identification of other pending referrals/open cases on the child/family at the time of death or near fatality
- A description of any other child welfare involvement with the child/family during the 12 months prior to the date of the child's death or near fatality incident
- The review process will consist of an objective discussion by the Review Committee of DHR's involvement with the family and an analysis of the Department's performance as it relates to policy, procedures, services, and best practices, etc.

Upon request for disclosure, information regarding child fatalities or near fatalities will in turn be provided by the Office of Data Analysis.

SUPPLEMENTAL CAPTA FUNDING (American Rescue Plan)

The State Department of Human Resources planned a multi-disciplinary training which took the place of the annual CPS SW Conference. The focus of this MDT training is for disciplines who have duties related to the investigation and prosecution of child maltreatment cases and includes four sessions of the same three-day training in various locations across the state. The training requires participating jurisdictions send a three-person team including one local DHR staff person, one law enforcement partner and encourages the third team member be an attorney from the local District Attorney's Office. The first session was held Dec 13-15, 2021, in Opelika, Alabama, the second session was held in Mobile, Alabama February 16-18, 2022. The third session is scheduled in Florence, Alabama for August 22-24, 2022.

These funds were also used to assist with the expansion of our Intensive In-Home Services. There are currently 661 IIHS slots statewide. As of February 2022, 456 families were being served through IIHS programs around the state. The IIHS services focus on achieving the outcome of successful permanency for children in a family setting through either family preservation or reunification programs utilizing evidenced-based programs. These programs have the flexibility to design individualized services that are family-driven and youth/child focused. Intensive in-home services are available to families for longer periods of time than 4 – 6 weeks as previously allowed in in Continuum of Care and FOCUS programs. All services are customized for delivery in the least restrictive manner.

SECTION E UPDATES TO TARGETED PLANS

A. Foster Parent Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan

Alabama has a Diligent Recruitment Plan with 12 Goals and 35 Objectives, and this statewide plan has been provided to each of Alabama's 67 counties. Due to the diversity and specific needs of each county, a County Recruitment Plan has been developed to ensure the needs of families and children are met. These plans coincide with Alabama's statewide plan. Each county submits their plan to the state office and provides updates to the state office annually regarding their progress towards reaching their goals. Each county has targeted monthly plans and include goals such as training families in Deciding Together, holding a certain number of TIPS classes, public service announcements on local radio and television stations and in written media, contacting local churches and other civic groups to discuss the need for foster parents, and setting up booths at local community events. Alabama will evaluate this plan to determine what updates are needed for the plan in the coming year.

B. Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan

The state of Alabama, along with local health departments, the State of Alabama's Medicaid program, local medical providers, local dental health providers, mental health providers, foster parents, and the Alabama Psychotropic Medication Review Team (APMRT), work together to ensure that the physical and emotional health needs of Alabama's children are met. During the past year the APMRT provided services across the state through presentations, videos directed toward foster parents and their care for children who are taking psychotropic medications, and other special projects including training at residential facilities. The APMRT continues to receive referrals for behavioral services and for

medication review only referrals. They offered medication review services to all 67 counties with the goal of ensuring the appropriateness of psychotropic medications prescribed to Alabama Foster Youth. In order to maintain services through the COVID-19 pandemic, APMRT notified social workers, facilities, and foster parents of a temporary change in service delivery and providing additional resource and links to APMRT developed trainings, activities, and videos.

Children who are in foster care continued to receive regular medical, dental, and mental health care during the COVID-19 pandemic. Many providers utilized telehealth services for children. There was no disruption of care for children during the pandemic.

Alabama's Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan did not specifically address a national public health care emergency. Alabama will evaluate the need for revisions to this plan to address a health care emergency such as a pandemic.

C. Disaster Plan

Alabama had one federally declared disaster in October 2021. No divisions of DHR were activated at that time. There were no other disasters during this reporting period. In the event Alabama is affected by a natural disaster, plans are in place to identify, locate, and continue availability of services for children under state care or supervision. Further, plans are in place to ensure a response to new child welfare cases, to remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel, to preserve essential records, coordinate services, and share information with other states.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Child Abuse and Neglect investigations continued without interruption. Workers were provided with PPE and required to follow safety protocols such as maintaining social distancing and wearing masks. Some foster care and family preservations case contacts were conducted virtually to ensure no interruption in services was noted. Alabama's disaster plan did not include provision related to a national public health emergency. Alabama will evaluate the need for revisions to this plan.

D. Training Plan

Alabama's Training Plan provides a list of initial and ongoing trainings for staff and providers. A description of each class and credit hours is also provided. Alabama will evaluate the Training Plan to determine what updates are needed for the plan in the upcoming year.

SECTION F STATISTICAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

INFORMATION ON CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICE WORKFORCE:

Alabama's Child Protective Service professionals and requirements for employment are as follows:

- **Social Service Caseworker I:**
Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in any major
- **Social Service Caseworker II:**
Current permanent status as a Social Service Caseworker I, a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in any major, and two years' experience as a Social Service Caseworker I
- **Social Worker I:**
Bachelor's degree in Social Work from a social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education and eligibility for licensure as issued by the Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners
- **Social Worker II:**

Current permanent status as a Social Worker I, two years' experience as a Social Worker I, and an active LBSW as issued by the Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners

- **Senior Social Worker I:** Master's degree in social work and eligibility for licensure as issued by the Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners
- **Senior Social Worker II:**
Current permanent status as a Senior Social Worker I, two years' experience as a Senior Social Worker I, and an active LMSW licensure
- **Service Supervisor I:**
Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in a social science, or in any major with at least 30 semester or 45 quarter hours in social or behavioral science courses, and 2 years of professional social work experience in child protective services, adult protective services, child/adult foster care, and/or adoption operations.
- **Service Supervisor II:**
Current, permanent status as a Service Supervisor I, a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university in a social science or any major with at least 30 semester or 45 quarter hours in social or behavioral science, and two years' experience as a Service Supervisor I
- **Senior Social Work Supervisor I:**
Master's degree in Social Work from a social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, current permanent status with DHR as a Social Service Caseworker I or II, Social Worker I or II, Senior Social Worker I or II, Service Supervisor I or II, or Human Resources Program Specialist, and two years of professional social worker experience in child welfare and/or adult services in a public welfare agency
- **Senior Social Work Supervisor II:**
Master's degree in Social Work from a social work program accredited by the Council on Social Work Education, current permanent status with DHR as a Senior Social Work Supervisor I, two years of professional social worker experience in child welfare and/or adult services in a public welfare agency, and an active LMSW licensure as issued by the Alabama Board of Social Work Examiners.

All workers are required to complete initial training Striving Toward Excellent Practice (STEP) Foundations, which consists of approximately 40 hours of training. STEP: Foundations is based on five foundation concepts: the belief that people can change; respecting the family's culture; joining with families; building partnerships with birth families; and foster/adoptive families in parenting; and working with families in an ecological (systems) framework. After the initial STEP Foundations courses, workers may attend specific modules of STEP which include Case Management, Investigation, and Adoption. The STEP trainings also include an On-the-Job Training component designed to strengthen the learning process for new workers.

After working with the Department for the times specified above in the classification descriptions, workers are eligible for promotion to the Supervisory level of employment.

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FOR CPS WORKFORCE

- Service Supervisor I (50223, 97 employees)
- Service Supervisor II (50259, 110 employees)
- Senior Social Work Supervisor I (50224, 25 employees)
- Senior Social Work Supervisor II (50275, 22 employees)
- Social Worker I (50248, 124 employees)

- Social Worker II (50257, 77 employees)
- Social Service Caseworker I (50246, 386 employees)
- Social Service Caseworker II (50250, 241 employees)
- Senior Social Worker I (50221, 79 employees)
- Senior Social Worker II (50258, 24 employees)
- Total: 1,185 employees

RACE	SEX	COUNT
AMERICAN INDIAN	F	4
ASIAN	F	2
BLACK	F	538
	M	47
HISPANIC	F	12
	M	2
NO RESPONSE	F	13
TWO OR MORE	F	16
	M	2
WHITE	F	521
	M	28
TOTAL	F	1,106
	M	79
GRAND TOTAL		1,185

***State Of Alabama Personnel as of 07/31/2022**

INFORMATION ON CASELOAD/WORKLOAD REQUIREMENTS

Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations: 12 new reports per worker per month
 Ongoing child protective service cases (families): 18 per worker

Alabama's CPS workforce is often times cross-trained in other areas of child welfare including foster care and adoption as many counties in the state do not have "specialized" staff. Many county child welfare workers conduct Child Abuse and Neglect investigations, work ongoing child protective service cases with families, work foster care cases, and adoptions.

Alabama's system is not currently set up to track the specific degree held by each worker. Typically, these classifications: Senior Social Worker Supervisor I and II, Senior Social Worker I and II, hold master's degrees or higher, and these classifications Service Supervisor I and II, Social Worker I and II, and Social Service Caseworker I and II hold Bachelor's degrees. We will review our system to determine what enhancements may be possible to track this information in the future.

Education and Training Vouchers: Please see Attachment C for details.

Payment Limitations:
See CFS 101 for details.

Office of Policy Yearly Report
2022 APSR ASSESSMENT

1. Maintain up to date policies

Meeting this goal will involve the planned review of existing policies. In the past 5 years a number of substantive policies have been developed. There is a need to make a careful review of existing policies to locate needed changes. While policies are updated as laws and regulations change, other revisions are also needed as the Department changes program and procedures.

2022 Update: During this reporting period revisions were made to several of the Department's policies.

- On April 7, 2021, Adoption Policy was revised to reflect current practices and requirements of Alabama Medicaid. A section was added to the adoption subsidy that discusses Medicaid coverage for children adopted by foster parents receiving subsidy. Alabama Medicaid required third party insurance to be used as primary insurance prior to Alabama Medicaid being used to pay for services.
- On June 4, 2021, Out-of-Home Care Policy Caseworker Visits was revised to reflect current practice and promote a strong assessment to help children understand their welfare is a priority and to ensure safety and well-being. Children placed in intensive level programs must be visited twice per month where the child resides.
- On June 4, 2021, Adoption Policy was revised with updated statute numbers and language. This revision was the result of ACT 2020-34 which amended sections in the Code of Alabama.
- On June 28, 2021, Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes and Out-of-Home Care Section Placement of Children was revised to follow ACT 2021-225. The types of foster homes were defined along with the definition of relative added.
- On August 5, 2021, Out-of-Home Care Policy, Child Protective Services Policy, American with Disabilities Act (ADA) Section 504 Policy, Multiple Need Child Policy, Interstate/Intercountry Services to Children Policy, DHR Partnerships with Children Their Families and Providers Policy and Child TCM Policy was revised to remove the term "mental retardation" from policy.
- On October 25, 2021, Financial Procedures for Out-of-Home Care Policy was revised to be in compliance with Family First Prevention Services ACT (P.L. 115-123) Placement of children must be in a foster family home that meets the standards of full licensure or approval that are established by the state. Children placed in provisionally licensed homes are not IV-E reimbursable. If the home becomes fully licensed or approved, the child may become IV-E eligible at that point. Congregate Care Services for TLP/ILP, Mothers & Infants and specialized placements for youth who are victims of or at risk of becoming victims of sex trafficking programs that are duly licensed and approved by the state are also reimbursable.
- On January 22, 2022, the Child TCM Manual was revised. A new on-call worker day sheet (DHR-FCS 2269) was developed for use for on-call staff.

2. Update and maintain the Alabama Administrative Record Code (APA)

An offensive plan to bring the Administrative Record Code up to date must be undertaken. Currently, a re-write of the entire APA for Out-of-Home Care is underway. The APA for Adoption services will be completed following that re-write. Included in the goal is the plan to develop the capacity of all policy developers in any program area to be familiar with updating the APA.

- **2022 Update:** The Department continues to work revising the APA. This is ongoing and goals will continue for APA completion.

3. Child Protective Services Policy and Procedures

Because this policy is the foundational policy for assuring the safety of Alabama's children, maintaining up to date revisions remains as an objective. Revisions to CPS Policies and Procedures are made in response to new laws and regulations, needs of children, and best practice issues.

- **2022 Update:** this goal continues. The Department continues to compose and revise Child Protective Services Policy in response to new laws and regulations.

4. Planned review of individual policies

A review of each policy is completed, and revision incorporated as needed.

- **2022 Update:** Objectives continue and will be carried forward. Policies are reviewed as needed.

Office of Child Welfare Eligibility Yearly Report

GOAL:

The Office of Child Welfare Eligibility will continue to strive to maximize the reimbursement from the federal government for some of the costs for the care of eligible children in foster care while complying with requirements set forth by federal and state guidelines.

2022 APSR Assessment

- Progress has been made related to including the required language for IV-E eligibility in court orders. The error rate of less than 5% has been maintained as evidenced by compliance with the last three Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility Reviews. Challenges will involve continuing to assist new staff in understanding the IV-E process, as well as modifying FACTS eligibility issues and implementing enhancements to improve the productivity in FACTS.
- In order to maintain this momentum of substantial compliance, we continue to have communication with our internal (county and state office) and external (Administrative Office of Courts) counterparts regarding the requirements of Title IV-E regulations including:
- To emphasize judicial determinations regarding reasonable efforts and contrary to the welfare language. We stress the importance of timeframes and required language for a court order to be valid when opportunities emerge such as at conferences and forums with county staff including county directors and District Administrative Specialists and line workers. The AOC continues to train judges, court staff, and attorneys on the importance of including proper court language for children in foster care to meet the federal IV-E eligibility requirements.
- Children entering care through Voluntary Placement Agreements (VPA). An enhancement has been integrated in FACTS to include a date of expiration in the VPA module that changes the child's status to state funds if the county has not documented in FACTS that a hearing addressing best interest was held within 180 days of a child entering care on a VPA. The funds will change to state funds on the 181st day.
- When it comes to responsibility for placement and care of children, we continue to make sure orders include language confirming that DHR has responsibility for the child. We have never been cited on any IV-E review for this regulation.
- Eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) under the state plan in effect July 16, 1996, OCWE staff was trained on the Title IV-E Foster Care Eligibility On-Site Review Instrument and instructions. We also incorporate examples of AFDC living with and removal from in training. A turnaround document is included in FACTS that summarized the points of eligibility for IV-E. We continue to utilize income and eligibility verification as well as information imported in FACTS by the county staff.
- To continue the momentum for placement in a licensed foster family home or other approved placements and the safety requirements for children's foster care placement. The Office of Child Welfare Eligibility in conjunction with the Division of Resource Management oversees a 100% review of all foster family homes and child placing institutions to ensure compliance with safety checks. This check is accomplished at times by sending a memorandum requesting county departments and childcare institutions to review all foster families and employees' records to ensure that all safety checks and foster family home approvals are in the records. Once the county departments and child agencies have completed this process, a compliance statement is forwarded to OCWE.

Office of Financial Resource Management Yearly Report

GOALS:

1. Provide Medicaid Rehabilitative Services training to individual county offices, county vendor providers, and state contract providers.
2. Provide Targeted Case Management (TCM) Training / refresher training to new / current county office staff
3. Help ensure that FACTS contains the current information required to bill TCM and Medicaid Rehabilitative Services
4. Conduct Initial and Follow-up record reviews of DHR state contract providers' records and provide feedback related to Medicaid Rehabilitative Services documentation
5. Conduct Medicaid and Non-Medicaid Provider reviews of county DHR offices Vendor Certification files to ensure required documentation is in compliance with DHR standards.
6. Conduct initial and follow-up TCM record reviews to ensure required documentation is in compliance with Medicaid and DHR standards.

2022 APSR Assessment

An essential function of the Office of Financial Resource Management (OFRM) is to monitor DHR Revenue Maximization efforts to draw down federal reimbursement for Medicaid services that would otherwise be paid with state dollars. Because of the Revenue Maximization efforts, DHR is able to save millions of state dollars each year. These efforts identify reimbursable services in the Medicaid Rehabilitative Services and TCM program in order to recoup state dollars spent to provide needed services for abused/neglected children and adults. To accomplish the 5-year goals, the OFRM provides policy training and consultation for Medicaid Rehabilitation Services and the TCM Program for both county staff and SDHR contract providers. The training and consultation are to ensure that Medicaid services are provided in accordance with Medicaid regulations and the documentation of services must be able to withstand a Medicaid audit. The OFRM has had great success in providing training to both county staff and SDHR contract providers. The OFRM has also achieved great success in correcting problems as well as working with county offices to ensure that current billing information is entered accurately and timely in FACTS. This is evidenced by the decreased number of denied and/or rejected Medicaid claims.

The OFRM conducts record reviews of contract provider records for policy compliance. This review process helps the provider implement and improved process to maintain accurate records related to service documentation. The OFRM has added a function to conduct record review of county DHR Vendor Certification files to ensure providers of Medicaid and non-Medicaid services have appropriate documentation of credentials on file.