

**STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES**

2024 Annual Progress & Services Report



**State of Alabama
Department of Human Resources
June 30, 2023**

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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) negotiates, manages, and monitors the Department's social service contracts and provides oversight, technical assistance, and support services to the public, contractors, state departments, and Department of Human Resources county and states offices/divisions. 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%.

VISION STATEMENT

The Department of Human Resources (DHR), as the designated Title IV-E-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 2023 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, 2023)

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Collaboration

C 1.

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 prevention of child abuse, well-being of children, placement stability and timely achievement of permanency. **For more detailed information please see Systemic Factors of Service Array and Agency Responsiveness to Community.**

During this reporting period, Alabama has worked closely with the Children's Bureau to strengthen APSR reporting. This has been accomplished via monthly calls with the Children's Bureau to discuss specific areas of the report and quarterly site visits. With this submission, there was greater emphasis on engaging internal and external stakeholders across many areas by inviting them to attend site visits and to participate in monthly calls in order to obtain input into the report. Areas of the report were assigned to specific units but were a collaborative effort across divisions as needed to complete the process and ensure input was obtained from many sources including internal and external stakeholders. Alabama intends to continue working with the Children's Bureau and stakeholders to further strengthen the reporting process and to ensure that collaboration across divisions and with internal and external stakeholders continues to be a priority for the next reporting cycle.

The Department works with the IL youth, as they participate in panels at both the Judicial and Supervisor's Conferences each year. The Dream Council meets annually with the Commissioner as well as hold meetings monthly. The Department encourage parents, family members, and age-appropriate children to actively participate in all ISPs. Children aged 14 and older are given the opportunity to approve or deny the option of being adopted.

Internal Collaboration:

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, the office of Independent Living and Recruitment/Home Care Support continues its partnership with the Office of Quality Assurance 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.

The Department participates in quarterly calls/ meeting with the Tribe to facilitate planning of possible joint training as well as consultation and collaboration as it pertains to the creation of goals and objectives for the next CFSP. 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.

The Department of Human Resources Finance review committee meets weekly to review spending requests for the Department that exceed \$499.00. This committee is made up Deputy Commissioners from each of the divisions, the Chief Legal Counsel for the Department and a representative from the Finance Division. Items are discussed and approval or disapproval is recommended to the Commissioner.

Program specialists from the Resource Management Unit and the Office of Foster Care meet monthly via zoom or in person with representatives from the county holding the case of each child who has been placed in congregate care 11 months or more to discuss progress, barriers, concerns, and ability to step down. Recommendations are made to the county director around appropriateness of placement, progress and need for step down to a less restrictive placement. The Resource Management specialists begin working with the county immediately to identify placements for any child who is deemed ready for step down monthly to ensure placements remain appropriate and in the child's best interest.

A Foster Care specialist facilitates the Conflict Resolution Team with the Alabama Foster/Adoptive Parent Association to mediate concerns brought to the Department from foster parents. This specialists reviews the case, reviews the complaint, reviews the counties response, and conducts the meeting. The specialists then presents the recommendations of the team to the Deputy Commissioner of FCS who presents the finding to the Commissioner. The Commissioner then responds with a letter to the county with the recommendations for corrections if they are warranted.

A Deputy Director of Family and Children's Services also meets quarterly with the Alabama Foster/Adoptive Parent Association (AFAPA) board of directors to discuss any concerns, give and receive updates, plan any trainings and coordinate any recruitment events. These meetings are held throughout the state and the Deputy Director of Recruitment and Home Care Supports or their designee attends the daylong meeting and presents any information needed to be communicated to the AFAPA around changes, upcoming events, and collaborations.

The Director and Deputy Director of the Quality Division, the Deputy Director of the Resource Management Division and the Director of the Family & Children's Services Division meet quarterly to staff children in a Therapeutic Foster Care-Enhanced placement to ensure placements are appropriate and to make recommendations to the Deputy Commissioners around step down to less restrictive placements. These cases are discussed with an emphasis on permanency and stability of the placement while also assessing the child's readiness for a step down. Each provider must present a semi-annual report on every child in a TFC-E placement

Family Services, Resource Management, and QA staff meet every other week to review MAT conflict resolution requests from county departments. Conflict resolution requests are submitted when the child/families' ISP team determines that they are not in agreement with the MAT rating of step-down or a less restrictive level of care for the child. Additional supporting documentation of behavioral needs over the past 30 days must be submitted for the team to consider conflict resolution requests.

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. Alabama's young people and the DREAM Council

leaders have also met as we continue to solicit their input related to strategic planning and input related to 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 and Lifeline. 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. Older foster youth have opened the annual Permanence, Supervisor, and Judicial Conferences with an information panel which included question and answer segments. Input regarding service gaps and supports needed is solicited from young people in all placement settings. **For more details see Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (pg. 99).**

External Collaboration:

One of Alabama's partner agencies is The Alabama Department of Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention (ADCANP), also known as the Children's Trust Fund, 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, ADCANPs Director serves 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 Department continues to partner with the Children's Justice Task Force (CJTF). During this reporting period, many trainings were held including Substance Abuse training for agency staff to focus on the complexities of substance use and how to assess for safety in these cases and Family Violence Assessment and Safety in Child Protective Services for DHR staff, law enforcement, and domestic violence shelter staff. **For more information on these collaborative trainings, see Systemic Factor Agency Responsiveness to the Community.**

The Resource Management Division meets quarterly with every level of contract providers and providers that are licensed by the Department to discuss any issues that arise, changes that have been made, and it is also a time for providers to be heard. At the last quarterly meeting discharge planning, acute discharge notices, and communication with counties was discussed. The Department's Independent Living Program staff and other staff from Family Services has participated in these meetings as well. Sometimes, children who are in need of placement are discussed at this meeting to brainstorm any supports that might make placement with their agency possible and successful.

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 Department and AOC have frequent contact and meet via iCAN team meetings. 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. 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. The 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. The state of Alabama service families in need equally. To ensure the state is doing so data is pulled quarterly to compare the foster care caseload to the current population.

Collaboration Through Joint Planning

Alabama has participated in monthly calls with the Children's Bureau and other internal and external stakeholders to discuss goals and objectives related to Alabama's CFSR. Calls were held on the first Tuesday of each month from January through May and resulted in a strengthening of APSR reporting.

Alabama has participated in quarterly site visits with the Children's Bureau which included internal and external stakeholders. Visits took place in November 2022 and February 2023. The November site visit included a panel of current and former foster youth discussing issues around education, lived experiences, and legal issues with foster youth. This information was provided to Family and Children's Service staff for dissemination and follow up. The February visit included discussions of many aspects of APSR reporting including Case Review System and CAPTA. A group of youth and young adults also joined the meeting to discuss ways to involve them in the CFSR/APSR. The group gave many insightful recommendations about how to best work with youth throughout the time they are involved with the Department and after they leave foster care. This information was shared with Family and Children's Services staff for follow up.

Alabama also held a joint planning meeting in May 2023 with internal stakeholders to address workforce development and worker retention. Participants included Family and Children's Services staff, county directors, supervisors, and workers, and representatives from State Personnel and the Office of Field Administration. The meeting began with a review of goals and strategies stepped out in the CFSR for updates on progress. Information was shared from Personnel about staff turnover rates and steps being taken to alleviate some of the turnover. Of note, the State is working on a new worker classification called a Case Management Technician. Staff employed in this classification would have state benefits and be a part of the merit system. This is a position that is similar to a case aide, where the worker would perform many tasks that a case aide would (e.g. transportation, supervision of some visits, and homemaker services) which will hopefully assist in lessening workload for front line workers. This position would also have access to the FACTS data base so that they could pay bills for services needed by the family and add narrative in the case file.

A lengthy discussion was held about things that the state is already doing around recruitment and retention. Some things include worker surveys (county specific), exit interviews/surveys when workers leave the Agency, stipend programs, hosting student interns, additions to pay scales, providing for licensure prep courses and supervision, and continuing education hours. The Agency also provides numerous trainings to assist workers and supervisors in managing case and workloads.

Concerns were shared in this meeting to include the amount of time it takes to enter data into the CCWIS system, the State Application process being lengthy, caseload versus workload, and development of supervisory capacity around the provision of difficult and constructive feedback to workers. Along with concerns, the group brainstormed ideas that may or may not be feasible, for future recruitment and retention. Some of those ideas included using a state newsletter in a positive way, hosting/attending job fairs, more incentives for supervisors (e.g. compensatory time, flexible schedules), and holding supervisory round tables by district to allow more networking, relationship building, and more time for discussion of specific topics.

Alabama plans to continue addressing the issue of workforce development over the next reporting period. Plans are to include external stakeholders in the next meeting regarding workforce development in order to hear what other ideas may be helpful to this process.

For more detailed information on collaboration across internal and external avenues, please see Systemic Factors of Service Array (pg. 63) and Agency Responsiveness to Community (pg. 72).

II. UPDATE TO ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE

C 2. ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT 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.

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 continues to be 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. The Department's policy requires an immediate response (within 12 hours but as soon as possible after a report is received) or a 5-day response time (within 5 days but as soon as possible after a report is received) for making contact with children and families. This is tracked by the FACTS system down to the minute for contact with the child victim.

Being a dual response state, Alabama set in policy that children who are reported to be at risk of abuse/neglect will be seen and assessed within the 5-day response time frames established by Alabama law and Department policy.

During FY 2022, the Electronic Report Distribution (ERD) showed First Victim Contacts were at 87.23 % in timeliness. This is a decrease of 3.37% from FY 2021 which showed 90.60 % timely contacts statewide. Though the exact reasons for the drop in timeliness of contact are not currently known, it is suspected that errors in report tracking, human error in entering timely information, or a decrease in staff across the state are all contributing factors. However, ERD report INVS 218A currently shows that for FY 2023 the Department is at 87.20 % for initial timely contacts for the state.

Quality Assurance Safety Assessment reviews were completed September – December of 2022 for 5 counties reflects this area to be a strength with ratings for each county reviewed rating above 90%. The areas of strength we are seeing in reviews are that the majority of children, per ERD reports, reported to be at risk of abuse/neglect are being seen within the designated timeframes mandates by policy. Response times are being correctly assigned in accordance with the nature

of the report. Tracking systems are in place to monitor timely child contact. These tracking systems include Alabama's CCWIS system, Electronic Report Distribution system, and supervisory review.

Areas that have been identified as needing improvement are that additional information could be gleaned at the initial intake to facilitate timely contacts such as additional identifying information, other people who may have information about the family, and additional ways to contact families. Some errors in data entry were identified which may not reflect an accurate percentage of timely contacts being made. One of the largest barriers to timely initial contacts continues to be the transient lifestyles which many families who come to the attention of the child welfare system live make it difficult to make timely initial contact.

One of the limitations of the data related to this area is human error. The reports that are utilized monthly for reporting are dependent upon data entry by workers. This is an area that the Department has and continues to address via worker and supervisor trainings. Worker turnover is also a contributing factor in timely and correct data entry.

The Child Protective Service Unit within Family Services continues to use the review tool already in use of the Safety Assessment as part of the regular on-site Quality Assurance reviews as the tool has a section specifically related to the Intake process. Reviews were conducted in 5 counties from September 2022 through December 2022. Five more counties were reviewed from January 2023 through April 2023 with ten (10) more reviews in ten additional counties scheduled for the remainder of 2023.

The state has met the 2023 goal established in the CFSP in the following items: Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment, services to families, risk and safety assessment permanency goals for children, achieving reunification, guardianship, adoption, or APPLA, relationship of child in care with parents, and child/family involvement in case planning. There were a few items the state did make improvements in however haven't met the goal for the year. These items are stability of foster care placements, placement with siblings, preserving connections, and worker to child visits.

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. Of the 9 Safety Assessments completed to date, only 2 showed that Safety Item 1 was an Area Needing Improvement. In those counties where this was an issue, County Improvement Plans are being scheduled to address the identified needs. As of now plans are underway to compile the data into a usable and workable spreadsheet over the coming year. The development of some tracking tools will be looked at quarterly to make updates. 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 have incorporated 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.

2023 Update:

- As of December 31, 2022, 41/67 counties had over 96% timely contacts and 12/67 were above 86% with the statewide average being almost 86%. This data is tracked through the CCWIS system and reported on monthly via Alabama's Electronic Report Distribution system 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 March 1, 2023, 5 counties had Safety Assessment reviews for the period of 7/1/21-10/1/22. The overall timely contact rating for these 5 counties was 96%. This shows that counties continue to rate well above 95% overall in making timely first victim contacts. This is monitored through the Office of Quality Assurance assessment tool.
- 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 continue to 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

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

SAFETY OUTCOME 2

INCLUDES 2023 UPDATES

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. For FY 2022, 1,137 referrals were received with allegations of substance abuse with 1, 443 children involved in the investigations. There were 1,394 entries to foster care due to substance abuse. Approximately 55.69% of children under the age of five at the time of entry, entered care with at least one entry to care

reason of parental substance abuse (drugs or alcohol) in FY 2022. 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.

Jefferson County Family Wellness Court

SDHR contributes \$260,260.00 to the Jefferson County Family Wellness Court. Of that amount, \$164,022.00 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.

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 there is a safety threat present but the child can remain in his/her home safely, services must begin immediately.

One service used by Alabama is family preservation which is comprised of intensive, in-home, or wrap around services. There are currently 661 IIHS slots statewide. Slots are filled based on referrals from county offices and can be made statewide. There are currently no wait lists for this service. More information on Intensive In-Home Services can be found in the Family Preservation section of the document on (pg. 93). 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.

Along with reviews conducted by Child Protective Services specialists, record reviews continue via the Office of Quality Assurance. Of the 10 counties reviewed thus far in this reporting period, 8 out of 10 showed a strength for Item 2. For Item 3, Risk and Safety Assessment and Management, 1 out of 10 counties showed a Strength for Item 3.

Strengths noted over this review period are that: appropriate in-home and/or community-based services are being provided to families and children to preserve the family unit. Other pertinent information is being gathered through forensic interviews, law enforcement contacts, medical providers, and other partner agencies as needed. Administrative Record Reviews are being conducted and detailed feedback is being provided to county staff for improvement. Workers continue to utilize the Safety Desktop tool that was created which includes information regarding how best to assess safety, determining safety, information on protective capacities, present and impending danger threats, and the Continuum of Risk of Maltreatment.

Challenges that have been noted over this reporting period: assessments are at times focused only on the initial allegation received, frontline staff and supervisors are often inexperienced, although services provided are appropriate there may be a need for more services to address underlying conditions. Collateral contacts that can offer supports are not always identified and utilized to provide safety and supports. A lack of services available for substance abuse and mental illness can be issues in some rural areas.

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 completed as part of the record reviews in counties will 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 2022 there were 5 safety assessments completed during on-site county reviews. There have been 8 completed thus far during 2023 with 7 more scheduled for the remainder of the year.

2. The SDHR Resource Management Division continues to 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.
3. SDHR and the Children's Justice Task Force continue to provide Substance Abuse Training for staff with an emphasis on current treatment modalities and the connection between active addiction and the risk of harm. More training is scheduled for 2023 including a Family Violence Assessment and Safety in Child Protective Services Training. Updates to trainings held over this reporting period are below.

2023 Updates:

The following Safety Assessment trainings were completed during 2022 by the Office of Child Protective Services.

5/4/22	Safety assessment only	Baldwin/Mobile	
5/5/22	Safety assessment only	Baldwin/Mobile	
10/12/22	Intake & CA/N	Baldwin, Mobile, Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, Washington	
10/13/22	Safety assessment	Baldwin, Mobile, Clarke, Escambia, Monroe, Washington	
11/16/22	Intake & CA/N	Mobile, Choctaw	
11/17/22	Safety assessment	Mobile, Choctaw	
12/7/22	Intake & CA/N	Mobile	
12/8/22	Safety assessment	Mobile	
1/30/23	Intake & CA/N	Blount, Calhoun, All CW staff Cherokee, Dekalb, Etowah, Marshall	34

1/31/23	Safety assessment	Blount, Calhoun, Cherokee, Dekalb, Etowah, Marshall	All CW staff	30
2/2/23	Intake & CA/N	Blount, Calhoun, Cherokee, Dekalb, Etowah, Marshall	All CW staff	38
2/3/23	Safety assessment		All CW staff	35

- 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 contact the Deputy Commissioner of Field Administration via email with requests for specific trainings as they are needed. These requests are approved and a request to complete them is sent to the Director of the Family Services Division for assignment. There are several trainings available upon request, including but not limited to: Intake, Safety Assessment, Safety Planning, Multi Needs referrals, Home Evaluations, ISP's, Comprehensive Family Assessments, 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.

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

All PIP goals were met as of July 2022. Activities from the PIP that were found to be effective have continued or will continued to be implemented to support the achievement of the CFSP goals/objectives.

2023 Update:

- Peer reviews conducted by the Office of Quality Child Welfare Practice specialists found that in 21 in-home cases reviewed and 26 foster care cases reviewed statewide from October 2022-June 2023:
 - Safety was assessed monthly in 17/21 CPS cases and 26/26 of the foster care cases (91% of all cases reviewed).
 - Safety was assessed less than monthly in 4/21 CPS cases and 0/26 foster care cases.
 - Safety was assessed at critical junctures in 16/21 CPS cases and 22/26 foster care cases (81% of all cases reviewed).
- 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.
- 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

Alabama has successfully completed its PIP and continues to utilize many strategies to ensure that successful permanency achievement for children continues to trend in an upward direction.

Stability of foster care placements continues to be an area of focus for the Department. Children in the State's care as of 09/30/2022 experienced an average of 4.5 placement moves over the span of their time in care. In FY 2021 the average number of placement moves was 4.12. The number of placements children experience is captured via Alabama's FACTS system. Placements are entered into the FACTS system each time there is a change. The Department has worked diligently over this reporting period to improve supports to caregivers. The Department has facilitated in-classroom training experiences provided by experts in attachment, including trauma informed parenting. The Trained Therapist Network, in partnership with the Children's Aid Society, provided several webinar opportunities for foster and adoptive parents as well as offering support groups and group and individual counseling opportunities to meet the needs of foster and adoptive parents and the children in their homes. The most recent QA site reviews (September 2022 through March 2023) show that 8 out of the 10 counties reviewed so far were determined to have a Strength in stability of placement for foster children.

As for placement stability in the most recent edition of Child Welfare Outcomes reporting FY 2021 numbers, placement stability was 76.8% with a 5-year average of 77.62 for 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.

While we acknowledge that moves can be traumatic on children, sometimes the moves are positive and based on successes. Alabama has continued to focus on reducing the number of children in foster care and reducing the number of children in congregate care settings; both of which require a move.

Another source of concern is barriers to receiving services, especially in rural areas where there are limited resources available to assist foster/adoptive parents. Large sibling groups, along with the need to place children with complex behavioral and/or mental health needs often lead to difficulty in locating suitable placements or lead to foster/adoptive parents being unable to care for a child that they initially thought they could maintain in their homes. Developmental disorders, such as Autism, have been a barrier for placement. Children with an Autism diagnosis who need a higher level of care may not be appropriate for some intensive residential placements due to their specific needs. This narrows potential placement options for these children. The Department is working diligently to address this gap. Any Foster/Adoptive home could be classified as a medically fragile home as long as the foster parents are willing to accept a medically fragile child and complete the training necessary to care for the child's specific condition(s). Currently, there are a limited number of families willing to accept and are able to care for children with Autism. As of 9/27/2022, there were 97 children in foster care with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

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 that includes brainstorming on services that might stabilize a placement before a disruption.

There are certain placement levels that require special approval to make the placement. They include children 12 years old and under for a basic residential facility, children 5 years old and under for a TFC or moderate placement, children 12 years old and younger for an intensive placement and all out of state placements. If the ISP team recommends placement in a basic residential facility for a child 12 and under, the county must request and gain approval from the Deputy Commissioner of Quality, the Deputy Commissioner of Family and Children's Services and the Special Assistant to the Commissioner. If the county has a recommendation and concurrence of the ISP team for a therapeutic placement for child who is 5 years old or younger, the county must request and gain approval for the placement from the foster care program specialist, the program manager for foster care and the Director of Family and Children Services. If the county has a provider who recommends an intensive placement for a child under the age of 12, the ISP team must meet and concur and the county must then request and gain approval for that placement from the Deputy Commissioner of Quality, the Deputy Commissioner of Family and Children's Services and the Special Assistant to the Commissioner. If the county has requested a placement through the Resource Management Division and a placement within the state cannot be located that can meet the needs of the child, the county can request and must gain approval for out of state placement to the deputy director of Resource Management, the Director of Quality, and the Director of Family Services.

One project to highlight from the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support (RHCS) is the unit's seven-county pilot recruitment project. Those current counties are Autauga, Dallas, Elmore, Jefferson, Lowndes, Macon, and Montgomery. This project entails customer service follow up calls and e-mails for each inquiry made from our (FITT) List- Family Intake Tracking Tool to their residing county. When people are interested in becoming a foster/adoptive parent, they call an 800 number, and their information is gathered and placed on the FITT list. These individuals are contacted and if interested in being licensed, provided an application as well as invited to the next training opportunity either in their home county or a neighboring county depending on which location has the earliest availability. These families are also registered in our FACTS database by the assigned RHCS specialist and tracked with assigned staff in the residing county.

For Fiscal year 2022 there were 2,304 inquiries from potential foster/adoptive providers. The foster care recruitment unit follows up with inquiries from potential foster parents on a weekly basis. After making initial contact they forward the information to the local county resource worker. This has helped to expedite the process of contacting potential foster parents. Additionally the resource unit has launched a QR code that allows potential foster parents the opportunity to complete an application online and this has streamlined the application process.

The Offices of Foster Care and Recruitment/Traditional Placement and Specialized Support continue to lead the State's weekly placement team meetings to assist in locating or developing placements for difficult to place children. 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 via conference call with the team and share their efforts 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 services, psychotropic medication review, behavioral assessments, mental health assessments, psychosexual assessments, in-home family preservation services, relative resource assessments and other wrap around 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.

As it relates to permanency goals for children, 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 and Alabama's CCWIS system. 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. In the OSRIs completed in 2022, the overall strength rating for Item 5: Permanency Goals for Child was 43.33%. Contributing factors for ANI ratings are not changing goals when case circumstances have changed, identifying the goal of adoption when relatives had not yet been assessed, and identifying concurrent plans that were not appropriate or were not being actively worked. Although barriers are still identified the agency has continued to maintain gains in Item 5. Item 5's baseline was identified as 32.6% and the Agency's PIP goal was set at 41%. In the 26 QWCP foster care case reviews completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023, it was determined that permanency options were adequately assessed in 20/26 cases (77%).

The length of time in foster care reduced in FY 2022 (see data below). In FY 2022, the average of timeliness initial ISPs were 94.55%. This information was obtained via Alabama's FACTS system.

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, from Alabama's CCWIS system, 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 2021 22.64 Months (approximate)
- FY 2022 21.20 Months (approximate)

To continue working towards fewer months in care, an emphasis on contacting all known relatives at the beginning of a case is stressed in worker and supervisor trainings as well as ISP trainings. Workers are also encouraged to utilize Accurant searches to locate relatives at the onset of a case. Jefferson County, the largest and most urban county in Alabama has an active drug court. Referrals for clients are made to the drug programs within 72 hours of a case opening for drug abuse assessments and other needs.

A team comprised of a Behavior Manager, MAT Assessors, Resource Management staff, and Foster Care Specialist continues to staff children monthly who are currently placed in intensive congregate care for 11 months or longer with county departments and other pertinent team members to ensure that these placements remain appropriate or if not, that these children are stepped down as needed. These staffings are conducted to determine barriers to progress and the best next steps towards permanency for these children.

In an effort to improve the permanency outcomes, the partnerships with Alabama Office of Courts 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 continue to be a focus moving forward.

Some barriers related to reducing the length of time in care for these children are:

- 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.
- Permanency goals need to be reassessed once it is determined that the initial permanency goal is not feasible.
- ISP steps are not behavioral in nature
- Staff turnover

Some noted strengths related to reducing the time in care for these children are:

- Numbers of youth in care have continued to decrease in recent years. At the end of FY 2022 there were 5,665 children in foster care. At the end of FY 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.

As it relates to Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or APPLA,

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

In the 60 foster care cases reviewed in 2022, the permanency goals were:

- Reunification: 4 (7%)
- Guardianship: 6 (10%)
- Adoption: 21 (35%)
- OPPLA: 1 (2%)
- Reunification and Guardianship: 18 (30%)
- Reunification and Adoption: 3 (5%)
- Reunification and OPPLA: 2 (3%)
- Adoption and Guardianship: 3 (5%)
- Guardianship and OPPLA: 2 (3%)

Some noted strengths are:

- State QA reviewers indicated that strengths for ISPs are assessing maternal and paternal relatives and filing for TPR timely.
- Kinship Guardianship continues to be an area of emphasis and is being utilized more in some counties. The Department continues to train staff of the use of Kinship Guardianship.
- In most counties, when the permanency goal is Return to Parent or Placement with Relatives, permanency is achieved before the ASFA time frames.

Some barriers noted in this area are:

- 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.
- Some states will require children to step down to a least restrictive setting prior to ICPC being requested; therefore, prolonging the length of time in foster care.
- Staff turnover leading to lack of monitoring progress in cases.

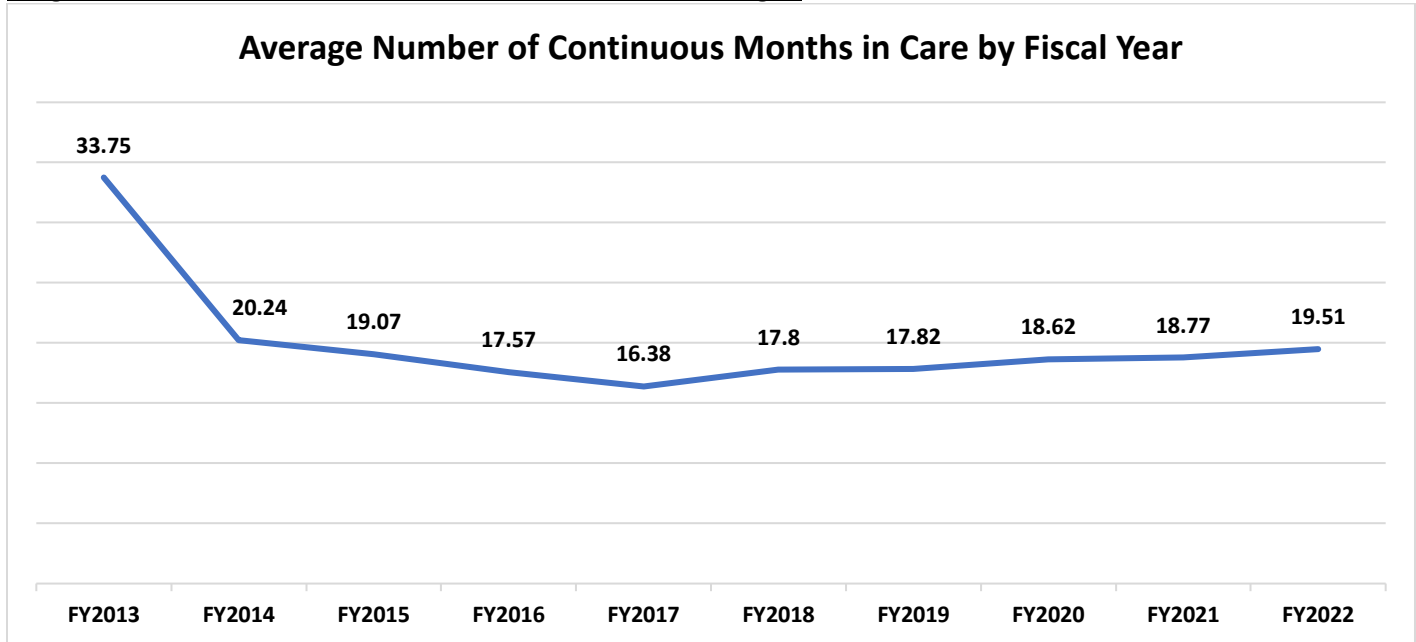
Length of Continuous Time in Foster Care for Children Discharged in FY 2022

The below table captures the length of time until discharge to the respective permanency goals for FY 2022.

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	1004	896	33	20
Kinship Guardianship	703	642	23	21
Return to Parent	371	259	12	9
Relative Placement	294	178	10	6

Length of Continuous Time in Foster Care for Children Discharged



DATA & SERVICES – Total Finalized Adoptions:

FY 2021	783
FY 2022	770

Adoptions – No Identified Resource (ANIR)

FY 2021: 118

FY 2022: 77

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.

There has been an emphasis and a great deal of success in the area of adoptions by current foster parents. Per data found on Alabama's FACTS system, there were approximately 694 adoptions by foster parents in FY 2022. This is not data that has been reported on in past APSR submissions though with the emphasis on foster parent adoptions, this data will be relevant for future reports. One limitation to this data is that it is only as accurate as what is entered into the FACTS system.

Adoption reports are monitored monthly for progress toward adoptions for children with the goal of ANIR. Adoption Placement Specialist activity is being tracked monthly by the Office of Adoption Recruitment and Placements and performance standards are in place to be included in staff performance appraisals annually.

Trauma informed training is offered to foster and adoptive parents to enhance their understanding of the children the Department places with the hopes of reducing the number of placement disruptions and increase the number of adoptions for children who are unable to be reunified with their biological families.

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

In FY 2022, 1372 children under the age of five at the time of removal, entered the foster care system. This represents a 12.28% decrease from FY 2021 (1564) children. Approximately 55.69% of children under the age of five at the time of entry, entered care with at least one entry to care reason of parental substance abuse (drugs or alcohol) in FY 2022,

compared to 62.30% in FY 2021. This age group remained in care longer than under 5 youth exiting care in the previous 2 fiscal years, 13.76 months in FY 2022 compared to 13.31 months in FY 2021 and 13.49 months in FY 2020. In FY 2022, 1601 youth under 5 years of age left foster care compared to 1406 in FY 2021.

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.

Alabama continues many partnerships with providers across the state related to Independent Living services for older youth. An emphasis continues to be stable housing for youth in and out of the Department's custody. More information is available regarding this particular partnership in the ILP section of the APSR on page -----.

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. These children make up a very small portion of Alabama's foster children.

For international adoptees, Alabama Pre/Post Adoption Connections served sixteen participants with free services for adoptive families during this reporting period. 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 Adoption Recruitment and Placement and the Office of Adoption Subsidies and Supports 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.

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 developed the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support in January 2022. This unit is comprised of a Deputy Director and two Program Specialist. The function of this unit is to work hand in hand with counties to help recruit and retain foster and adoptive parents. This unit provides recruitment specific training at conferences as well as quarterly consultation with all 67 counties.

2. Each county submits an annual foster/adoptive home recruitment plan that is discussed and monitored with the assigned Specialist for that county from the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support. County Recruitment plans are reviewed quarterly with the specialist and county resource staff to ensure plans are practical, functional, and being implemented according to the submitted plan. Although submitted formally yearly, plans are fluid and subject to revisions.
3. The Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support discusses the number of current and new foster homes per county during quarterly TEAM calls to include reports from Data Management and QA. This helps to ensure there are adequate homes based upon the number of children in care per county as well as document trends and needs. It will also strengthen collaborative efforts within the counties and state office.
4. The Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support has recently added an additional pilot county which brings the current total to seven. This unit provides added support to ensure through follow up and tracking is completed when inquiring families want to foster and/or adopt. Individual contact is made within the week of the inquiry. Those interested in starting a class will be mailed or e-mailed an application and timely communication is facilitated between State DHR and county staff to get individuals and families in training classes expeditiously. Those wishing to be put on a wait list for various reasons are contacted at sixty- and ninety-day intervals.

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 annual 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 are required to invite all necessary parties to ISPs by letter.
5. Alabama will, through continued partnership with the Administrative Office of Courts, expand the initiatives, such as iCAN meetings, which bring court and DHR county and state staff together to discuss barriers to timely permanency and work toward solutions of problems.
6. Alabama conducts permanency staffings monthly within many counties to mentor and coach front line staff and supervisors in case review and problem solving in specific cases.
7. Alabama continues to utilize the kinship navigator site to provide support and answer questions for kin providing care for children in Alabama.
8. State DHR has made dashboards available with real-time data to all staff that list all data regarding child well-being, individualized service plans, and safety.
9. In FY 2022, the Placement Staffing team staffed a total of 59 cases which yielded the following outcomes: 6 youth returned home or was placed with a relative; 7 were placed in an out-of-state treatment program; 9 referrals were

rescinded/cancelled by county staff; 37 children were placed in an in-state residential placement/program. The Office of FC will continue to hold placement staffing meetings to assess placement needs for children.

10. The Office of FC completed three conflict resolutions team meetings this FY 2022. The Office of FC will continue to work with AFAPA to address foster parent issues as part of the Conflict Resolution Team.
11. In FY 22 from August-September 2022, the Office of FC assisted counties with seeking traditional statewide placements on 5 foster children. The Office of FC will continue to assist counties with assessing appropriate placement types for children to reduce placement changes. The OFC will continue to seek traditional statewide foster homes for children in foster care.
12. The Office of FC will provide trainings addressing permanency timeliness, such as establishing paternity timely, assessing paternal relatives, relative placements, kinship, etc., at annual supervisor and permanency conferences.
13. The Office of FC will continue to encourage counties to seek maternal and paternal relatives within the first 30 days of the child entering foster care and recommend Accurant searches to also be completed within 30 days of case opening.

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:

- 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.
- The Office of FC will provide policy trainings annually during conferences for workers and supervisors.
- The Office of FC will attend permanency staffings (i.e., ages 4-10 in PIP counties, CIPs, full perm staffing's in some counties).
- The Office of FC Specialists will continue to provide support to their assigned counties regarding policy (such as locating policy and memos).
- While attending permanency and case staffings, the Office of FC will assess policy implementation and address it when necessary.
- The Office of FC will provide new worker trainings when necessary to discuss policy.
- The Office of FC trained staff in three counties on Foster Parent Bill of Rights. The Office of FC will continue to train staff on Foster Parent Bill of Rights when requested.
- The Office of FC trained 11 new staff on policy and procedures during FY 2022. The Office of FC will continue to train new staff on policy and procedures when requested.

2023 Update:

- 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, whereby barriers to permanency and proposed solutions are discussed/implemented
- Recruitment, training, and approval or foster/adoptive parents continues, with monitoring and evaluation activities in place as well

Permanency Outcome 2

The Continuity of Family Relationships and Connections is Preserved

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

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. Of the most recent county reviews via Quality Assurance 9 out of 10 counties showed a Strength in this area. Alabama's baseline performance at the beginning of Round 3 reviews was 75% and at the end of the review periods, the percentage was 80%. These numbers continue to show progress towards ensuring that siblings are placed together when appropriate. The Department is also able to track visits with siblings via our FACTS system, however this information is only as accurate as what is entered into the system. Other ways of monitoring sibling visits include record reviews and supervisory conferences.

In the County onsite reviews from September 2022 to June 2023, 13 counties were reviewed including Jefferson. The findings from those reviews relative to Permanency Outcome 2 are as follows:

Item 7:	85% STR
Item 8:	46% STR
Item 9:	61% STR
Item 10:	69% STR
Item 11:	23% STR

These overall item ratings are based upon decisions made by QA staff after a comprehensive review with the inclusion of OSRIs, Stakeholder Interviews, ERD data, and Permanency Assessments.

- In FY 2022, 673 sibling groups were placed together, and 611 siblings groups were not placed together.
 - This is sometimes necessary due to behavior issues between the siblings
 - Children with different fathers are placed with their paternal relatives
 - There is a lack of foster homes willing/able to accept large sibling groups
- There are a limited number of foster family providers that will take sibling groups, which ultimately result in siblings being separated. Additionally, some children have specific behavioral or medical needs that require specialized treatment that can lead to siblings being placed separately.
- Alabama also pays an enhanced payment to a family who will take a sibling group of 4 or more children.

In 2022, OSRI Item 7 was rated in 36 foster care cases.

- 26 (72%) were rated Strength
- 10 (28%) were rated ANI

Reasons for Siblings being separated:

- Lack of foster homes able to accept sibling groups
- Initially separated based on needs, but no steps to reunify when issue was resolved.
- Initially separated prior to PUR, but there were not sufficient efforts to reunify the siblings.

Although the overall 2022 rating of Item 7 is lower than the initial PIP baseline rating of 76%, Alabama is seeing an increase in the ratings for 2023. As of June 2023, the average rating for Item 7 is 83.3%.

As it relates to visits with parents and siblings in foster care and preserving connections, the following points are noted for this review period:

- ISPs contain visitation plans and workers are providing assistance to ensure the visits happen, including providing transportation and supervision of visits. Many foster parents are willing to partner with birth parents to schedule visits and to aid in transportation and supervision
- Social workers are taking siblings to visit each other during worker visits and birthday celebrations.
- Foster parents inviting siblings and parents to foster children birthday parties.
- Sibling visits are able to be tracked in the FACTS system, however many of them are not being logged.
 - This could be due to lack of familiarity with the process of documenting them.
 - More emphasis is needed to ensure that these visits are documented timely and accurately

Item 10

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

Relative Placement:

- As of 10/01/2022, 11.74% of children in care had a permanency goal of relative placement. This did not include Kinship Guardianship.
- In FY 2022, there were 245 children with a permanency plan of Kinship Guardianship, 646 children with permanency plan of permanent relative placement with transfer of custody to the relative, and 21 children with a permanency plan of permanent relative placement with DHR retaining custody.
- In FY 2022, 944 (25.88%) of children were discharged to relatives and spent an average of 9.77 months in care.
- In FY 2022, a total of 473 providers were receiving Kinship subsidy payments for 958 children

Observations on this practice area include:

- The time it takes to establish paternity can prolong the kinship guardianship cases
- Some birth parents are uncooperative and are not consistently disclosing relatives to the agency for consideration. Maternal and paternal relative resource forms are not being completed initially.
- Some counties are not as proactive and wait for relatives to reach out to DHR or have the relatives file their own petitions to begin the process of assessing the relative.
- In cases where children are removed from extended family members, rather than parents, there are documented efforts to locate birth parents or established paternity
- Staff are not always utilizing Accurant initially when the case is opened.

During the FY 2022 reporting period, 944 children exited foster care to placement with relatives, which represents 25.88% of children discharged that fiscal year. During the FY 2021 reporting period, 1060 children exited foster care to a placement with relatives. That number represents 27.7% of the young people discharged for the fiscal year.

Kinship Guardianship

Alabama's Kinship Guardianship program has been in place since the legislation passed in 2010. Our program continues to pay Kinship Guardianship assistance payments to relatives who become approved as a related foster family homes. They can be provisionally approved and begin receiving a payment immediately or if they do not meet the requirements for provisional, they can begin receiving payments as soon as they are approved as a foster home (meeting the same criteria as unrelated foster families). Once the child has been in the home for a minimum of six months, Kinship Guardianship can be finalized by the court. Our data can be found below

REPORTING PERIOD	NUMBER OF CHILDREN RECEIVING GAP*	NUMBER OF PROVIDERS (FAMILIES)*
FY 2021	715	341
FY 2022	958	473

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

Alabama DHR continues to focus on bringing awareness and education to families regarding the Kinship Guardianship process. As a result of these efforts, we have seen an increase of the use of the Kinship Guardianship Program. Per the chart above the number of young people receiving Kinship Guardianship payments has increased by 34 % during the reporting period of FY 2022.

Services to Support Kinship Care:

As of April 2023, Alabama currently has 5,818 children in out of home care. And of those children 555 were placed in relative homes. Approximately 237 of those children were placed in a related foster home and 244 children had the permanency plan of Kinship Guardianship. Of these 244 children, 120 were placed in a Foster Family Related Home, 47 were placed in a Related Home, 1 was placed in Therapeutic Foster Home, and 76 were placed in Traditional Foster Homes. Also of these 244 with a Kinship Guardianship permanency plan, 35 had a concurrent goal of return to parent, 102 had a concurrent goal of permanent relative placement, and 11 had a concurrent goal of adoption.

Alabama's newest unit within Family Services is the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support. This unit houses 8 staff members to include a Deputy Director, administrative assistant, full-time dedicated Kinship Program Specialist, and five part-time retired state employees who teach TIPS and Deciding Together to Kinship families. The Kinship Program Specialists are instrumental in the development of policy and provision of consultation and training to county offices. The five part-time employees play an instrumental role by expediting training to kinship families.

The Kinship Program Specialists work closely with our State Office media partners to include digital and social media outreach. Some of the outreach covers education for the public as to the benefits of becoming a kinship guardian versus a custodian, the benefits available for kin caregivers, and ways other community members can support the kin provider. Alabama's Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support has produced a scannable QR code which sends the user to Alabama DHR's online Foster Care Inquiry Form. Alabama DHR has also worked with a media company to produce a Kinship Guardianship promotional video which is displayed on social media outlets as well as on other digital platforms.

Alabama continues its partnership with 211-United Way Alabama to increase public awareness and service delivery regarding Kinship. "Kinship Guardianship Program" continues to be a tab on 211- United Way Alabama's website. Quarterly contact continues to be made to gather data on received calls and current referrals. 211-United Way Alabama has trained their call specialists regarding Kinship in effort to assist callers who seek 211-United Way resources.

The Kinship Program Specialist will partner with community stakeholder as needed to provide information for referral to the community at large. The Kinship Specialist will also attend child and family specific state events and trainings to strengthen networking opportunities.

Alabama DHR plans to print and distribute updated Kinship brochures. The updated brochure will include an innovative QR code which will direct the family to the Kinship Navigator website. The brochure will be for distribution in all school districts and local pediatrician offices to increase the knowledge of the benefits of becoming a kinship guardian.

Efforts continue to develop partnerships with Kinship families. The State of Alabama Department of Human Resources (SDHR) has plans to host a Kinship Community Fair Summit with Kinship families and community stakeholders and partners.

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 Permanency Conference, the annual Supervisor's Training as well as the annual Child Welfare/ Judicial Summit to educate and reinforce both new and veteran staff and court officials about the benefits of developing a kinship guardian in foster care cases.

FY 2022 Kinship Navigator Funding:

Alabama was awarded a 2022 Kinship grant from The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act. Such funding has assisted in the creation and stabilization of Alabama's KINSHIP Navigator website, internal training regarding using the KINSHIP guardianship permanency plan through annual conferences and advocacy by the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support and other permanency units within the Family Services Division. This grant has also provided a funding source for salaries and supplies to support the needs of Kinship Families.

As it relates to relationship of children in care with their parents, 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. In 2022, of the 38 OSRI rated for Item 11: relationship of Child in Care with Parents, 18 (47%) cases were identified to have the rating of Strengths and 20 (53%) were identified to have the rating of Area Needing Improvement. 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
- Workforce stability impacts this issue

Alabama has made substantial progress in Item 11. At the onset of Alabama's PIP, the baseline for Item 11 was identified as 13%. Although not an item monitored in the PIP, continued progress was made in this item throughout the PIP and in 2022.

Kinship Guardianship continues to be an area of emphasis for our children so that family connections can be maintained when possible. Training around preserving connections continues to be provided to DHR staff and those with permanency responsibilities at Permanency Conferences, Judicial Summits, and other conferences. Caseworker visits with parents/guardians are being tracked via our FACTS system. Alabama also has the ability to track visits between siblings.

Some challenges the State continues to address via trainings are the need for workers to enter data related to parent/worker/sibling visits, and the continued need for improved worker visits. As worker turnover is an issue in child welfare as a whole, ensuring that workers have the training and skills to engage with families and move permanency plans along, this will continue to be an area of emphasis. Some other challenges are related to relatives not wanting to become Kinship providers due to the requirements such as training and the time it takes to become licensed.

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.
6. The Office of FC will continue to assist with implementing Provisional Licensing policy encourage counties to utilize the permanency plan of Kinship Guardianship.
7. The Office of FC provided training on Home Evaluations at the 2022 and 2023 Supervisor Conference, to assist with securing appropriate relative placements and to maintain family connections.
8. The Office of FC will partner with the Independent Living Program to provide trainings at annual conferences, such as permanency conferences and supervisor conferences.
9. The Office of FC will provide training on seeking maternal and paternal relatives through relative resource forms and Accurant searches at annual supervisor conferences.

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 2023 Updates

Item 12

- 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.
- Staff turnover has 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. For QCWP case reviews completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023, the findings are as follows:

- In 18 applicable in-home cases, documentation reflected an adequate assessment of children's needs in 11/18 cases (61%). Of the 7 that did not include an adequate assessment, 4 were lacking an assessment around the child's dental needs and 3 were lacking an assessment around their MH needs.
- In 18 applicable foster care cases, 16 had evidence of assessment of children's educational needs (89%)
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, 20 had evidence of assessment of children's physical needs (77%)
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, 8 had evidence of assessment of children's dental needs (31%)
- In 19 applicable foster care cases, 15 had evidence of assessment of children's mental/behavioral needs (79%).
- In 21 applicable in-home cases, there was an assessment of ongoing service needs in 13/21 cases (62%).
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, there was an assessment of ongoing service needs in 17/26 cases (65%).
- ISPs are not consistently providing completion dates for service provision, resulting in some services not being secured in a timely manner.

For QCWP case reviews completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023, the findings are as follows:

- In 19 applicable in-home cases, there was documentation that parents were engaged in the ISP process in 11/19 cases (58%).
- In 24 applicable foster care cases, there was documentation that parents were engaged in the ISP process in 16/24 cases (67%).

The above QCWP data closely resembles ORSI data from 2022: Sub Item 12a: Needs Assessment and Services to children averaged at 67%, Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child averaged at 72%, Item 17: Physical Needs of the Child averaged at 72%. There is a disparity in the findings for Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child averaged at 46%. Different tools were used to identify the findings, but the agency will explore reasons for the disparity for this reporting period.

Item 13. Child/Family Involvement in Case Planning

GOAL:

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

Strategies:

- The Office of FC completed a legal training on ISPs for DHR Legal in FY 2022. The Office of FC will continue to support counties with trainings on ISPs when requested.

Item 14. Caseworker Visits with Child

Alabama requires visits with children in foster care to occur at least monthly, and for children in certain placements, twice monthly. In OSRIs completed from September 2022 until March 2023, it was identified that caseworker visits are typically happening on a monthly basis and at times more often. While visits are happening the scope and purpose of the visits cannot always be gleaned from the documentation to determine if progress towards goals for 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. The Department captures caseworker visits using FACTS. Workers are required to enter 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
FY 2021	95%	96%
FY 2022	95%	95%

***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.

QCWP reviews were completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023 with the following findings:

- In 21 applicable In-home cases, safety and well-being were monitored during monthly visits in 17/21 cases (81%).
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, safety and well-being were monitored during monthly visits in 24/26 cases (92%).
- In 21 applicable in-home cases, children perceived their well-being as a priority during visits in 14/21 cases (67%).
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, children perceived their well-being as a priority during visits in 24/26 cases (92%).

In the OSRIs reviewed in 2022, Item 14: Caseworker Visits with Child averaged 66% with 95 cases rated. While still lying down with the OSRI items, the QCWP unit utilizes a different tool that is structured differently than the OSRI. However, similar trends were identified when rating caseworker visits

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).

As it relates to quality visits, the office of Foster Care reports there is a continued need for emphasis on documentation of visits so that the scope of what is assessed, discussed, and progress made is evident in the narrative. Further, more emphasis should be placed on obtaining critical information from staff when children are placed in residential facilities.

Item 15 Caseworker Visit with Parents

The primary focus of caseworkers is to work with the child and caregiver, and to have meaningful caseworker visits each month to monitor progress on ISP goals. Visits to parents and caretakers may also occur in other settings outside of the home, 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. The OSRIs have identified there is a significant difference in caseworker visits with the father of the children.

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:

- Meaningful Caseworker visit training is available to all counties as needed. The Department is looking at integrating this training into the new worker training model that is being developed.
- 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.

Item 16. Educational needs of child(ren)

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

WELL-BEING OUTCOME 2

Includes 2023 Updates

The assessment of educational needs for children continues through record reviews and child-specific directives and feedback conducted by the OQCWP and Quality Assurance reviews. 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. In 18/26 applicable foster care cases reviewed, 16 had evidence of assessment of children's education needs (89%).

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.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Includes 2023 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. In county onsite reviews and case reviews by foster care specialists, evidence is seen that workers are assessing educational needs of children at the beginning of cases and throughout the life of the case. This is evidenced by documentation of workers attending IEP meetings, following up with school counselors as needed, and discussing educational needs with children and caretakers. Further, evidence is seen that counties are making referrals for tutoring, early intervention services, and obtaining educational records.
- The QCWP Specialists continue to conduct ongoing peer reviews with county supervisors and reviews in the counties. 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.

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.
- 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.
- Training for supervisors and workers around the CFA/ISP process will be facilitated in districts by the QCWP specialists. 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 training includes 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. This training has been provided to all but two districts. Please see Case Review System for more information related to this training.
- We will request copies of all ESSA protocol from every county 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.
- During permanency reviews, the Office of FC will discuss educational needs of the children, when appropriate.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to include educational providers within the ISPs or have an absentee ISP form completed.
- The Office of FC will encourage workers to seek out educational support services for children in foster care.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to include educational needs in the ISPs and the CFAs.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to enroll children timely into schools when coming into care.
- The Office of FC will provide training on meaningful worker visits to address the assessment of educational needs for children in foster care.

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 2023 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 OQCWP completes peer reviews across the state. 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.

Item 17: Physical Health of the Child, 77 OSRIs rated for this item.

56 (73%) STR

21 (27%) ANI

Reasons for ANIs: not providing oversight of medication logs, not assessing dental health needs, overdue EPSDT or not receiving a medical upon entry into care, not meeting all of the child's dental health needs, not receiving regular dental checkups.

QCWP case reviews completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023, the findings are as follows:

- In 18 applicable in-home cases, documentation reflected an adequate assessment of children's needs in 11/18 cases (61%). Of the 7 that did not include an adequate assessment, 4 were lacking an assessment around the child's dental needs.
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, 20 had evidence of assessment of children's physical needs (77%)
- In 26 applicable foster care cases, 8 had evidence of assessment of children's dental needs (31%)

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 or children, such as surgery or ongoing medical conditions, are met through the appropriate provision of services.

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 Analysts continue to provide significant support to counties in assisting them to meet the behavioral health needs of our children. A Behavioral Services Unit has been developed within SDHR, which includes a Program Manager with 5 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.

Item 18: Mental Behavioral Health of the Child, 46 OSRIs rated for this item.

21 (46%) STR

25 (54%) ANI

Reasons for ANI: Did not adequately assess mental and behavioral health, did not address all of the child's known mental health needs, no concerted efforts to assess mental health needs, no concerted efforts to refer child to needed services, did not provide sufficient oversight of mental health medications.

QCWP case reviews completed statewide from October 2022-June 2023, the findings are as follows:

- In 18 applicable in-home cases, documentation reflected an adequate assessment of children's needs in 11/18 cases (61%). Of the 7 that did not include an adequate assessment, 3 were lacking an assessment around their MH needs.
- In 19 applicable foster care cases, 15 had evidence of assessment of children's mental/behavioral needs (79%).

The agency has identified the disparity around the ratings for the OSRI's Item 18 and the QCWP's rating for mental and behavioral needs. The QCWP review is a case record review only and does not include interviews of case participants. The agency will continue to explore the disparity and other potential causes.

State DHR Behavioral Analysts, the Office of Foster Care, Resource Management Division, and State QA MAT assessors continue to have round table congregate care staffings with the counties for children who have been in intensive placement for 11 months or longer to discuss needs, barriers, and next steps via conference calls. 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. For FY 2022, on average there were 92 cases staffed monthly by SDHR OFC, Behavioral Analysts, county staff, and program staff.

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

- 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 mental/behavioral health 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

There are also strengths noted in this area which include:

- Screenings are being provided to children of all ages and at the appropriate time frames based on age and need
- Workers are aware of children's medications including needs and side effects
- Works are following up with caregivers to assess the effects of medications
- Medication logs are kept by providers
- Immunizations are up to date for children
- Evidence of workers assessing behavioral issues is seen
- Discussion of behavioral or mental health concerns with caregivers

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS Includes 2023 Updates

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 requires 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, Resource Management Division, and MAT Assessors, will continue to conduct round-table type case discussions for foster children in congregate care facilities/programs to ensure engagement and assessment by county workers and program staff.
- The QCWP Specialists will continue to conduct ongoing peer 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 and will be integrated into new worker training as the current training model is revised.
- The State continues to monitor service provision to ensure needs of all children, youth, young adults, and families are adequately met.
- The Office of FC will recommend behavioral health services to counties (Autism services, psychotropic medication review, behavioral assessments, mental health assessments, psychosexual assessments, intensive in-home services) and assist with providing referrals.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to monitor psychotropic medications for children in foster care by referring counties to complete referrals to the Alabama Psychiatric Medication Review Team.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to include medical, dental, vision, and behavioral needs in ISPs and CFA.
- The Office of FC will continue to review ERD reports to monitor FACTS entries.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to attend treatment teams meetings for children in foster care.
- The Office of FC will continue to monitor incident reports to ensure that medical follow ups are completed. The Office of FC reviews and logs incident reports monthly.
- The Office of FC will encourage counties to gather medication logs from agencies, facilities, and foster parents.

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.

The Office of FC specialist will continue to support their assigned counties. Each specialist is assigned certain counties and provide support to the counties when requested.

Systemic Factor: Statewide Information System

Item 19. State is operating a statewide information system

CFSR, R3: Area Needing Improvement

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Alabama's automated child welfare system known as Family, Adult, and Child Tracking System (FACTS) 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.

- During 2022-2023 reporting period enhancements were completed to facilitate capturing data for the AFCARS 2.0 changes. These enhancements included:
 - Adding information that updated ICWA documentation.
 - Updating picklist values to allow documenting reasonable accommodations.
 - Fields were added to the Home Removal Screen to document prior adoptions and prior episodes of Kinship Guardianship as well as updated picklists that so that information about additional conditions at time of removal could be documented.
 - Fields were added to the client general information screen as well as the client health information screens to document whether a child had ever fathered or bore a child.
 - Ethnicity pick lists were updated to allow documentation if child was abandoned.
 - Fields were added to multiple screens that allow documentation of the steps in the TPR process
 - Modifications were made so that multiple episodes of missing or runaway could be documented.
 - Modifications were made to allow capturing additional information about sex trafficking prior to and/or during current home removal episodes.
 - An existing field in the client education section was modified that allowed documentation of IFSP's for children receiving early intervention services.
- Additional Enhancements to FACTS completed during the current reporting period included disabling a reserved placement checkbox.

In October 2021 work began on developing a NEICE Module in FACTS that will send and receive ICPC Referrals and Information through the NEICE Clearinghouse (NCH). Following a period of research, analysis and requirement gathering we

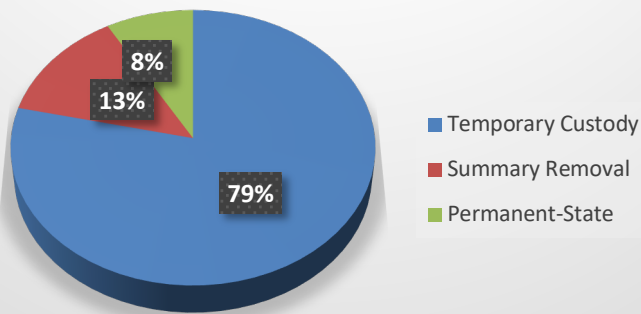
- Created a node for NEICE in the Admin Module in FACTS.
- To this area we have included a NEICE Workload Screen and Coding that will allow information received from the NCH to land in this Admin area and be exported or downloaded, (whichever is applicable) to the FACTS either to the Referral (intake) Module or the Case Module.
- Coding for Incoming Cases was completed by October 2022.
- As of early May 2023, coding has been completed. Revisions may be necessary based on testing results.

- Once the Web Service was completed, a special POC (Proof of Concept) environment was created. Initial testing was done in this environment. Batch Process coding has been completed.
- In early May 2023, a special UT Build for the entire NEICE package was complete as was a training demonstration to the State's ICPC Staff. It is expected that the package will make it through a SIT build and into UAT for Quality Control Testing by May 15, 2023. We expect NEICE to go live in FACTS by June 2023. There will be a period of converting data currently held by the Case Management System to the FACTS/NCH system.

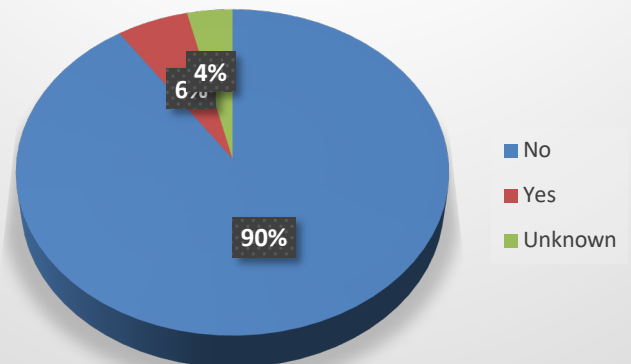
Data is pulled from information entered into FACTS by workers and supervisors. The accuracy of FACTS information is examined through analysis of various reports and queries. Careful review by Office of Data Analysis staff provides opportunities for any discrepancies to be discovered. Further analysis 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.

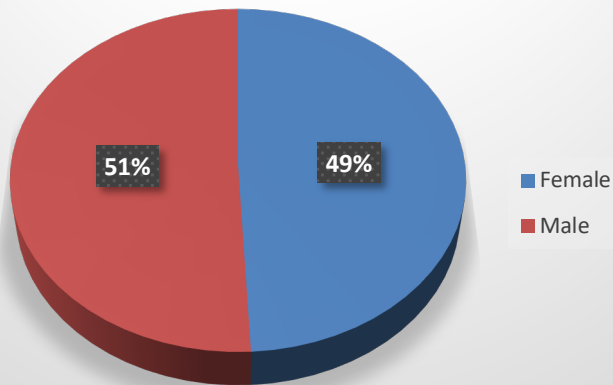
**Custody Status of Children
in Foster Care as of
9/30/22**



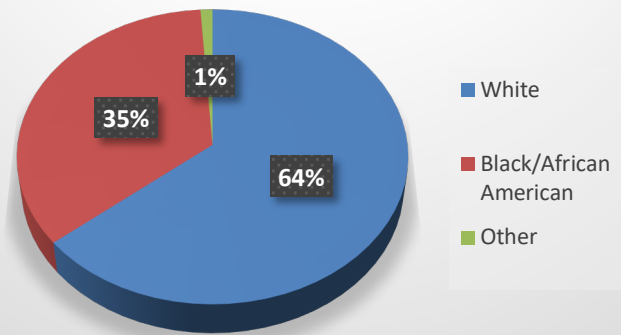
**Hispanic Origin of
Children in Foster Care as
of 9/30/22**



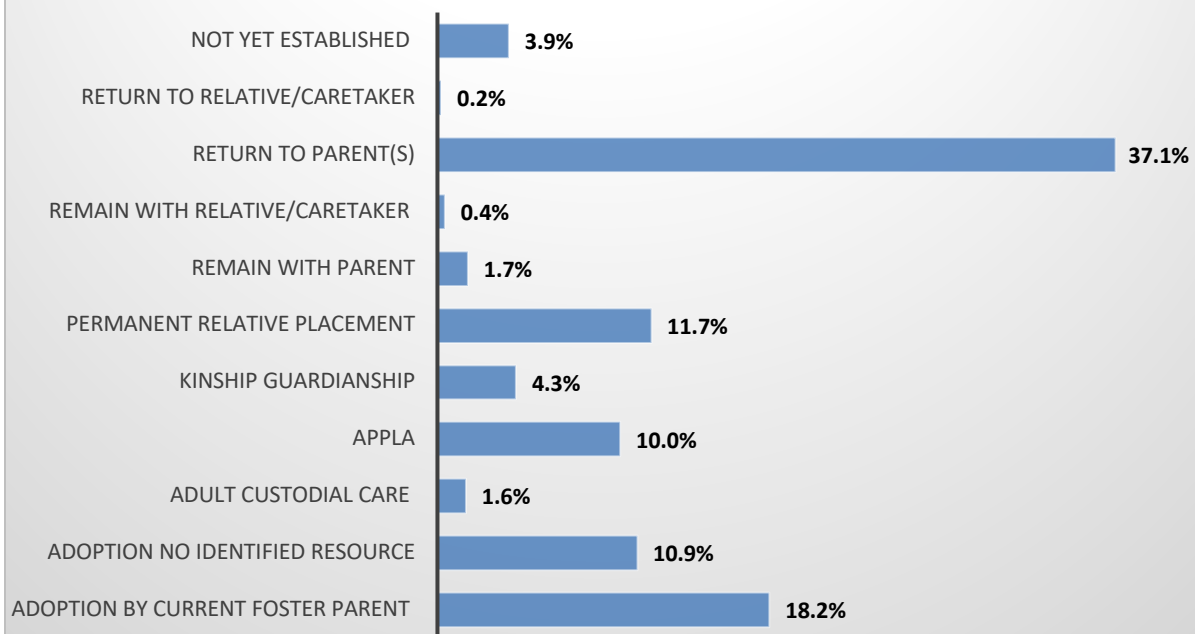
Gender of Children in Foster Care on 9/30/22



Race of Children in Foster Care as of 9/30/22



Permanency Goals for Children in Care on 9/30/22



SYSTEMIC FACTOR CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

Item 20. Written case plan:

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

During case reviews, there is evidence in some counties that parents are not being invited to ISPs. This is seen in paper file reviews and also via FACTS where workers enter the names of those invited to case plan meetings. There is evidence that

most parents are invited to attend ISP meetings, and this is via paper file reviews by looking at the sign in sheets for ISP meetings. There is no place to track if parents actually attend the meetings in FACTS other than by looking at sign in sheets.

Information gathered from current county onsite case reviews, as well as stakeholder interviews showed inconsistent engagement with parents, including absent fathers and extended families (maternal and paternal). Thus far for FY 2023, ten county onsite reviews have taken place. Of those reviews, it is noted that ISP meetings are happening as required by policy. However, in some counties there is a lack of documentation of pre-planning and a lack of detail the steps the Agency, family, and others were to take to move the case forward. It is also noted that counties are inviting the appropriate participants and encouraging all participants to offer input.

Item 20: Written Case Plan Development

13 Onsite Reviews from Sept 2022 to June 2023

7 (54%) Strength

Reasons for ANI ratings: Meetings not held within policy timeframes, not all team members were invited to attend meetings, fathers were not consistently invited, there were missing permanency plans, inconsistently using absentee forms, inconsistency in providing a narrative entry about who was present and what was discussed at the meeting.

- 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). Alabama's baseline rating was 20% for this item, and progress has been noted over the reporting period. For this reporting period, stakeholders reported that mothers and fathers were engaged in discussions in strengths, needs, identifying services, establishing goals, and evaluating progress.
- 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 is difficult to discern the difference in parents' not feeling heard on case planning or not accepting a change of permanency planning based on their lack of working services. It should be noted continued emphasis related to the ISP process, as well as the CFA are being undertaken which should help strengthen the work the Department does with children, families, and stakeholders.

Item 13: Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning, 82 Applicable cases

42 (%) STR

36 (%) ANI

4 (%) NA

Involvement of Child:	36 (46%) Yes,	15 (19%) No,	27 (35%) NA
Involvement of Mothers:	42 (54%) Yes,	30 (38%) No,	6 (8%) NA
Involvement of Fathers:	20 (26%) Yes,	22 (28%) No,	36 (46%) NA

In the ANI case narratives, concerted efforts were not made to involve mothers, fathers, and caregivers in the case planning process. The agency has traditionally shown more efforts were given to mothers than fathers, unless they were actively involved in the case at the time of removal. This data does not differentiate between cases where a father had been identified to engage.

In 13 applicable in-home cases reviewed by QCWP specialists from October 2022-June 2023, parents were included in the development of the case plan and the ongoing process in 11/13 cases (85%).

In 12 applicable foster home cases reviewed by QCWP specialists from October 2022-June 2023, parents were included in the development of the case plan and ongoing process in 11/12 cases (92%).

In 21 in-home cases, there was monitoring of progress toward goals in 14/21 (67%).

In 26 foster home cases, there was monitoring of progress toward goals in 16/26 (62%).

The agency recognizes the disparity in the OSRI and QCWP ratings. The QCWP ratings do not separate mothers and fathers in the ratings and do not have the benefit of interviewing the parents/caregivers.

- The Department utilizes 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 Electronic Report Distribution system.
- Cases are methodically reviewed, as a result Alabama's ongoing on-site QA reviews. 15 on-site county reviews are completed each year. 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.
- 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). This training was part of the PIP and began in 2021. In 2022, the training was rolled out to all other districts except two. For more information on this training, see Case Review System. 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, 104 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.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

Case Review System (ISP/CFA training provided by Quality Child Welfare Practice)

2023 Update: 278 staff in 6 districts received the CFA/ISP training during FY 22. District 4 and Jefferson County received it during FY 21 through the PIP implementation process. The September 2022 CFA/ISP trainings for Districts 7 and District 9 were postponed and will be rescheduled later.

This training will be reviewed in conjunction with the STEP training for new employees to identify potential overlap of information/curriculum. After this review, the existing CFA/ISP training will be modified as needed to present to new employees on a quarterly basis as a supplement to the information provided to new workers during STEP training.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT – Includes 2023 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 strategy remains in place and trainings continue to be offered. For more information on specific trainings, please see Systemic Factor Training on page _____.

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 so that fathers and paternal relatives can be considered when forming and reviewing permanency plans. 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.

Permanency plans and service arrays are discussed as a part of the Child welfare/Judicial Summit each year. Helping judges understand all of the possible permanency goals and the requirements for each has been impactful particularly with increasing the Kinship Guardianship numbers.

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.

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. 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.

For context to show Alabama's results of efforts in the identified PIP counties, the PIP counties' OSRI ratings for item 13 were separated from statewide data for 2022.

Item 13 Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning (2022)

PIP Counties (Jefferson and District 4)

19 OSRIs

10 (53%) STR

9 (47%) ANI

Involvement of Child:	8 (42%) Yes,	4 (21%) No,	7 (37%) NA
Involvement of Mothers:	11 (58%) Yes,	8 (42%) No,	0 (%) NA
Involvement of Fathers:	5 (26%) Yes,	4 (21%) No,	10 (53%) NA

Item 13 Statewide Data:

42 (51%) STR

36 (44%) ANI

4 (5%) NA

Involvement of Child:	36 (46%) Yes,	15 (19%) No,	27 (35%) NA
Involvement of Mothers:	42 (54%) Yes,	30 (38%) No,	6 (8%) NA
Involvement of Fathers:	20 (26%) Yes,	22 (28%) No,	36 (46%) NA

Reasons for ANI: Did not have ongoing discussion with mother and father to discuss case progress, mother was involved, but father was excluded from case planning, the agency did not make efforts to gather mother and father's input in the case planning process, limited contact with mother outside of case planning meetings. The data is limited and does not differentiate between cases in which a father has been identified and one that he has not.

In 13 applicable in-home cases reviewed by QCWP specialists from October 2022-June 2023, parents were included in the development of the case plan and the ongoing process in 11/13 cases (85%).

In 12 applicable foster care cases reviewed by QCWP specialists from October 2022-June 2023, parents were included in the development of the case plan and ongoing process in 11/12 cases (92%).

In 21 in-home cases, there was monitoring of progress toward goals in 14/21 (67%).

In 26 foster care cases, there was monitoring of progress toward goals in 16/26 (62%).

In 20 applicable in-home cases, safety threats and protective capacities were included in the CFA/ISP in 9/20 cases reviewed (45%).

In 26 applicable foster care cases, safety threats and protective capacities were included in the CFA/ISP in 19/26 cases reviewed (73%).

In 20 applicable in-home cases, services were assessed for appropriateness and effectiveness in 11/20 cases reviewed (55%).

In 26 applicable foster care cases, services were assessed for appropriateness and effectiveness in 13/26 cases reviewed (50%).

The overall rating for Item 13 shows a slight increase but shows consistent growth from the time Alabama's baseline was established at 20% and Alabama's PIP goal was set at 25%. Efforts to increase child and family involvement in case planning was provided statewide but was initially started in the PIP counties.

Although a lesser number of cases have been reviewed in 2023, a slight increase in the number of mother's involvement in case planning is identified with the percentage of fathers' involvement remaining the same.

Item 21. Periodic administrative / judicial review

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	2021A	2021B	2022A	2022B
Percentage Timely Review	93.78%	93.37%	93.61%	93.35%

- Staff 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).
- 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.
- A youth panel is present at the annual Child welfare/Judicial summit where there is always discussion around the court and their allowing youth to be actively involved in hearings

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. For more information about the 2022 Judicial Summit see pg. _____.

Item 22. Process ensuring permanency hearings

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

Strengths noted in the most recent OSRI reviews include:

- Evidence of permanency hearings being held noted by orders being filed in case records and noted in the FACTS system
- Evidence of hearings being held timely via stakeholder interviews and documentation in case records and FACTS
- Court reports are being completed timely with accurate information so as not to delay information being received by the Court
- Evidence that guardians-ad-litem are attending hearings

- Counties are utilizing internal tracking systems to ensure that hearings are requested and held timely such as pen and paper lists and Electronic Distribution Reports
- There is evidence of flexibility between the Court and the local office to ensure that hearings are held timely
- 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 Court Improvement Plan.
- 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 challenges seen in the most recent reviews include:

- Gaps in case records after the initial hearing
- Scheduling by the Court in some counties is inconsistent
- Orders being signed by judges are not always signed timely
- Some courts schedule six-month hearings at the conclusion of the adjudicatory hearing
- 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.
 - This is always an area covered at the Child welfare/Judicial conference.

TIME TO PERMANENCY HEARINGS

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

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	FY21	FY22
Average # of Days	319	329
Median # of Days	339	345
% of Timely Hearings	66%	65%
% Untimely Hearings	34%	35%
% children >365 days with no hearing documented	3%	0%
Initial Permanency Hearing to 1st Subsequent Hearing	FY21	FY22
Average # of Days	274	276
Median # of Days	301	301
% Timely Hearings	77%	67%
% Untimely Hearings	23%	22%
% children who should have had but	9%	10%

did not have a subsequent hearing		
1st Subsequent Hearing to 2nd Subsequent Hearing	FY21	FY22
Average # Days	233	258
Median # of Days	203	266
% Timely Hearings	86%	74%
% Untimely Hearings	14%	18%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	10%	8%
2nd Subsequent Hearing to 3rd Subsequent Hearing	FY21	FY22
Average # Days	223	253
Median # Days	188	218
% Timely Hearings	88%	80%
% Untimely Hearings	12%	14%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	8%	7%
3rd Subsequent Hearing to 4th Subsequent Hearing	FY21	FY22
Average # of Days	199	215
Median # of Days	178	189
% Timely Hearings	92%	84%
% Untimely Hearings	8%	11%
% children who should have had but did not have a subsequent hearing	6%	5%

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 24 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 2021 and 2022. The FY2022 numbers are higher than FY2021. This is attributed to cleaning up cases after COVID and some judge vacancies occurring due to retirement. The Office of Courts anticipates that next year's numbers may be high as well due to new judges coming in and disposing older cases from previous judges. The average number of days from the original dependency filing date to TPR petition date (617) does include some children that are not involved with the Department, though to separate those, a paper file review would need to be conducted by the Office of Courts. For the average number of days of TPR petition date to TPR disposition date (255) the Office of Courts points to service of fathers as the biggest barrier. Cases cannot be set on a docket until that father is served or it has been published, which requires a motion from one of the parties in the case.

FY 2021 TPR PETITIONS	Average Days
Original Dependency Petitions Date to TPR Petition File Date	393
TPR Petition Date to TPR Disposition Date	182
FY 2022 TPR Petitions	Average Days
Original Dependency Disposition Date to TPR Petition File Date	617
TPR Petition Date to TPR Disposition Date	255

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 continues to work on the development of several trainings to be conducted for all child welfare staff statewide. This will also be a topic for our annual permanency conferences during the next five years.

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 2023.

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

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

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 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.

Most juvenile courts in Alabama give notice of next scheduled hearings from the bench at each hearing. There is not a way in the current system to track such notices. For FFY 2024 additional research and assessment will occur regarding notification of required entities and tracking capabilities. Additional comprehensive information will be provided in FFY 2025 APSR.

Systemic Factor Quality Assurance/Continuous Quality Improvement

Item 25. Statewide operation of quality assurance system

Assessment of Progress / Data

How well is the quality assurance system functioning statewide to ensure that it:

(1) is operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided:

Alabama has an extensive CQI system operating statewide in all 67 counties. State DHR has a QA Division with a Deputy Commissioner, Director, Program Manager, and a QA Unit consisting of a Program Supervisor and 7 Program Specialist. Each of the 67 counties have an identified QA Coordinator and an established local QA Committee comprised of community stakeholders. Alabama has adopted the OSRI as its primary review tool for the State QA Unit and it is used during onsite reviews of the 67 counties.

(2) has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety)

Beginning in September 2022, after the completion of Alabama's PIP, State DHR returned to conducting county specific onsite reviews utilizing the OSRI and OMS. In addition to utilizing the OSRI to evaluate the quality of services, the QA Unit also conducts stakeholder interviews, QRIs (Quality Review Instrument), QRI re-reviews, safety assessments, permanency assessments, and resource record reviews. The assessment of safety and well-being are aspects of each of these components of the onsite review. Approximately 15 counties are reviewed per year by the State QA Unit.

All county QA Committees are required to complete an established number of QRIs per year. QRIs, after being debriefed with the county, are submitted to State QA for review and then entered in the QRI database. The database allows for reports to be run depending on entered parameters.

County committees are also required to complete annual stakeholder interviews bi-annually when not having a State Onsite Review. Stakeholders required to be interviewed are juvenile court judge, education personnel, service providers, law enforcement, foster parents, GALs, DHR attorneys, county director, county supervisors, and county workers. Once the local committees complete their annual stakeholder interviews, the report is then submitted to State QA. In March 2023,

the State QA Unit developed a more structured stakeholder interview process to ensure uniformed information is provided to the State Office. Beginning in 2023, State QA will begin entering the submitted Stakeholder Interview Reports into a spreadsheet allowing information to be aggregated to identify statewide trends.

In March of 2023, the QA unit began work on developing a new system for the counties to complete satisfaction surveys. Prior to 2023, each county had their own surveys and processes. Survey results were only used by the county for their CQI process and not shared with SDHR. The new surveys, which are “yes or no” questions and scale questions will be sent to stakeholders after completion of investigations and case planning meetings. Survey results will be reviewed and compiled by the county QA committees and shared with county management. Compiled results will be sent to SDHR to be used to identify strengths and barriers by county and regions.

All counties are expected to complete and submit their County Self-Assessment every 6 months.

The County Self-Assessment utilizes the 36 federal items and is supported by county stakeholder interviews, satisfaction surveys, case reviews, and ERD reports. Once the QA Coordinator compiles all the necessary supports for each item, county management, frontline staff, and stakeholders review each item and determine if the item is rated a strength or an area needing improvement. The report is then submitted to SDHR QA Division and is used in the development of the County Improvement Plan.

If a county had an onsite review completed by the State QA Unit, the Summary of Findings can be used in place of or in conjunction with their County Self-Assessment to develop their County Improvement Plan.

During the county self-assessment, Items 29 and 30 requires the county to assess their service array and ability to develop necessary resources. Should these items be identified as an Area Needing Improvement, the county would make plans in their CIP to address barriers and ensure the county can develop and provide appropriate services to the children and families being served.

(3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system

In the onsite reviews completed from September 2022 through December 2022, items 29 and 30 received 100% strength in the 5 counties reviewed. The counties identified having the resources needed to ensure children can remain in their homes and services are available to meet the individual needs of the children and families served to facilitate the identified permanency goals for children.

Although the onsite reviews and counties identify resources are available and can be adjusted, the OSRI findings reflect that services are not always delivered timely and that in many cases, parents refuse to access the services to ensure children are able to remain in their homes, prevent entry into foster care, or the timely achievement of permanency goals.

In the 81 OSRIs completed in the calendar year of 2022, 17 OSRIs were applicable for Item 2, of the 17 applicable OSRIs, 9 (53%) was rated as a Strength and 8 (47%) were rated as Area Needing Improvement. For Item 12, 25 (31%) were rated as a Strength and 56 (69%) were rated as Area Needing Improvement.

In a review of Item 2's rated as ANI, the reviewers identified workers completed an adequate assessment of the family needs and needed services, but there was a delay in service provision or no provision of services. In some instances, referrals were made for services, but not followed through or it was left for the family to secure the services on their own. Safety Assessments completed Sept. 2022 through Dec. 2022 during on-site reviews, identified thorough assessments throughout the investigations and services provided, however some children entered foster care despite services provided.

In a review of item 12's rated as ANI, the reviewers identified workers failed to complete an adequate assessment of the underlying needs of the parents more often and either provided no services or services that did not appropriately address the true needs of the family. The permanency assessments completed Sept. 2022 through Dec. 2022 during on-site reviews identified the children and foster parent's needs were assessed for the most part and appropriate services provided; however, the parents, especially fathers, were not appropriately assessed and appropriate services were not provided.

(4) provides relevant reports

At the completion of each onsite review, the counties reviewed received a Summary of Findings that identified the 36 items as either a "Strength" or an "Area Needing Improvement". Within the Summary of Findings, the appendix provides the individual reports for the OSRIs, QRIs, QRI Re-Reviews, Safety Assessment, Permanency Assessment, and Resource Record Review.

The OMS provides the ability to run reports with many different parameters, and the QRI database also allows a lesser number of parameters to be run such as county, district, case type, gender, ethnicity, time in care, reason for case opening, worker, supervisor, and reviewer.

The agency also has access to ERD and Family Services Dashboards. SDHR can identify services provided to children and families when acquired through a purchase order; however, SDHR is unable to run reports that detail the use of community-based services or contract services.

(5) evaluates implemented program improvement measures

After the submission of the County Self-Assessment and prior to the development of the County Improvement Plan, State QA (practice specialist and QA specialist) meet with county management, frontline staff, and stakeholders to review ratings, identify priority areas, goals, data elements to track, and set data goals. Participants are requested to consider the best possible steps to achieve goals before the next meeting to develop the County Improvement Plan.

During the County Improvement Planning meeting, county management, State QA staff, frontline staff, and stakeholders develop the steps for identified goals. Each step should have responsible parties identified with timeframes for completion. The steps will also identify the type of service and support provided to the county by the State Office.

During the implementation of the County Improvement Plan, the Practice Specialist will continue to track county data and will report to the county, as well as Division leadership, monthly the progress of reaching the identified data goals. Should no progress be made, the Practice Specialist will alert the county and a meeting will be held to address the barriers and identify new steps.

Systemic Factor: **Training**

Includes 2023 Updates

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. The Office of Child Welfare Training (OCWT) unit consists of six trainers and a Program Manager. Trainers are located throughout the state in Huntsville, Montgomery, Gadsden, and

Birmingham, and trainings are delivered both virtually and in-person, with in-person sessions primarily held in Montgomery or Birmingham.

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 Striving Toward Excellent Practice (STEP) curriculum equips 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. Staff are enrolled into this training upon their employment, and this is managed through the online Learning, Education, and Training System (LETS). 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 these modules depending on their assigned responsibilities and the decision of county management. Outlined in the table below are the number of sessions and participants that have attended each module thus far in FY 2023.

TRAINING	NUMBER OF SESSIONS DURING FY23 (October – January 2023)	NUMBER OF STAFF TRAINED DURING FY23 (October-January 2023)	NUMBER OF COUNTIES WITH STAFF ATTENDING
STEP Foundations	7	112	38
STEP Intake	3	50	22
STEP Investigation	5	85	28
STEP Case Management	6	104	41
STEP Adoption	2	28	16

TOTAL NUMBER OF COUNTIES WITH STAFF PARTICIPATING IN ANY STEP TRAINING FROM OCTOBER 2022-JANUARY 2023:
49

The average length of time between an employee's start date and the date that employee began STEP training was 16 days. Of the 112 employees who completed STEP during this period, 64 began the training 10-20 days after their start date. Only two of the 112 employees were employed for more than 30 days prior to beginning STEP training.

Of the 112 employees who completed STEP Foundations during this period, 93 (or 83%) began the next module within 30 days of completing Foundations. Of those 93:

- 35 (or 37%) began the next module within 10 days
- 34 (or 37%) began the next module within 5 days

Only 13 (or 12%) began the next module more than 30 days after completing Foundations.

Six of the 112 employees have not yet been enrolled in the next module, and three of those have left the agency.

Participants' supervisors were surveyed 30-60 days post training to determine the effectiveness of the curriculum. The results, to date, for each module are outlined below.

STEP: FOUNDATIONS

Upon completion of Foundations, was the worker able to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Effectively engage/join with families?	37.5%	57.5%	5%	0%
Provide effective feedback to their families?	35%	60%	5%	0%
Recognize & respect cultural differences in families?	47.5%	50%	2.5%	0%
Demonstrate genuineness/respect in interactions with family members/clients, including those who may be resistant or angry?	52.5%	42.5%	5%	0%
Successfully navigate/access FACTS, including accessing the employee's workload, locating a referral, case, client, or provider; identify a mandatory field; identify an AFCARS/NCAND field?	35%	55%	7.5%	2.5%
OJT component of the training provided an opportunity for the worker to observe interactions in a variety of child welfare situations and for the supervisor to debrief the experience with the worker?	43.59%	53.85%	2.56%	0%

Additional Training Needs Identified by Foundations Participants' Supervisors included:

- More specific ISP training and shadowing of other staff
- More training around underlying needs and communicating with empathy
- Training around avoiding early burnout

STEP: Intake

Upon completion of Intake, was the worker able to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Understand the functions, process, roles, and responsibilities in responding to reports of abuse/neglect?	33.33%	55.6%	11.1%	0%
Demonstrate the ability to engage/communicate with those who make the reports to child protective services?	33.33%	61.11%	5.56%	0%
Apply assessment skills to determine immediacy of risk or abuse of children & decide level of priority for agency response?	33.33%	50%	16.67%	0%
Determine the types of referrals and reports that should be transferred to community providers rather than opened by the agency?	27.78%	50%	22.22%	0%

Understand the legal & agency definitions of physical abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment?	27.78%	66.67%	5.56%	0%
Understand the roles/responsibilities of other community agencies, professional, and service providers involved in child protection and family support	27.78%	66.67%	5.56%	0%
Understand interpersonal/family dynamics commonly associated with physical, sexual abuse, neglect, and emotional maltreatment	33.33%	55.56%	11.11%	0%

Additional Training Needs Identified by Intake Participants' Supervisors included:

- More training around documentation
- More training around obtaining/assessing pertinent information
- Ongoing training around policy

STEP: Investigation

Upon completion of Investigation was the worker, with guidance from their supervisor, able to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Identify impending danger threats?	13.33%	80%	6.67%	0%
Identify protective capacities?	6.67%	80%	13.33%	0%
Utilize the 6 assessment questions to assess a situation to determine safety and act appropriately to ensure safety?	6.67%	73.33%	20%	0%

Supervisors for Investigation participants were also asked to identify whether participants could, upon completion of training and with guidance from a supervisor, complete the following tasks in FACTS:

Activity:	Yes, They Could Complete This Task:
Add Clients to the Investigation	53.85%
Add Collaterals to the Investigation	46.15%
Complete Child Vulnerability Screen	76.92%
Complete Impending Danger Screen	61.54%
Complete Protective Capacities Screen	69.23%
Complete Safety Decision Screen	69.23%
Complete Service Logs/Purchase Orders	84.62%
Case Connection	46.15%

Additional Training Needs Identified by Investigation Participants' Supervisors included:

- More ISP training
- More training around safety assessment as part of ongoing case management

- More training around determining the disposition of a report and which families would benefit from family preservation services/other referrals
- Training to improve FACTS proficiency.
- More training around safety plans and case transfer procedures

STEP: Case Management

Upon completion of Case Management, was the worker able to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Actively Involve the family & ISP team in joint case planning, assessment, and service provision?	13.64%	86.36%	0%	0%
Help families develop informal and formal supports?	13.04%	82.61%	4.35%	0%
Provide effective feedback to the family?	17.39%	82.61%	0%	0%
Determine and provide intervention strategies during a crisis?	13.04%	78.26%	8.7%	0%
Understand the cause of child abuse & neglect?	22.73%	77.27%	0%	0%
Assess attachment through child to parent visits?	18.18%	77.27%	4.55%	0%
Understand the effects of maltreatment and importance of meeting the needs of children?	26.09%	73.91%	0%	0%
Identify the strengths/needs of a family?	17.39%	82.61%	0%	0%
Prepare the family/team members for an ISP meeting?	13.04%	73.91%	13.04%	0%
Facilitate an ISP meeting?	17.39%	78.26%	4.35%	0%
Gather, analyze, organize information to provide a professional analysis of the family for the CFA?	4.35%	78.26%	17.39%	0%
Conduct a meaningful caseworker visit to determine safety, permanency, and well-being of families?	17.39%	73.91%	8.7%	0%

Additional Training Needs Identified by Case Management Participants' Supervisors included:

- More FACTS training

STEP: Adoption

Upon completion of Foundations, was the worker, with guidance from their supervisor, able to:	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree

Determine when adoption is the most appropriate permanency plan for a child?	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0%
Engage with the child and discuss adoption, including helping an adolescent child move beyond the “no?”	33.33%	33.33%	33.33%	0%
Complete a thorough Non-Identifying Background Summary?	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%
Fully complete the required forms for adoption placement and complete the adoption placement interview?	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%
Complete the tasks in FACTS required for adoption, such as entering the adoption placement, subsidy information and submitting for approval, and splitting the case?	0%	66.67%	33.33%	0%

Additional Training Needs Identified by Adoption Participants’ Supervisors included:

- More FACTS training

Data Source: LETS (Learning, Education, and Training System) & Supervisory/Management Surveys

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 30 days of their start date.
- 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), with the majority beginning the next module within 30 days of completing Foundations.
- 97% of supervisors who completed the Foundation survey 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. This is a key component in the process of Transfer of Learning is on-the-job training.
- Overall, supervisors report that workers can engage and join with families, provide effective feedback, respect cultural differences, involve families in the case planning process, demonstrate genuineness, understand the causes of abuse and neglect, and identify families’ strengths and needs upon completion of training.

These strengths are based on the surveys completed STEP participants’ 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.

Activities for the Coming Year to Maintain the Strengths:

We are continuing plans to update the curriculum used for new workers in coordination with one of our university partners. This work is still in the development stage. It is our plan to include simulated learning into the initial child welfare worker training, so that they will have more hands-on learning opportunities under the supervision of the trainers. 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 also plan to continue to ensure that our workers are enrolled in STEP training as soon as they are hired and maintain the current pace of having staff attend Foundations within 30 days of their start date.

Areas that need to be strengthened:

- More in-depth FACTS training is consistently noted as an area of need. As such, we are looking at ways to enhance this component of training and focus on some of the greater areas of need that have been identified. This may result in the development of a stand-alone FACTS module vs. having it included in the STEP modules. We are in the process of determining the viability of this option.
- While it appears that STEP consistently allows workers to understand the core concepts of work with families (engaging/joining, giving feedback, genuineness, respect for cultural difference, understanding the cause of abuse/neglect, etc.), it does not prepare them quite as well for the concrete, hands on piece of the work, particularly around assessment, such as:
 - Determining the appropriate response times
 - Utilizing the 6 assessment questions to assess a situation to determine safety and act appropriately to ensure safety
 - Determining appropriate referrals to other agencies
 - Gathering, analyzing, organizing information to provide a professional analysis of the family for the CFA
- 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 the 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 developed these trainings, and they are being edited and finalized now with implementation scheduled for the coming months.
- We plan to continue with efforts to roll out the stand-alone ISP/CFA training for all new workers. This is the training that was developed to address the needs identified in our PIP, and we want to continue to offer it to all new workers. We are in the process of determining how it will fit into the curriculum revisions that will be done in conjunction with our university partnership.
- 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 working to revise the training curriculum for new staff, and this will include simulated learning experiences.

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 also assesses the 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 is communicated to the director to arrange with program staff at SDHR. This year, we have completed the following trainings: Safety Assessment, Safety Planning, Individualized Service Plan (ISP), Foster Care 101 (how to begin a case), Multi-disciplinary Team, Targeted Case Management, 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. From June 2022-April 2023, 50 supervisors received this training through four training sessions.

Alabama partners with Children's Justice Task force who presented Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse training to case workers around the state. Alabama also partners with Children's Aid Society to present the Permanency Conference in the spring each year. Presentations are made annually around the importance for timely permanency of children and addressing any barrier to such.

Family Service Division presents two supervisor conferences 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. Family Services Division also presents an annual Child Protective Service Conference with topics geared toward safety assessments and safety planning.

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 variety 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 and Family Services Division works with departmental leadership to develop plans for how new training initiatives are implemented.

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.

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. TIPS utilizes both a staff trainer and a foster parent co-leader to facilitate the sessions. 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. The data around the number of prospective foster/adoptive homes that are selected out/select themselves out 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. Thus far through FY 23, three TIPS training sessions have been provided to staff, providers, and prospective foster parent co-leader; and three TIPS/Deciding Together sessions have been provided to staff and providers. The breakdown of those trained thus far is outlined below.

TIPS

PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER TRAINED THUS FAR IN FY23
County Staff	14
Prospective Foster Parent Co-Leaders	19
Provider Staff	46
TOTAL	79

TIPS/DECIDING TOGETHER

PARTICIPANTS	NUMBER TRAINED THUS FAR IN FY23
County Staff	15
Provider Staff	21
TOTAL	36

Surveys were completed by TIPS and TIPS/Deciding Together participants this year. Results for the following information are based on a scale of 1-5 and reflects the average ratings (5-high; 1-low).

DECIDING TOGETHER February 2023

This training program was of great overall benefit to me- 5

The content of this training had considerable practical application to my work - 5

This training program will enable me to put new ideas and skills into practice- 5

DECIDING TOGETHER April 2023

This training program was of great overall benefit to me- 4.7

The content of this training had considerable practical application to my work- 4.8

This training program will enable me to put new ideas and skills into practice- 4.8

TIPS 8-DAY CERTIFICATION TRAINING March 2023

This training program was of great overall benefit to me - 4.8

The content of this training had considerable practical application to my work- 4.8

This training program will enable me to put new ideas and skills into practice- 4.8

Three additional TIPS training sessions and two additional TIPS/Deciding Together sessions are planned for the remainder of the fiscal year.

Once county/provider staff are certified to lead TIPS and Deciding Together, they facilitate the trainings at the county level for potential foster and adoptive parents. Each county is required to submit a county self-assessment twice per year, once in November and once in May. Included in the county self-assessment is information related to how many prospective homes (couples or individuals) were enrolled in TIPS and TIPS/Deciding Together during the reporting period. For the April-September 2022 reporting period, approximately 413 potential foster homes were enrolled in TIPS classes across the state, and approximately 79 potential foster homes were enrolled in TIPS/Deciding Together. This does not mean this number of homes were approved/licensed. This is the number that were enrolled/participating in training.

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.

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.

Foster and Adoptive Training Strengths:

- The Department requires successful completion of a pre-service curriculum for foster/adoptive applicants. No one is approved as a resource without completing TIPS or TIPS/Deciding Together.
- 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.
- 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-site 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 associations 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.

Since returning to the county specific review process in September 2022, ten counties have been reviewed, and 7/10 (70%) of those counties had a strength in Foster and Adoptive Parent Training. For the seven counties in which it was rated a strength, the following supports, based on record reviews and stakeholder interviews, were noted:

- There were multiple staff members trained as TIPS co-leaders and TIPS/Deciding Together facilitators.
- There were multiple TIPS classes held per year.
- All foster homes reviewed had the required 15 hours of continuing education documented.
- There was evidence of an active Foster Parent Association which meets regularly (monthly) and representatives from the county attend the meetings to discuss training topics.
- There was evidence that the county provides foster/adoptive training that addressed the skills/knowledge needed to care out their duties as foster/adoptive parents.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Training Needs:

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 must be sure to fill the gaps to maintain capacity within the OCWT. At this time there are only 3 certified Master TIPS trainers who can certify trainers for the Department.

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.

Since returning to the county specific review process in September 2022, ten counties have been reviewed, and 3/10 (30%) of those counties had an area of need in Foster and Adoptive Parent Training. For the three counties in which it was rated an ANI, the following supports, based on record reviews and stakeholder interviews, were noted:

- Some provider records did not have the required amount of annual training hours documented.
- A need was identified for training in one county specific to children's specific diagnosis and behaviors.
- In one county, it was noted that foster and adoptive parents would appreciate on-going training opportunities to help them address topics such as trauma and Reactive Attachment Disorder.
- Lack of verification of CPR/Water Safety training in the records.

Additionally, while TIPS Co-Leader Training participants are surveyed at the end of the training course, there is a need to develop a survey for both county staff and providers as well as foster/adoptive parents to be completed approximately 6 months after their initial placements to determine the effectiveness of TIPS and how well the training prepared them for placements. The QA Division is working on developing those surveys for use during FY 24.

Program Support

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, the QA Unit routinely conducts County On-Site Reviews (15 per year) utilizing the federal 36 items to

evaluate the quality of services and the outcomes achieved for children and families and how the county functions systemically. At the completion of an onsite review, a discussion is held with the county's management team to provide the preliminary findings of the review and within 30 days a written report, The Summary of Findings is then provided to the county. Information provided in The Summary of Findings is then rolled into the county's improvement plan which will initiate QA Division technical assistance and training. The assistance and training are individualized for each county based on the needs that have been determined through the On-Site Review.

The QA division also offers technical assistance following peer reviews which are conducted by the QCWP specialists. During these reviews a strengths /needs assessment is conducted based on the 18 federal items. The OQCWP 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 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 around the duties of coordinators and the completion of QRIs. Additional technical assistance includes specialist review of QRI reports, data tracking, 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 Subsidies and Support 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 Subsidies and Support and the Office of Adoption Recruitment and Placement. These programs provide one-on-one technical assistance to workers and supervisors related to recruitment, adoption planning, and placement activities. They also provide on-site assessment of county staff's adoption skills.

In terms of collaboration with the Tribe and Inter-Agency Agreement continues in effect and as of 2023 an 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 for the 3 members of a multi-disciplinary team in each region around the state.

Our annual Permanency Training took place in April 2022. Statewide supervisor leadership training was held in June and July 2022. 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 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

Alabama continues to utilize 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. As of April 30, 2023, 451 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. 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 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.

Percentage of Services Offered		
TYPE OF SERVICE	TOTAL OFFERED	PERCENT OFFERED
Clothes/Shoes	1676	15.82%
Baby Products	1361	12.85%
Identification	1318	12.44%
Transportation	1230	11.61%
Individual Psychoeducational Services	952	8.99%
Drug Screening/ Assessment	634	5.98%
Sitter Services	504	4.76%
Diagnostic Testing	502	4.74%
Family Counseling	456	4.30%
Gifts	320	3.02%
Medically Fragile Payments	311	2.94%
Other	297	2.80%
Child Day Care	286	2.70%
Medication	140	1.32%
Food	129	1.22%
Medical Treatment	119	1.12%
Mental Health Consultation/Coord.	117	1.10%
Individual Counseling	87	0.82%
Individual Family Support	83	0.78%
Enhanced Foster Care Services	72	0.68%
TOTAL	10,594	

*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.

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 23, 20 mental health centers around the state received funds for the expansion of school based mental health services. There are currently 97 school systems and 18 community mental health centers participating in the School-Based Mental Health Collaboration Program, per the Alabama Department of Mental Health. This is an increase of 17 school systems participating in the program this year. 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.

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 the Resource Management Division and 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 04/30/2023	253
Total Number of Children in TFC-E as of 04/30/2023	99
Total:	352

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, and a provider recommendation letter are all required for placement in intensive residential facilities. The Resource Management Division assists counties in locating appropriate placements through centralized intake. Approval by the Deputy Commissioner of Quality, the Deputy Commissioner of Family and Children Services and the Special Assistant to the Commissioner must be requested by the county director, the case must be staffed with the county director and approval must be given 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 and analysis of information 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 for the provision of necessary individualized services that are authorized by the ISP team.

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 Resource Centers

The Family Resource 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 Resource 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 partnering with family resource centers to implement Workforce Development Programs at 25 FRCs across the state. Each center works with their county office to enroll people in the A-RESET program, which provides participants with a small stipend while they work with the center to improve employability through components such as work readiness and job search. Family Resource Centers also utilized TANF funds to support eligible participants with a variety of services, including GED preparation, job training, parenting classes, relationship education, and emergency services. DHR provides ongoing technical assistance to support the WFD programs.

A Program Specialist in DHR’s Office of Foster Care, made a presentation to more than 50 Family Resource Center staff members about Kinship Guardianship and the resources available to families. This specialist provides ongoing related resources, which are shared regularly with hundreds of FRC staff members through a weekly newsletter.

The Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers provided 13 trainings on the Strengthening Families Framework to service providers at locations across the state. A total of 396 people participated, including 62 DHR county-level staff members. “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 2022, eleven (11) youth in DHR custody were committed to DYS. Four of these youths reentered foster care during FY 2022 (discharged during FY and reentered during FY). The average age at entry to foster care was 13.61 and at commitment age 16.19. Ages of children committed to DYS ranged from 12 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, three full-time board-certified behavioral analysts, and 2 graduate assistants. As of November 2022, two part-time board-certified behavioral analysts have been added for the Birmingham area. In June 2023, one of the part-time board-certified behavioral analysts will transition to a full-time position.

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.

Though the team moved to a telemedicine services model, behavioral services, medication review or both were provided to 66 clients from October 2021 through September 2022. The APMRT provided services to 20 different referring counties in the state of Alabama with 39 referrals for behavioral services and 27 for medication review only. Extensive training continues to be 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 APMRT has safely resumed in-person services and continues to provide a hybrid model consisting of both telehealth and in-person services and will provide in-person trainings to staff and stakeholders. During the period of October 2021 through September 2022, APMRT conducted 393 in-person appointments, 327 telehealth appointments, for a total of 720 completed appointments. The APMRT found that the telehealth format was not suitable for each referred case, but families were receptive to behavioral and medication review services provided in this format.

The biggest challenge identified by APMRT from October 2021 through September 2022 was the high number of cases with adolescent that the team identified as “high needs cases”. These cases were characterized by multiple problem behaviors (e.g., theft, lying to caregivers, sexual behavior) displayed by adolescents and numerous barriers to working with the respective caregiver. More specifically, these cases required an extensive amount of time from the consulting LBA as well as one or more of our prescribers. In turn, the number of youths the respective LBA was able to concurrently serve decreased substantially.

In an attempt to address noted deficits in the APMRT’s delivery of behavioral services to complex cases and with adolescents in care, the APMRT is developing two new initiatives. They are developing an assessment tool to determine caregivers’ understanding of their (a) need for behavioral interventions, (b) time commitment for collaboration meetings

with APMRT personnel, and (c) interest in reducing psychotropic medication. With this information, the APMRT hope to better prepare and assign caseloads. In part, this process also involves analyzing data the APMRT has collected on caregiver contacts with previous families over that past five years. This also includes carefully tracking the time periods by which most beneficial outcomes should be produced. Second, APMRT is expanding the focus of their training with adolescents to include further skill development. That is, in addition to focusing on behavior to improve their relationships with family members and medication self-advocacy (developed in the fall of 2021), APMRT has developed protocols to broaden adolescents' self-management skills sets. These programs currently include financial literacy (e.g., completing taxes, learning how to get a loan), applying for job and admission community college, obtaining a driver's license, making healthy food choices, and general time self-management (e.g., how to create and abide by schedules). The APMRT collective experience that adolescents in child welfare are almost universally deficient in these skills. APMRT is currently working with the Auburn University's recording studio to produce instructional videos that will be available for general use (they will provide the links on the APMRT website). Their preliminary data indicate that adolescents engage with the materials, learn from the instruction, and recognize the value of the training videos. APMRT believes that developing these skills will increase successful independence of adolescents in care.

Additional information regarding the protocol for this project can be found in the Health Care Services Plan.

Services Related to International Adoptees

For international adoptees, APAC served 16 families in counseling. There is not a waiting list for the free APAC services. The families are seen by a counselor as soon as the counselor can schedule them. DHR families receive priority.

Pre/Post Adoption Services

Since 2018, all Pre/Post Adoption Services have been provided by the Children's Aid Society under the title APAC (Alabama Pre/Post Placement Adoption Connection). The Pre-Adoption services include TIPS/Deciding Together Training, Home Study Approval, and assistance in Finalization adoptions. APAC assisted in the finalization of twenty children into fourteen adoptive families. The Post Adoption Services include counseling, family advocacy, and training. The agency served 1, 514 individuals with Post Adoption Services. Additionally, APAC held a family fun day for Adoptive families which allowed the families to network, participate in equine therapies, and make memories.

These services help strengthen adoptive families and provide necessary support to ensure the adoptions are successful. Families are referred to these services through County Workers and State Adoption Placement Specialists. Families can better understand the trauma history of the child/children in their home and implement techniques to better manage behaviors. The low number of adoptions disrupting shows the services are working. Satisfaction data is also collected via surveys by APAC, and the surveys are shared with the Department.

Services for children adopted from other countries

All Adoptive Families have access to training and the resource library at APAC. There are no services in Alabama directly targeted to children adopted from other countries.

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 target exclusively on moving America's children who have been waiting the longest out of Foster Care. Wendy's Wonderful Kid Recruiters maintain an active caseload of twelve to fifteen children and use the Child-Focused Recruitment Model to match the children with adoptive families.

The emphasis of the Child- Focused Recruitment Model is using a case dig method to go back and revisit every person with the child has a prior relationship. The Recruiter uses email, letters, phone calls to reach out to the people identified to try to reconnect the person with the child if appropriate. Even if the adoption is unable to finalized prior to the child reaching adulthood, the individual has re-established connections that can last a lifetime. We have seen children reconnected with family members, prior caseworkers, and previous foster parents. These relationships give the children a sense of purpose and acceptance. The families that can proceed with adoption go through the State's licensure requirements to be a State approved adoptive home.

Due to Alabama's continue success with the DTFA grant, in 2022 we were given permission to expand the grant to five additional recruiters. This now gives us a total of seven recruiters. This allows approximately eighty-four children to be on WWK Caseloads. These Recruiters are assigned regions, and the children on the caseloads originate from those regions. The Recruiter is responsible for building rapport with the children during monthly face-to-face visits and using the information they learn during visits to recruit an adoptive family that can meet the child's needs. During the face-to-face visits Recruiters are building the children's self-esteem and helping them become ready for adoption through education about mental-health, permanency, and social skills, and relationships.

The WWK Program has experienced some barriers. Many family members that are deemed appropriate for the child do not want to move forward with licensure. Some of our teenagers have experience failed adoptions before, and do not want to consider being adopted again so they advocate for the permanency plans to be changed so active recruitment does not continue. We are overcoming these barriers through better education and training through our Pre/Post Adoption Connection Services (APAC) and using tools to unpack the reasons for hesitancy regarding adoption in our teens.

Due to our expansion, our team will have a lot of new training opportunities and be able to use this training to better service our WWK caseloads. The first opportunity for collaboration and training will be at the WWK Summit in Columbus Ohio in May 2023, and after Summit the Dave Thomas Foundation will be sending in a national DTFA trainer to provide training for our new Recruiters. This will allow our team to have access to the most updated training and tools possible. The new Recruiters will use these tools to locate permanent families for a youth in foster care.

AdoptUSKids

AdoptUsKids is operated through the National Adoption Exchange and one of the most popular photo listing services worldwide. The page includes only children legally free for adoption. In addition to photos, profiles, and biographies, the site provides a mechanism for posting video footage of the children. The site has a link to the photo listing website for Alabama, Heart Gallery. An Administrative Assistant in the Office of Adoptions manages the photo listing websites and is responsible for responding to inquiries and building the summary pages for each child based on information received from the custodial county.

Out of State Agencies send inquiries on behalf of adoptive families in other states in attempt to match Alabama's children with waiting families. The home studies are reviewed, and information of waiting children is sent to the families to see if the children can be matched. Once children are matched with out of state families then the children can start visits and have services to prepare for the idea of living out of state.

Heart Gallery of Alabama (HGA)

Heart Gallery Alabama connects youth in foster care with permanent families through photo listings. Children are photographed when they receive a permanency plan of adoption with no identified resource and termination of parental rights has occurred. The kids are taken to various state sites including parks and museums to have a fun day of playing and shooting photos.

Heart Gallery also ensures that foster youth have birth celebrations. The Hope from the Heart Program provides youth with birthday cakes and gifts to ensure someone remembers their birthday. The program is led by the Heart Squad, a group of committed volunteers who want to make a positive impact.

Heart Gallery has started a Mentor Program, Supporting Opportunities to Achieve and Rise (S.O.A.R.). The mentor program is a partnership with Big Brother/Big Sisters of Central Alabama to create connections for youth to help them have a stable, lifelong, and positive relationship. Mentor relationships can help youth learn to advocate for themselves and break barriers to success. Additionally, we hope these relationships will foster a connection that will lead to adoption if the mentor is willing to become the child's adoptive parent.

Our photo listing sites have helped us finalize twenty-three adoptions this reporting period. We currently have four additional adoptions waiting to finalize. The Heart Gallery also keeps records of success stories on their sites so interest adoptive families can hear the stories of other families' adoptions.

Applied Behavior Analysis

An Applied Behavior Analyst program is available statewide. There are 5 Behavior Analysts, and one Behavior Manager, based throughout the state. This service focuses on the environment in which a behavior occurs, and scientifically determines what factor of the environment is maintaining the target behavior to then create an intervention for positive change in the target behavior. This is accomplished through Tools of Choice, an introductory behavior management/parenting course that teaches positive parenting techniques, as well as through Individual Consultation in which an assessment is conducted for a specific child, a treatment plan created for the caregiver to implement, and follow up occurs to ensure the plan is successful. The use of these services promotes stability of placements and permanency for children.

From June 1, 2022 – April 30, 2023, 93 children were served through Individual Consultation cases, and 37 Tools of Choice classes were conducted with 169 participants.

From June 2022-March 2023, 26 Individual Consultation cases closed, with 16 (62%) of those resulting in successful case closure (treatment goals were met or behaviors were reduced to an acceptable level). At this time, tracking of services provided does not adequately record the long-term outcome related to placement stability and permanency. Improved outcome tracking is being implemented through a review of the child's situation 6 months after the conclusion of services.

From June 2022-May 2023, 55 foster families completed Tools of Choice as a result of a referral for a specific child in their care. 52 of the 55 families either maintained the child's placement six months after completing Tools of Choice or the child was successfully reunified with their family. During the same time period, 88 birth family members (parents or relative caregivers) completed Tools of Choice as a result of a referral for a specific child/children. 84 of the 88 families either were reunified with the child, maintained the placement, or the case remains open six months after completing Tools of Choice. As such, the success rate for placement stability six months post completion is 95% during this period.

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 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.

- Engagement and assessing underlying needs was addressed at the Supervisor and CPS conferences. Family and Children's Services will continue to provide training in these areas.

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.

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 county 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 heard, 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 county onsite 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 county onsite 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. 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 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 conducts approximately 15 county onsite reviews each year to evaluate the quality of services and the outcomes achieved by children and families. Children and Family Services is assisting conducting a safety

assessment as a part of the county onsite 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, 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. Four CJTF meetings were held with a combined platform allowing both in-person and virtual attendance via the zoom during this reporting period.

The Task Force continued to monitor the COVID health crisis and make changes to training schedules as necessary to assure safety. Three sessions of Family Violence Assessment and Safety in CPS Training were held March 9-10, June 8-9 and August 3-4, 2022, 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. Over ninety (90) people were trained during the course of both trainings. An additional three trainings are scheduled for FY 2023.

The Substance Abuse Assessment two-day training was held four times in FY 2021. The training was held in Montgomery, which is centrally located, December 6-7, 2021, February 7-8, April 4-5, and June 27-28, 2022. 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 100 persons were trained during these 4 trainings. An additional four trainings are scheduled for FY 2023.

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 2022, 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 2022 from 56 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 in-person in Huntsville, Alabama on March 22-24, 2023. The CJTF approved 162 slots for multidisciplinary team members to attend. CJ funds were used to pay registration, travel and for Continuing Education credits for those that requested in advance. With the use of CJ Grant funds, 140 local multidisciplinary team members, representing 56 counties attended the International Symposium on Child Abuse. The registered attendees were multidisciplinary and represented DHR child welfare staff (42 participants), DA/ADA staff (16 participants), law enforcement (37 participants), child advocacy center staff (39 participants), and mental health, legal aide, medical, education, domestic violence staff, and CJTF members (6 participants). The International Symposium of Child Abuse is considered one of the elite child abuse training opportunities in the country.

Additionally, ten (7) multidisciplinary teams requested and were approved by the CJTF for local child abuse training projects or other child abuse projects, all local training projects. One of the local training projects was for a regional child abuse training encompassing 4 counties. The remaining three approved projects were local training projects to be conducted by one county. 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. The CJ Task Force has begun the preliminary planning for the upcoming Three-Year Assessment which will be due with the Children's Justice Grant in May 2024.

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 30, 2022, with more than 50 counties represented. Topics presented included Independent Living Program, Indian Child Welfare Programs, Out of Home Care, Child Trafficking in Alabama, legal updates relevant to Juvenile Court, and a national look at child welfare outcomes. Along with State DHR staff and Judges, representatives from Casey Family Programs, Alabama's Office of Courts, Alabama's Attorney General's Office, and Indian Child Welfare Programs were also in attendance.

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 staffings 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 2021 – 2 CRT meetings
- FY 2022 – 3 CRT meetings

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. 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 Children and Family Services 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. 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.

As Alabama seeks to change our Citizen Review Panel (CRP) process, this group will become a CRP over the next reporting period. Alabama will work closely with the Children's Bureau to ensure that the group meets all requirement of a Citizen Review Panel.

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 parents, 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. Over the next reporting period, Alabama will be removing the Citizen Review Panel responsibilities from the State QA Committee. Alabama is revamping the Citizen Review Panel process.

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. 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 Protective Factors Framework through their network with Strengthening Families certified trainers at local Family Resource Centers. This partnership has trained current DHR supervisors and frontline workers. Another critical use of CBCAP funds has been 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.

The 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 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. 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. We plan to support the development of the 3rd site in our state this upcoming year, which will be housed at Troy Resilience Project.

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.

Finally, CBCAP supports two statewide initiatives including 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 and 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 prevention programs and activities. The council promotes resources for parents and families, reviews grant applications for the funding of community-based prevention programs, as well as provides speaking engagements and trainings on strategies to implement parent engagement in various family serving organizations and systems.

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 activities. The AFAPA model has local associations within each county; however at this time, all counties do not have a local association. More attention has been placed on assisting counties with the development of a local association.

The AFAPA was instrumental in collaborating with State DHR to revise the Conflict Resolution Policy (CRT). Our CRTs continue to be a platform in which foster parents have an opportunity to be heard regarding any grievance not settled in their county of origin.

The AFAPA has been an active member of our provider quarterly meeting series. The Association was able to resume their annual conference in May 2022 with several representative from SDHR presenting on topics including adoption subsidy, independent living and procedures for CA/N investigations involving foster families.

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 advocate with counties on behalf of foster families 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 also offered to kinship care providers.

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, PIP through assisting in identifying and implementing steps to improve dependency case flow management and educating judges and guardians ad litem, 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. 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.

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. These are attended by the Deputy Commissioner of Family and Children's Services. 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.
- 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 2022, a monthly average of 5,700 families received assistance representing about 10,399 children and 2,209 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 2022 the SAIL program received 1,258 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 584 SAIL participants, helped 240 participants acquire employment, and provided financial assistance to 225 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. 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

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. This is for example, a representative from the Alabama State Department of Education on the State's Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative.

SYSTEMIC FACTOR FOSTER/ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING

During the week of June 20-23, 2021, the State Department of Human Resources reviewed Requests for Proposals with the hope of developing additional specialized placement resources for youth with an IQ of 55+ for males and females with psychiatric disturbances and or behavioral issues. The goal of the Enriched Community Based Homes is to facilitate recovery so that youth can live, learn, and participate fully in their communities. The Department requested proposals from vendors that would be able to create a highly structured environment with a community based out of home treatment setting for youth whose treatment needs require individualized care at the intensive service delivery level. Additionally, the Department requested vendors be able to provide ancillary services to preserve/maintain successful placement stability including but not limited to individual aide services. The primary outcomes for these youth are safety, permanency, and well-being.

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.

Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) may approve foster homes for private placements, DHR placements, or a combination of private/DHR placements. CPAs must ensure compliance with Minimum Standards for Foster Family Homes. If the CPA licenses TFC homes, the Alabama Therapeutic Foster Care Manual must also be followed.

Residential care facilities must comply with the Minimum Standards for Residential Child Care Facilities.

Licensing site visits are facilitated and, if there are issues noted, a deficiency letter with the completed site visit report is sent to the provider with the expectation of the provider sending a plan to correct the deficiencies or proof that the deficiency has been corrected. The Resource Management Division provides the provider with a list of all deficiencies, a copy of the site visit report, and the date that a response is expected to be received from the provider. If the provider refuses to comply with correcting the deficiencies, then a corrective action plan may be implemented.

Resource Management Division's Office of Licensing will review initial, or renewal applications and all supporting documentation provided by providers to determine the next actions to be taken. Resource Management conducts announced and unannounced visits for contracted and licensed providers.

The Office of Licensing provides technical assistance, consultation, training, and interpretation of the Minimum Standards to prospective and existing providers.

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS / DATA

The Department maintains and Office of Criminal History that ensures compliance with applicable federal regulations. Criminal History Check letters of Suitability are on the Resource Record Review checklist. 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 Electronic Report Distribution 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. Counties are expected to regularly deliver a message about the need for more foster/adoptive parents. Each February, counties are expected to develop and implement a foster parent recruitment plan. Each county has an identified Office of Foster Care Recruitment Consultant. This person is responsible for one-on-one dialogue with each county as well as quarterly reports regarding recruitment activities.

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 Subsidies and Support 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.

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.

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.

DESCRIPTION OF CURRENT / PLANNED ACTIVITIES FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. State will address Systemic Factor of **Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention** through implementation of the Diligent Recruitment Plan as follows – See 2023 APSR Diligent Recruitment Plan:
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 33:
See DRP, Goal 9 – Objectives 1 & 2
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 34:
See DRP, Goal 9 – Objective 3
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 35:
See DRP, All Goals & Objectives
 - Concerns highlighted in Item 36:
See DRP: Goal 10 – Objectives 1 & 2

2023 Updates:

The ICPC unit utilizes an internal data tracking system for incoming and out-going ICPC home study referrals. Cases are logged administratively and the progress of ICPC cases is monitored. Alerts are issued to the county offices requesting updates to the progress of the home studies, supervisory reports, initial placements, and closure documents, as appropriate. State procedures and protocol for sending ICPC home study requests to other states occur when the county offices or the Office of Adoption Consultants send ICPC home study referrals to the ICPC State office. The referrals are reviewed and assessed for completeness and processed to the receiving state. Administrative data indicates 40% of State agency ICPC adoption requests result in placement of children. New home study requests received from other states are not completed within 60 days due to the 10-week training requirements.

Continue to Provide ICPC Training and Case Consultation to County staff:

The Interstate Compact on Placement of Children process continues to assist interjurisdictional out of state placements for the Office of Adoption by increasing permanent placement options for children. The ICPC office is in the process of transferring from the CMS NEICE module to the NEICE Clearinghouse system. The ICPC office has worked closely with the IT and Facts units to implement the new system, and anticipate this system will generate NEICE reports and administrative data. The ICPC staff provide training and daily consultation to county staff who have indicated their knowledge and skills have improved with the 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. The annual ICPC Conferences which provides training and Federal updates on the implementation of the ICPC process will continue to be attended by a minimum of two staff each year.

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

ASSESSMENT OF PROGRESS

Assessment of the progress of efforts regarding the recruitment of potential foster/adoptive homes include both qualitative and quantitative measures. FACTS child register and provider register provide information on both the number and population of children as well as number and population of approved foster parents for each county. Counties are

encouraged to continually assess, review, and consider any disparity in these numbers when recruiting and developing their local recruitment plan.

Qualitative measures include monthly follow-up customer service calls to potential families who have made an inquiry to SDHR. These calls are made to each inquirer to ensure that the family has information and forms needed to register for an upcoming foster/adoptive parent training if such family is ready to do so. If the family only has questions, these calls ensure that the family is rerouted back to their local county office for follow up if additional follow up is needed. Qualitative measures also include quarterly discussions with each local county office. Discussions include reporting response/ and or outcomes of each potential family who have inquired.

Quantitative measures include quarterly assessment meetings which include reporting the number and names of the potential foster parent(s) who have inquired for each county, as well as the total number of current approved foster homes. Quantitative measures also include the reviewing and discussion of reports to include ERD reports and SDHR internal reporting documents (Family Intake Tracking Tool LIST and Learn About Us Report). Data from these reports are reviewed and discussed with each local county.

Our newest unit at State DHR is the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support (R&HCS). This unit supports statewide recruitment, retention, training and support of foster and adoptive homes. This unit also offers extended collaboration with counties, other state entities, tribal and local communities. This office most recently introduced and made available a QR Code to assist in streamlining families towards the recruitment inquiry website. The office of R&HCS is under the management of a Deputy Director and comprised of 2 full- time Program Specialist and 5 part-time retired employees.

Some of the continued collaborations and initiatives are:

- The Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support developed a Statewide TIPS availability map. This map is updated and distributed quarterly to counties and other State Office units.
- 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 5 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

Monitoring and evaluation are occurring in various ways to include:

- Weekly updates regarding potential inquiries (Family Intake Tracking Tool LIST)
- Monthly follow-up customer service calls to potential families who have made an inquiry to SDHR
- Production of monthly reports for pilot recruitment counties
- Quarterly chart of boots on the ground recruitment events
- Quarterly resource discussions with assigned counties
- Production of an annual statewide inquiry chart
- Quarterly review and analysis of monthly outcome reports provided by Higher Level Digital Foster and Adoptive Parent Campaigns.

III. Update to the Plan for Enacting the State's Vision and Progress

C3.

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.

2023 Update:

Every new employee is trained on the Practice Model as part of the Striving Toward Excellent Practice (STEP) Foundations Training. This year 112 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 50 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 85 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 104 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
- As Alabama works to overhaul the new worker training curriculum, we are considering how best to implement the CFA/ISP training into this new model, so that all new workers receive this training at the beginning of their employment.

The Department is currently working with the University of Alabama to develop/revise the curriculum for new worker training, including hands on learning through a simulation lab experience. It is the goal of the agency to role this revised training out in 2024.

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.

2023 Update:

- 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. This was completed during the PIP.
- Alabama continues to have 661 Intensive In-Home Services slots as of this APSR submission (June 2023).
- 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.

Staff Training, Technical Assistance, and Evaluation

- 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

There is ongoing evaluation to assess/determine the Department's current capacity/bandwidth to implement this work in each county in the coming year.

The State Office of ILP utilizes the ongoing trainings and conferences throughout the year to share the resulting information from the state's quality assurance system, NYTD data and other available date. In addition to uses these staff events to share data, the Department shares information to youth learned from the data when consulting at Dream Council events, camps and local ILP meetings. Annual data collected is also used during training sessions during our annual Alabama's DREAM Ambassadors leadership retreat.

Collected data is also referenced in conversations with stakeholders when reviewing and in the development of additional services to youth in care. This past year the Department used collected data when cultivating resources for mentorship programs, ILP meeting supports and throughout regional consultation meetings. The State is currently working with our

contract provider for Educational Assistance funding, Foster Care to Success, to create integration of the information they collect.

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.

The QA unit conducts onsite reviews across the state utilizing the 36 Federal Items. As part of the onsite review process, all stakeholders are interviewed for qualitative data. Information learned for items 26, 27, and 28 is gathered and provided to Management. From September 2022 to July 2023, 14 counties were reviewed and the averages for strengths in each item were:

Item 26: 86% Strength

Item 27: 64% Strength

Item 28: 64% Strength

QA has identified initial onboarding of new staff has greatly improved over the past 2 years; however ongoing training within the county continues to need improvements. Lack of staff continues to impact the counties' ability to do ongoing training. Onsite reviews identified a lack of formalized training programs for ongoing foster parent training in some counties

IV. QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

C 4.

Alabama has worked diligently to implement enhancements necessary to capture data for the AFCARS 2.0 changes. Recent enhancements include updating ICWA documentation to capture more information. Enhancements were also made to picklist values to allow documentation of reasonable accommodations, prior adoption and Kinship Guardianship as well as updated picklists for documenting additional conditions at time of removal. Modifications were made so that multiple episodes of missing or runaway could be documented. Modifications were also made to allow capturing additional information about sex trafficking prior to and or during the current home removal episodes.

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.

At the conclusion of Alabama's PIP, Alabama began conducting county specific onsite reviews. The onsite reviews consist of case reviews using the OSRI, stakeholder interviews, a safety assessment, a permanency assessment, and a resource record assessment.

All information obtained from either the 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. ERD reports from FACTS are used to set data goals to measure the counties progress. 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 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.

The state showed improvements on the CFSR statewide data indicators for safety in areas such as timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment, which had an improvement of 17%. There was a 26% of improvement in services to families to protect children in the home and prevent removal/ re-entry. An improvement of 25% from the state’s baseline in permanency goals for children and an improvement of 23% from the state’s baseline in achieving reunification, guardianship, adoption, or APPLA were noted. The state also showed improvements of more than 10% from the state’s baseline in worker visits with children, worker visits with parents, educational needs of children, and physical health of children

V. UPDATE ON SERVICE DESCRIPTION

C 5.

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

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 2024 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.

Attention to resource development was provided in the PIP and ongoing quarterly Resources Development meetings were held with counties. There is ongoing evaluation to assess/determine the Department's current capacity/bandwidth to implement this work in each county in the coming year.

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.

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 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.

According to the 2021 Children's Bureau Child Maltreatment report, Alabama had 643 Infants with Prenatal Substance Exposure (IPSE) in 2021. 4 of those were in reference to Alcohol Abuse, 633 were for Drug Abuse, and 6 were screened out IPSE.

According to the 2021 Children's Bureau Child Maltreatment report, Alabama had 637 Infants screened in for appropriate services. 294 of those children had a referral completed for appropriate services, which represents 46.2%. Many times when reports are received, there are no need for referrals or families are able to access services without the intervention of the Department.

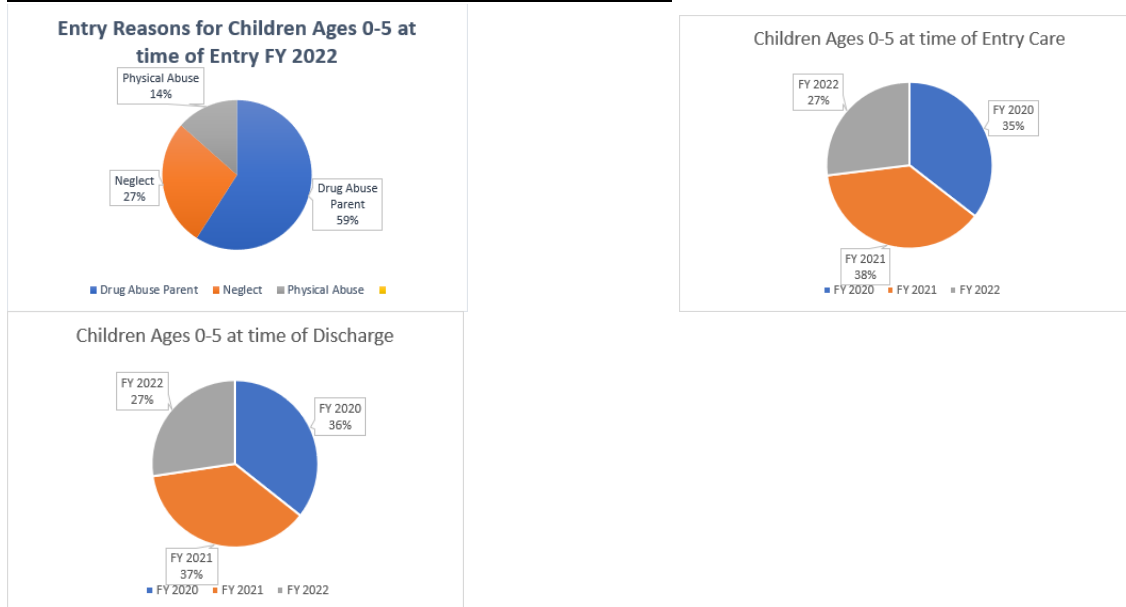
In Alabama, children ages 0-5 move to permanency at almost the same rate as they enter care. We know that as children age, their time in foster care increases; so as a part of our PIP we facilitated meetings with counties as a way to model in county staffings with directors and supervisors. We saw success in moving these children to permanency in a timelier 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 average length of time in care for children aged 4-10 in FY 2022 was 18.51 months.

Due to staffing issues in the counties in which state office personnel have had to step in and assist, these staffings have been put on hold. 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. The Department is currently completing face-to-face permanency staffings in 29 of our 67 counties. Other counties report monthly on permanency issues or have date only reviews. 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**

2023 Update:

Due to a significant county staffing shortage in both front-line workers and management, this case review project is not being conducted at this time. Staff have been pulled to work in county offices so that counties can continue to ensure the safety of the families and children they serve. In the coming year it is the Department's intention to continue these permanency reviews as staffing allows. Services for these children continue to be in place and will remain available. Examples are counseling, referrals, transportation, and other needs that may expedite permanency.

Services for children adopted from other countries

All Adoptive Families have access to training and the resource library at APAC. There are no services in Alabama directly targeted to children adopted from other countries.

EFFORTS TO TRACK AND PREVENT CHILD MALTREATMENT DEATHS

Child maltreatment fatalities reported to NCANDS are those children whose death has been reported to the department to have been caused by child abuse/neglect. ~~for which the Department has investigated the child death.~~ 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. 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.

In Alabama, doctors, nurses, medical examiners, coroners, social workers and law enforcement officials are considered mandatory reports. The Code of Alabama requires them to report suspected child abuse/neglect to the department both verbally and followed up in writing. Mandatory reporter training is accessed online as well as through in-person presentations in counties conducted by county staff to further educate mandatory reporters on their obligation and the process by which to make a report.

Any time a child dies or almost dies, and the department has had contact with the family within the last 12 months, the county department must complete a child fatality or near fatality form and send to management and legal at State DHR for review and monitoring of the case. The case is immediately reviewed by upper management to determine if the county has correctly assessed the allegations, safety threats to other children in the home and protective capacities of caregivers. These are reviewed periodically by management to discern any trends of inaccurate assessments.

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. According to the Alabama Department of Public Health, in 2020 the top three causes of death were 1. congenital anomalies, 2. Prematurity and 3. SIDS- safe sleep. 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	11.5
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	8.5

*Rate is per 1,000 live births: Data Source: Alabama Department of Health Website

TOTAL INFANT DEATHS AND INFANT MORTALISTY RATES BY COUNTY

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Montgomery	19	29	32	28
Macon	1	1	2	1
Russell	11	4	8	7
Alabama	135	405	449	491

Data Source: Alabama Department of Public Health; Alabama Vital Statistics

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 work with the Citizen Review panel to review child death 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.

~~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~~

Mary Lee Allen, Promoting Safe and Stable Families – Provide the following services using PSSF funds:

MARY LEE ALLEN PROMOTING SAFE AND STABLE FAMILIES (PSSF) (title IVB, subpart 2)

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. As of 1/31/23, Alabama has 661 Intensive in-Home Service (IIHS) slots awarded across all contracts, and 496 of those slots were utilized. 207 of those are Family Preservation cases, and 289 of those are Reunification cases

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 did not increase from 2022. In FY 22, an average of 423 families were served. As of April 30, 2022, there were 451 families receiving intensive in-home services. Invoices are created in 1 adult and 1 child’s name, even if there are other children in the home.

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 Resource 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.

The Department further ensured training 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 9/30/21. According to the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers, between April 2021 and September 2021, 259 DHR workers were trained in the Strengthening Families Framework. No trainings were conducted in 2022. In 2023, the Alabama Network of Family Resource Centers will conduct 13 Strengthening Families Framework, which will include any DHR workers who are interested.

DIVISION X SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

In June 2021, the Department rolled out guidelines to county staff for how Alabama established use of the supplemental funding from Division X. County staff were provided with a list of youth identified as eligible, along with guidelines to determine eligibility for youth not already identified. The goal was to remove as many barriers as possible to expedite support to the county. During the first 12 months of implementation, the State Office of ILP managed request directly and provide support to the county staff. About 3,000 youth were identified as being eligible for the 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.

During the duration of the funding, approximately 28% of those youth identified received funding support. The greatest level of support (about 36%) was through transportation needs. These needs were capped at \$4,000 per youth but included coverage of car insurance and purchase or repair of a vehicle. The second largest area of support (29%) covered support for rent. Youth were provided up to \$750 per month, providing an average of 6 months support where needed. Additional supports consisted of additional household needs (about 2%), groceries (about 5%), utility bill payments (about 2%), delinquent debt (about 3%), phone/computers or electrical items (about 3%), parenting items (about 1%), medical needs (about 1%) and additional supports (about 13%). Challenges during the reporting period centered around locating and getting information out to identified youth. The Office of Audit granted exceptions toward obtaining original signatures, allowing communication through e-mail, and paying youth directly when possible.

Based on lessons learned during this time, the Office of ILP is working diligently with contract providers and partnership across the State to maintain a data base of former foster youth pending the need to reach them with important information in the future. Use of the newly established ILCONNECT app with it's notification feature will provide the

Department with a structure to maintain contact and through the App's lock-box feature, youth can securely access important documents.

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Based on lessons learned during this time, the Office of ILP is working diligently with contract providers and partnership across the State to maintain a data base of former foster youth pending the need to reach them with important information in the future. Use of the newly established ILCONNCT app with its notification feature will provide the Department with a structure to maintain contact and through the App's lock-box feature, youth can securely access important documents

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. Partnership agencies are chosen by the 'Request for Proposal' process.

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 remained at 661. These services are geared toward family preservation or reunification in the home setting.

POPULATIONS AT GREATEST RISK OF MALTREATMENT

In the 2020-2024 CFSP and subsequent APSRs, states were required to identify and describe which populations are at the greatest risk of maltreatment, how the state identifies these populations and how services will be targeted to those populations.

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.

According to the Children's Bureau 2021 report of Child Maltreatment, 327 of the 637 Infants with Prenatal Substance Exposure (IPSE) cases has a Plan of Safe Care, which represents 51.3% of the reported IPSE cases. For more information please see **page 120**.

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.

Source: Child Maltreatment 2021 | The Administration for Children and Families (hhs.gov)

Services to Support Kinship Care:

As of April 2023, Alabama currently has 5,818 children in out of home care. Of the children in foster care, 555 were placed in relative homes. There were 244 children with the permanency plan of Kinship Guardianship. Of those 244, 120 were placed in a Foster Family Related Home, 47 were placed in a Related Home, 76 were placed in a Traditional Foster Home, and 1 was placed in a Therapeutic Foster Home. Of these 244 children thirty-five (35) have a concurrent goal of Return to Parent and 102 have a concurrent goal of Permanency Relative Placement. The remainder have other concurrent goals such as Adoption with No Identified Resource or Adoption by Current Foster Parent.

Alabama's newest unit within Family Services is the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support. This unit houses 8 staff members to include a Deputy Director, administrative assistant, full-time dedicated Kinship Program Specialist, and five part-time retired state employees who teach TIPS and Deciding Together to Kinship families. The Kinship Program Specialists are instrumental in the development of policy and provision of consultation and training to county offices. The five part-time employees play an instrumental role by expediting training to kinship families.

The Kinship Program Specialists work closely with our State Office media partners to include digital and social media outreach. Some of the outreach covers education for the public as to the benefits of becoming a kinship guardian versus a custodian, the benefits available for kin caregivers, and ways other community members can support the kin provider. Alabama's Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support has produced a scannable QR code which sends the user to Alabama DHR's online Foster Care Inquiry Form. Alabama DHR has also worked with a media company to produce a Kinship Guardianship promotional video which is displayed on social media outlets as well as on other digital platforms.

Alabama continues its partnership with 211-United Way Alabama to increase public awareness and service delivery regarding Kinship. "Kinship Guardianship Program" continues to be a tab on 211- United Way Alabama's website. Quarterly contact continues to be made to gather data on received calls and current referrals. 211-United Way Alabama has trained their call specialists regarding Kinship in effort to assist callers who seek 211-United Way resources.

The Kinship Program Specialist will partner with community stakeholder as needed to provide information for referral to the community at large. The Kinship Specialist will also attend child and family specific state events and trainings to strengthen networking opportunities.

Alabama DHR plans to print and distribute updated Kinship brochures. The updated brochure will include an innovative QR code which will direct the family to the Kinship Navigator website. The brochure will be for distribution in all school districts and local pediatrician offices to increase the knowledge of the benefits of becoming a kinship guardian.

Efforts continue to develop partnerships with Kinship families. The State of Alabama Department of Human Resources (SDHR) has plans to host a Kinship Community Fair Summit with Kinship families and community stakeholders and partners.

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 Permanency Conference, the annual Supervisor's Training as well as the annual Child Welfare/ Judicial Summit to educate and reinforce both new and veteran staff and court officials about the benefits of developing a kinship guardian in foster care cases.

FY 2022 Kinship Navigator Funding:

Alabama was awarded a 2022 Kinship grant from The Promoting Safe and Stable Families program, Title IV-B, Subpart 2 of the Social Security Act. Such funding has assisted in the creation and stabilization of Alabama's KINSHIP Navigator website, internal training regarding using the KINSHIP guardianship permanency plan through annual conferences and advocacy by the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support and other permanency units within the Family Services Division. This grant has also provided a funding source for salaries and supplies to support the needs of Kinship Families.

MONTHLY CASEWORKER VISITS GRANTS

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.

2022 Annual Caseworker Visit Data Submission for Alabama.

- The percentage of monthly caseworker visits was 95.3%
- The percentage of visits made in the residence of the child was 99.5%
- The total population of Alabama children in foster care for at least one month during FY 2022 was 7,751.

Caseworker visit grant monies have been utilized for iCAN county team meetings, iCAN Advisory Committee meetings and Alabama's Judicial Child Welfare Summit. Each of these meetings include caseworkers, supervisors, the county director, the local Juvenile Court judge, Guardian ad litem and other attorneys. The purpose of each of these meetings is to help the court and DHR problem solve on any areas within the county that are resolvable with conversation and action plans and raise the capacity of the workers and supervisors. At each of these meetings, the importance of engagement with families through meaningful caseworker visits is discussed and from the perspective of each of the members. Whether it is fathers and paternal relatives to look at as possible placements for children in care, mothers and maternal relatives to also assess for placement, foster/adoptive parents to look at permanency or collaterals for information and history on the family, engagement by caseworkers is the basis for all of the information we gather to assess and monitor strengths, needs and change and to report that to the Individualized service plan team or the court for guidance and input on services and case plans.

iCAN county team meetings, iCAN Advisory Committee meetings and Alabama's Judicial Child Welfare Summit have the same goals, timely permanency for children. Workers are encouraged to have meaningful visits with each child and parent to accurately assess the value of the services provided, the level of change in the caregivers, the appropriateness of relatives and the desires and adjustment of the children. The teams stress the importance of assessing each of the areas explored in a meaningful visit that includes safety, health, education, emotional well-being and permanency so that that information can be relayed accurately to the ISP team and the court.

Alabama does not allow for virtual visits. All children who are in the care and under the supervision of the Department must be seen at least monthly in their placement or in their own home depending on the type of case. Children who are in facilities are seen twice monthly.

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 2022 Judicial Child Welfare Summit was held November 30-December 2, 2022. Topics presented included Independent Living (talk time with teens in foster care), child trafficking including labor and sex, Alabama comparisons to national trends

and numbers and a panel discussion with social workers around team approaches to helping with employee retention and other areas. There is another Summit planned for November 2023 where tentative plans include a focus on areas such as permanency, timeliness, collaboration, and using data in practice, etc.

ADOPTION / LEGAL GUARDIAN INCENTIVES

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 Department divides the funds between each of the 67 counties where each county receives a base amount of funding. Counties are then awarded supplemental funds based on the number of adoptions they completed the prior fiscal year. 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. 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.

Each county contacts the Office of Adoption Subsidy and Support when they need to utilize the funds. The State Office of Adoption Subsidy and Supports ensures these funds are utilized to promote permanency of children. Some examples of uses of Adoption Incentive Fund are:

- recruitment activities to support the development and training of resources,
- to obtain specific services for adoptive families,
- trainings for the county staff around adoption issues
- to meet specific needs of children that will aid in their being adopted whose permanency plan is adoption
- to purchase fliers and banners for recruitment
- to purchase equipment to train foster/adoptive families
- for items needed for children in pre-adoptive placements such as special hospital beds, medical equipment, furniture, and suitcases

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.

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.

CHAFEE FOSTER CARE INDEPENDENCE PROGRAM (CFCIP)

Program Design and Delivery

Alabama Department of Human Resources, Children & Family Services is implementing the Foster Care Independence Act of 1999 by operating a statewide Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. The Education Training Voucher Program was implemented in 2004. Direct services (e.g., supplies, books, and fees) and indirect services (e.g., referrals to therapists, life coaches, and rehabilitation 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. The Alabama Department of Human Resources, 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. Each county DHR office can create and maintain its own Foster Care Independent Living Program. Services are provided through group programs such as financial literacy training and healthy relationship workshops and individual services and several also offer experiential activities including providing a budget and funds to shop for meals for a week or going to a local museum. The 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, non-marital childbirth, 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. We partner closely with Children's Aid Society of Alabama to focus on leadership development for DREAM Ambassadors and the DREAM Council.

As of March 1, 2023, there were 1,708 young people in foster care age 14 to 20: representing an 8% decrease in the number of youths in care from the most recent reporting period of 1,849 on March 1, 2022. All those young people are eligible to receive Independent Living Services. Per Alabama's most recent NYTD data from FY 2021, 1068 youth received services. The ability to provide services statewide continues to be related to the state's high turnover rate. Though there are job opportunities available, several young people lost employment and continue to struggle with consistent, stable employment. Stable supportive housing also continues to be an issue.

We are thrilled to report an all-time high of 237 young people currently enrolled in school and receiving our State's Fostering Hope Scholarship.

Successful transitioning for older youth in our care continues to guide our practice through ILP 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. Transition plans are monitored and reviewed with quarterly feedback provided to county workers during IL Consultant staffing. Caseworkers and foster youth update plans as needed along with their Individualized Service Plan.

Our partnership with Children's Aid Society of Alabama (CAS) continues to expand. CAS employs four former youth and two master's level Social Workers who have extensive experience with this population of young people as a foster care worker and licensed counselor. The team also employs an ILP Coordinator and a Communications Specialist. The CAS ILP Team serves youth, foster parents, congregate care providers and community stakeholders statewide. Our supports and services are enhanced through direct contact with county youth at regional ILP meetings that provide trainings by our youth Ambassadors. CAS also provides training and networking opportunities at our annual state conference and leadership development for our state staff and youth ambassadors in facilitation our attendance at the National ILP Conference - See also system factor, "Agency Responsiveness to the Community", Older Youth Input.

The ILP team continues to solicit the input of our community partners, providers, foster parents, CAS partners and most importantly our young people. Quarterly meetings with our providers have continued remotely. Our young people and our DREAM Council leaders have also met as we continue to solicit their input related to strategic planning and improvement in 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, county and state staff from both the foster care and Independent Living programs. Continuing to engage and formulate new relationships with community partners has positively impacted our ability to better serve both current and former foster youth. We are in constant contact with our community partners, such as Youth Towers, Second Shift Alabama and BigHouse Foundation, Lifeline Children Services. These partnerships have enhanced our ability to serve current and former foster youth by developing supports prior to and after youth have left foster care. Our DREAM Ambassadors are also an integral part of our training model. Their ability and willingness to provide lived-experience insight to judges, community members, quality assurance committees, TIPS classes, tribal members and DHR staff is invaluable.

The FY 2023 work of the ILP team related to training, collaboration, and support is outlined below. These activities are included in the statewide training: serving youth in congregate care, youth participation in court and individualized service plans. Training regarding these issues were provided to staff and foster parents, service providers and stakeholders at the Annual Foster and Adoptive Parent Conference, Permanency, Judicial and ILP Networking Conferences. Education and training were also provided to youth at the annual ILP camps held in June and July 2022.

LGBTQ Resource Meetings/Contacts

Trainings were provided to staff during the reporting period at the 2022 Permanency Conference by the Magic City Acceptance Center related to advocating and serving LGBTQ youth. The Office of Recruitment's Deputy Director attended our regional ILP meetings and engaged youth who openly identify as LGBTQ. There were also informal chat sessions with ILP youth and Dream Ambassadors to discuss how the Department can support and nurture LGBTQ youth during and after foster care. Information obtained during these sessions were used in the structure of the Annual ILP Networking Conference and provided to county staff to train on being better aware of needs of LGBTQ youth. Organized breakout sessions were provided at each of our ILP Camps during the summer of 2022 to provide open and honest engagement with youth as to how we can improve support to the LGBTQ community. On-staff IL Consultants through Children's Aid Society who have lived-experience have also provided ongoing insight and guidance on integration of protocols to protect and recognize the needs of youth who identify as LGBTQ. Youth were honest and engaging during the sessions. A representative from the Office of Recruitment will continue to attend annual camps and other ongoing IL events to engage our youth about LGBTQ matters that concern them the most as well as partnerships for recruitment. It is through this non-judgmental dialogue that the Department can demonstrate a helping relationship.

Alabama has fully implemented the requirements to remove barriers to foster and adoptive same sex couples becoming placement resources to our youth. The Office of Foster Care and Foster Care/ILP continue to provide consultation and support to counties should LGBTQ issues arrive.

The Department continues to work in conjunction with our current partners in developing trainings about meeting the needs of youth in our care who identify as LGBTQ. The Deputy Director of the Office of Recruitment and Home Care Support has met with our current partners to develop specific recruitment strategies for respectfully recruiting LGBTQ foster and adoptive parents to nurture all our youth in care. A representative from this unit was invited and accepted a recruitment session at the 1st annual PRIDE conference in Montgomery scheduled for June 2023. We will also continue to ensure that LGBTQ resources and trainings are ongoing for our staff and youth.

Proposed trainings will involve sensitivity, education, support and nurturing components. We will accomplish this by meeting with the below partners to develop training series throughout the year for staff, foster and adoptive parents and our foster youth. A few of the partners that have committed to this important task are:

- Children's Aid Society of Alabama
- Magic City Acceptance Center
- Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parents Association
- The Knights & Orchids Society (TKO)
- All Children All Families (HRC Foundation)

The National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD)

Alabama met compliance requirements for our 22A and 22B submissions. Our DREAM Ambassadors played a key role in the proposed improvements to our current NYTD survey and website development, assisting us in making it more user friendly. We will continue to work with our current DREAM Council and youth participating in our DREAM Council meetings, summer camps and conferences regarding the importance of NYTD. We will continue work with our young people to develop strategies to ensure that youth are aware that they are required to participate at age 19 and at age 21. Incentives are provided to youth as they complete the surveys. Updates to the design and landing page of the NYTD portal were made to create a more youth-friendly engagement.

The review of our NYTD snapshot reveals that Alabama is on pace with national trending related to participation and outcomes. The data collected related to education and college data is concerning, as our graduation rates and college participation have significantly increased over the reporting period. That increase is not reflected in our NYTD snapshot. We will continue working with our data team to resolve that issue. We will also continue working with our local partners and taking advantage of training opportunities to collaborate with other states to improve our data collection efforts. Improved data quality will positively impact permanency outcomes for our older youth.

Coordination with other Federal Programs and Private and Public Agencies

There have been several initiatives related to private and public agencies which will continue. The Independent Living Program works closely with **Children's Aid Society** to provide services and supports to current and prior older youth in foster care. We have 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 NSORO**. These collaborations improved educational outcomes, college retention and matriculation, an improved knowledge of psychotropic medication use and trauma-informed practice, as well as a focus on ensuring that older youth re-enroll in the **Medicaid** program. We 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 **Alabama Department of Mental Health** regarding smooth transition would improve outcomes for our youth with serious mental health issues, reducing the numbers needing to be hospitalized and at risk of being homeless adults. 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, the Department has conducted annual Youth Transition Fairs, called Life After High School. These transition fairs held in March 2022 and January 2023, were a collaborative effort with Children's Aid Society and community partners representing The Alabama National Guard, technical and training schools, Alabama's Education programs for foster youth, National Social Work Enrichment Program and two- and four-year colleges and universities. Youth were able to complete their FAFSA onsite, apply for Alabama's Educational programs, and gather information regarding college and career options.

Additional partnerships have been developed through the National Selfless Love Foundation and the Center for the Study of Social Policy through their action-oriented training initiative called Youth Thrive. In these new partnerships, the Office of ILP create a youth-voice recognition event that was tied to the Regional Dream Council Meeting held in Etowah County in October 2022. Alabama was one of 37 states who held a youth-voice recognition in partnership with the Selfless Love Foundation and their One Voice Program. During the event, youth were provided with t-shirts highlighting youth voice in foster care and challenged by State ILP Staff and Youth Ambassadors as to how they could best use their voice to improve the foster care system. One of Alabama's lived-experience youth participated in a Youth Voice blog. In May 2022, the Department hosted a Youth Thrive training through Children's Aid society with 18 lived-experience youth participating. These youth completed the training and gave input to its structural development. The Alabama Office of ILP has continued

its partnership with Youth Thrive through ongoing participation with their Advisory Committee Meetings

We have worked to develop a partnership with **Housing and Urban Development** to decrease the number of homeless youths. There are several organizations around the state which focus on supporting youth as they exit foster care. **Second Shift Alabama, Youth Towers, My Father's House, the BigHouse Foundation and Camp Hope** all seek to serve young people statewide. Some of their initiatives includes job training and preparation, housing assistance, and mentor supports to improve older youth well-being and avoidance of homelessness. Lifeline Children's Services has also joined in partnership with the Department to develop mentorship opportunities. Through this partnership, Lifeline Children's Services builds relationships with churches across the state to host county ILP meetings, while promoting a model for introducing potential mentors, or Advocates as they refer to them. The development of this structure originated from focus groups held by Lifeline Children's Services and the Department with foster youth and church organizations. Through this initiative, we have cultivated improved ILP meetings in Jefferson and Shelby counties with a tentative focus on Montgomery and Tuscaloosa counties. Additional partnerships toward developing statewide mentorship opportunities have been cultivated through the Be Grateful Group Mentoring Program and SOAR mentoring which is offered through the Alabama Heart Gallery. The need for mentors and advocates for our youth has been emphasized through our Annual ILP Networking Conference and Permanency Conference in 2023.

The Department initiated the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) Program through a partnership with HUD in February 2020. Since that time, we have 19 Public Housing Authorities (PHA) approved to serve FYI vouchers covering 39 counties across the state. We have sent 82 referrals for Public Housing through FYI resulting in 40 PHA referrals to HUD and 38 youth receiving vouchers. We have continued to utilize our partnerships with our IL partners to provide support services to these youth while in the program and have transitioned eight of these youth from contract placement to Section 8 housing upon the youth aging out of care.

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. 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 continued to enhance 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 also participated in the Division X Technical Assistance Program (TAP) from May 2022 through September 2022. The overall goals for the TAP were to address how the Department could better improve the service and support needs of foster youth and young adults, increase the knowledge of available resources/services among staff, foster youth and young adults, and to explore opportunities that could enhance, identify gaps in, and address barriers for access to services for older youth in care. To achieve these goals, the Department participated in a conversation between Alabama's Chafee/ETV team and Nebraska's Chafee/ETV team to discuss developmentally appropriate supports for 18–19-year-old; conducted a meeting between Alabama and the Children's Bureau to discuss policy options for this population; developed a community asset/resource list of providers/resources for two of our counties; established a roadmap to enhance current information (IL Connect) and referral system to help youth/young adults access providers and resources including a resource map sample; conducted focus groups with youth and young adults, agency staff, and community partners to understand the need, service gaps, opportunities, and challenges/barriers; developed a summary report of the focus group responses, including proposed solutions and strategies and building off the focus group feedback, utilized the good-better-best continuum tool to explore opportunities to enhance and improve service array. The Department continues to implement tools developed and information learned from the TAP.

Serving Youth across the State

All youth in our System of Care are considered Alabama's children. 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 Ambassadors and community providers in the counties all over the state. We are currently strengthening our partnership with the Poarch Band of Creek Indians to provide training directly to their Youth leaders. 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, conference, 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. This information can also be accessed through the ilconnect app that was developed in partnership with our IL contract provider. Anyone who downloads the app has access to information about all ILP information for Alabama. The app also has an instant notification feature that allows connection to current and former foster youth. Two additional features include direct messaging to contracted IL staff and a lock-box feature that will securely hold important documents for youth like their driver's license, Social Security card or Birth Certificate. These avenues offer a one-stop webpage that list independent living services across the state.

The Division has updated the Official State of Alabama website, iDHR, with tools, forms, and instructions to improve accessibility of 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. Smaller counties continue to struggle with placing youth in their home counties, as there are a limited number of resources in our rural counties.

In October 2022, the Department rolled out the use of on-line financial training tools provided through Ramsey Education. This thirteen-part curriculum has been provided to county staff and caregivers so all IL age youth can have access. As of April 2023, we have nine of our 67 counties participation. IL incentives are provided to youth as they complete each section. Use of the curriculum is part of a three-year initiative to build consistent skill development across the state.

Considering the inconsistent nature of ILP services and supports across the state, the Office of Foster Care/ILP will implement a more comprehensive approach to providing monitoring of case planning related to foster youth. Consultations to review the case progress of all youth in care at age 20 to support successful transitions into adulthood have continued. The consultations include both state and county workers and managers. All youth 18 to 20 have had their permanency plans reviewed via phone conference. They serve to identify trends and improve supports based on needs identified. Moving forward, ongoing staffing of youth in care 17 years of age and older will work as counties development of mandatory youth transition plans at that same age.

Case review and consultations have continued. Our ILP Team conducts monthly reviews related to young people in our ILP and TLP placement setting regarding their readiness for transitioning to adulthood. Our Team also participates in meetings with the Office of Foster Care and our Resource Management Division regarding our hardest to place youth when needed. Special focus has been made to review pregnant and parenting teens. Our Mother's and Infant providers began participating in our quarterly provider meetings during this reporting period (2022-2023). The reports received from providers are reviewed monthly. If providers express concerns or needs, then our IL Specialists contact the county to resolve the issue or concern.

Serving Youth of Various Ages and Stages of Achieving Independence

The focus of our Independent Living 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. The ILP Framework was trained statewide and emphasizes the worker's assessment of the young person's skills and abilities and is to be completed prior to or at the point of the Individualized Service Plan (ISP) to better offer and develop services to meet the needs of each youth. More importantly our focus will be on identifying and facilitating authentic permanent connections.

The provision of service is crucial, but without familial support our young people will continue to struggle post foster care. Breaking down the myths regarding the needs of older foster youth, addressing their unique mental health needs related to trauma, abandonment, and loss, and empowering them to develop and retain lifelong relationships will be important to breaking down the barriers that often lead to homelessness, mental health facilities and jail. Youth aged 14 to 21 can participate in all Independent Living activities provided by the counties and state. There are no age restrictions. Youth have participated in trainings geared toward their specific age group annually in summer or fall conferences/camps. There were 72 youth aged 14-16 who participated in Camp Life which provides introductory training regarding what they are eligible for as a foster youth, how to effectively participate in their ISPs, basic NYTD, social media safety, money management, preparing for college by successfully completing high school, sex education and human trafficking. There were 74 youth that participated in the 17-21-year-old group, and they were provided more detailed trainings focused on college, technical and trade school success, credit reporting, household management, permanency pact, sexual safety, NYTD, internet safety, health and fitness, and Medicaid to 26. In FY2022 the focus of both camps was related to awareness

of and maintaining mental health, preparing for life after foster care, team building, advocacy and non-traditional mental health and wellness. During both camps, general sessions were held to get feedback from youth as to the strengths and needs they felt were found in the foster care system. During both camps, youth were split into two groups to give more opportunity for conversations. During the camps, youth expressed needs around having greater input into the direction their case was going and a desire for input into their placement. Strengths addressed centered around educational supports.

All youth in the System of Care can participate in state and county trainings. ILP aged youth in our protective service caseloads are encouraged to participate in ILP activities, but there are no financial incentives offered for their participation. Unlike many states, Alabama allows youth to remain in foster care until they reach age 21. There are no additional supports specific to those young people outside of existing services detailed in policy. However, services are intensified to promote a smooth transition into adulthood concurrent with a concentrated focus on the need for each youth to be connected to a caring and capable adult. 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 FY2022 Graduation Celebration was held in person and keynoted by a former foster youth and New Jersey foster care administrator. We had 165 high school graduates in 2022 with 190 set to graduate in May 2023.

Providing personal and emotional supports to young people exiting care due to their age 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 employ to ensure that our older youth have the best possible opportunities to achieve legal permanency. Alabama has developed ongoing partnership with 13 non-profit agencies that serve out of care foster youth. These partnerships allow continued supports to youth who have aged out of care.

Our Second Shift partners developed and distributed their LIFE Directory to all our high school graduates and to our camp participants. The LIFE Directory provides information related to housing, health, finances, employment, and various other life skills. It also provides contacts for additional state and national resources for life after foster care. Second Shift also provides Life Skills Education to youth between 18 – 26 years old who are aging out, emancipating, at-risk, or transitioning from care. They also work to provide mentors, sponsors, and client care advocates to support youth in and out of care.

Our Finance Division ensures, through monthly monitoring, that no more than 30 percent 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 that they are still eligible for services and supports post-foster care to include the services and supports of our Fostering Hope Mentors, our post-foster care support providers, and the Foster Youth to Independence 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 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 fourteen 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 age 18, ranging from traditional foster homes to Independent Living apartments and college dorms. We are working to offer services and supports and foster home placements for young people so that they can remain in foster care in their home counties as needed. There are programs, supports, services, and placements available to assist all special needs populations to include substance using or addicted youth, pregnant and parenting young people, 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 a partnership with our Adult Services and Mental Health communities to ensure that our young people with developmental disabilities receive the services needed 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 continue our partnerships with the **NSORO** 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 partnerships 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.

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 in Tuscaloosa. A program at Alabama State University in Montgomery successfully launched in Fall 2014 through that university's Social Work Department. 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 2022 school year, Alabama Reach has worked to provide their services and supports to 22 current and former foster youth. Alabama Reach is interested in working with other colleges and universities around the state to replicate the programming statewide.

Fostering Hope

Since the passage of the Fostering Hope scholarship bill (2015), 739 young people across the state have received financial and mentor support. It has provided funding to cover tuition and required fees to young people attending 43 state two- and four-year colleges, universities, and certification programs. The scholarship covers tuition and 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 2021-2022 and 2022-2023 school years. Eighteen young people completed their two- and four-year degrees during this school year. As of this writing 118 young people have a two- or four-year degree or a certification; with an additional sixteen set to graduate in May 2023.

The Fostering Hope Mentors are required to meet with each young person face to face at least one time per semester. These meaningful visits are done to ensure students are meeting educational requirements, having their emotional and physical needs met, and are linked to appropriate services and supports on their campuses. The Mentors further serve as a liaison for the Department with the universities, should our young people experience difficulties. The Mentors work closely with county staff if participants remain in foster care. The application is accessed on the same web portal. This facilitates streamlining the process and maximizing the funding available for our young people.

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 purchases for a child such as school supplies, movie tickets, etc.):

- Room and Board 85.0%
- Clothing 7.5%
- Medicine Chest Supplies 2.0%
- Incidentals 5.5%

Data on Youth Over the Age of 18

As of March 2022, 449 of our young people remained in care past age 18. This number remained stable with 450 remaining in care past age 18 as of March 1, 2023. There has been an emphasis tied to the roll out of the Alabama Transition Plan to encourage older youth to remain in care and receive ongoing IL services. 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. All youth exiting foster care are eligible to receive the \$1000 aftercare payment and services and supports three months post their exit from foster care to ensure smooth transitions.

Age	18	19	20	Total 18-20
Total	256	127	70	334

Credit Reports and Health Care Proxies

Credit reports are to be requested by county staff each year upon each youth's 14th birthday, per PL-113-183. The results should be shared with the young person and results recorded in their files. This policy is continuously shared with social workers, county directors, foster parents and vendor/service providers at the Annual Permanency Conference, the Annual ILP Networking Conference, at meetings with the ACCA and FFTA groups. Youth are also provided training regarding the importance of maintaining good credit and responsible fiscal management.

Health care proxies continue to be an area of focus for the Department. They are encouraged with youth who have not identified permanency resources to speak on their behalf, should they become incapacitated. Individualized consultation regarding this matter will continue to be provided to staff.

Determining Eligibility of Benefits

All youth aged 14 to 21 in the foster care system or receiving services through our Protective Service Program are eligible to receive services. Foster youth aged 14-21 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 all national evaluations required regarding the effect of the programs in achieving the purposes of Chafee Foster Care Independence Program.

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 uses an electronic application platform. The Department verifies eligibility. The vendor works with the 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 ensures that methodology to avoid duplication and overpayment of federally provided and assisted funding. The ETV vendor is required per contract to maintain a database related to individual and cumulative data related to an annual, unduplicated count and qualitative roster of ETV recipients.

Youth are supported with Chafee Foster Care Independence Program monies allotted for Education and Training Vouchers through our contract with Foster Care to Success. A web portal is maintained which our youth and their caregivers,

university officials and state office staff can access 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The youth apply online, the information is verified by State DHR, they submit all required documentation related to their institution and are awarded ETV funds based on their need. Our contract provider delivers comprehensive support to include care packages, school supplies, and equipment. Our youth are required to check in with an identified staff member once monthly to report their progress. There were 194 youth participating in FY 2022 compared to 181 youth participating in FY2021. 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 of needed concern and focus. Our number of freshmen enrolling far outnumbers our seniors near completion. We will work with our partners at the State Department of Education, the National Social Work Enrichment Program, Alabama Reach, and NSORO and our Fostering Hope Mentors to improve our college completion success rate. We have self-assessed our Youths need for better preparation and additional supportive services while participating in post-secondary education. Staff has been advised at all trainings to have their youth as early as their junior year in high school to complete the ASVAB.

Information regarding the Consolidated Appropriations Act allocation is attached to this document.

Alabama's Youth participating in the Program received an average of \$3,357.00 per year. There are 182 current and former foster Youth participating in the program, attending 52 colleges, universities, training, and technical schools. Chafee funds are 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 Tribe if they have youth in custody. We continue to work in partnership with our ETV provider, Foster Care to Success, the Alabama Reach Project the National Social Work Enrichment Program, the Alabama National Guard, The Alabama Department of Education, Career Coaches, Counselors, and the Department of Labor to develop strategies to improve matriculation. All youth who graduate while in foster care or were adopted from Alabama's foster care system at age 14 or older are eligible to receive the college assistance up to age 26.

Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act

Throughout the Pandemic, the Department established quarterly contact with former and current foster youth through available emails and social media blast using established tools developed through our contract provider Children's Aid Society and Foster Care to Success. In addition, an social media App was developed to establish connections and improve information sharing capability to support youth through direct notifications to updated news articles. These tools notify youth of services available in their community, like food banks, housing assistance, employment opportunities and ways to manage and get assistance with mental health needs. Ongoing updates to how youth could gain access to the supplemental COVID/Division X funding was also provided. An estimated 800+ youth were contacted through these efforts. The Department also utilized partnership through agencies Second Shift Alabama, Youth Towers, and Lifeline Children's Services to assist youth with managing funding needs. Primary barriers during this time was related to locating and maintaining connections to youth who were in need.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Training

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 Independent Living 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 Conference was held in April 2022 and reinforced the statewide ILP Case management tools and Framework training while encouraging staff, youth and IL partner participation in our Regional DREAM Council weekends that provide DREAM Council Leadership training with our positive enhanced service model. Our young people and those tasked to provided services to them have several opportunities to enhance their support network, obtain useful and portable skills and strengthen their support networks. 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 our one Federally recognized Tribe, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians regularly prior to the national health crisis. Restrictions were in place until March of 2022 which resulted in less opportunities for consultation with PBCI. Over the next reporting period, Alabama intends to place more emphasis on specific, intentional collaboration as it relates to youth and the upcoming CFSR. 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 young people. There are no restrictions regarding the Tribal members accessing any benefits or services available to all other youth in the state. We have resumed our work and annual meetings. The Poarch Band of Creek Indians hosted one of the Departments Transition Fairs in January 2023. The Department is currently working to host a Regional ILP meeting with them in October 2023.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Program Improvement Efforts

Our 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, state and local conferences annually. They set and develop goals based on information received from their peers during their monthly meetings which occur in a different county each month. They provide training at their monthly meetings and serve as junior camp counselors at the summer camps/conferences. They develop strategies related to their goals and consult with ILP staff and our Children's Aid Society partners to effect the change that 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 the 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. Our DREAM Ambassadors have participated as presenters at the National IL 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 Independent Living 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 voice and input of additional lived-experience youth. We had several Ambassadors and lived-experience youth participate in our Judicial conference. During that event, youth were able to speak to Judges, County Administrators, and Guardians ad-litem.

Report on the specific accomplishment achieved to-date– Includes 2023 Updates:

1. Help youth transition to self-sufficiency:

The number of foster youths in care 18 years and older remained stable with 449 in FY22 and 450 FY23. 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 employment. Staff, youth, foster parents, our Quality Assurance Committee and CWCI Team have all been provided information and have provided input regarding services and supports to our older youth. We have continued to enjoy the full support of our partners. Our youth have provided training at our Supervisors Conferences, our Strategic Planning Meetings and our ILP Networking Conference.

Permanency Goal percentage of APPLA for children in Out-of-Home Care:

FY2022 (as of 3/31/2022) 10.26%

FY2023 (as of 3/31/2023) 10.50%

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

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, graduate from post-secondary schools and be ready to enter the workforce (Source Foster Care to Success). Alabama had a record 191 young people graduate or receive their GED in 2021. 165 graduated high school or earned their GED in 2022. 181 are set to graduate or receive their GED in 2023. We continue our efforts to review and support post- high school participation in vocational and educational opportunities. Annually we request that each county report future endeavors related to each youth. Those reports are reviewed and counties are advised related to educational and vocational opportunities that can 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	Total ETV's	Returning Students	# New Students
2021-2022	194	100	94
2022-2023	219	119	100

NSEP (National Social Work Enrichment Program) 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, experience and learn about campus life in preparation for career choices. Since 2010, NSEP has graduated over 290 participants. NSEP has had 19 former participants graduate college and 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 young 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 the 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 material 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 youth adult.

Provide personal and emotional support to youth exiting care through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults: Alabama Department of Human Resources in the past has provided personal and emotional support through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults. The State does not have a state-wide mentoring program. Our partners, Heart Gallery of Alabama and Alabama Reach have developed mentoring programs for our youth. We are currently working with our partners to develop a more formalized network so that youth in every county can have access to mentors and caring adults. Congregate care providers also facilitate mentoring support. 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.

Attending and making academic progress towards completing a degree or certificate is the goal of the Alabama ETV Program. We had approximately 337 youth helped academically through Foster Care 2 Success in 2022 with their

developed Academic Success Program (ASP) so educational mentors can provide targeted and specific academic and career guidance to students. The tiered program was developed to meet the needs of all students by recognizing that they range from struggling with basics to academically gifted, are incoming freshmen, through graduating seniors. ASP offers academic mentors to student and 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 the skills and means to pass and progress academically.

Our Foster Hope Mentors meet with our college youth receiving the Fostering Hope Scholarship to assess their strengths and needs based on their performance and progress in the college/university and trade school setting. They attend ISPs as needed to assist county staff in providing support to young people and also meet with college advisors and provide necessary supports to promote academic success. Our Fostering Hope Mentors have participated in our monthly DREAM Council Meetings, ILP Networking, Permanency, and Supervisors Conferences to provide training to staff, supervisors, and community partner agencies. The addition of this team has led to increased secondary education interest and participation. All of Alabama's high school seniors are now required by law to complete FAFSA.

5. Provide financial, 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 then 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 by State of Alabama 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 startup costs. Aftercare financial assistance and support services continue 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 need to re-enter foster care or remain in his own home, financial, housing, counseling, employment, education and other appropriate support and services are also to be provided as needed until the 21st birthday. Room and Board payments are available for youth who choose to 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 our expanding relationship with 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 and 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 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 is 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 to enhance their independent living skills.

6. Make available vouchers for education and training, including postsecondary education, to youth who have exited foster care due to their age: See chart under #3, page 112.

7. Provide services to youth who, after attaining 16 years of age, have left foster care for kinship guardianship or adoption.

Services to youth and their families as they leave foster care after age 16 have improved due to our partnership with Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parents Association. Kinship guardians are now provided the same supports, training opportunities and financial support as foster and adoptive parents. ETV and the Fostering Hope Scholarship are also

available to these youth. Services offered 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 fourteen are now eligible for our Fostering Hope Scholarship, which provides eligibility up to age 26. The Alabama Foster and Adoptive Parents Association offers scholarship opportunities for young people exiting foster care. There are also supportive services offered to these youth by BigHouse Foundation, Youth Tours., Alabama Department of Commerce, Alabama Department of Labor (Alabama Works), the Alabama National Guard and Job Corps.

8. 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.

Alabama 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 March 1, 2022, with 449 young adults, those age 18 and older, represent 8.5% of our overall ILP population chose to remain in foster care. The number of youth on March 1, 2023, was 450 there has been no change.

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, and foster parents 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 strengthened partnerships with Job Corp, HUD, Youth Towers, Second Shift Alabama, Alabama Works and the National Guard to assist youth who are homeless or need housing supports post-foster care.

FIVE-YEAR PLAN: 2020– 2024, OBJECTIVES

Alabama will continue to deliver specialized services and supports to those youth in our care age 14-21, based on their individualized strengths, needs and their goals.

Permanency for older youth continues to be a focus and objective for our program. Our youth who remain in foster care for over five years has increase by 8% between FY22 and FY23 conversely the number of youth remaining in care for more than ten years has decreased by 27%. Our youth and our county staff are encouraged to support the youth as they remain in care and to continue to build their support teams as they transition. Additional services are also available through our post-foster care providers. We will continue monitoring this number to ensure that all positive permanency options are being explored. The Department's focus related to our 18 to 20-year-old youth will continue to promote more gradual transitions Having competent and capable adults in the lives of our young people is paramount in their overall success. We will continue to work with our partners to develop natural mentor opportunities for youth.

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 PL113-183 with regarding to reporting to law enforcement and the National Missing and Exploited Children per policy requirements to continue to reduce potential sex trafficking victims and additional poor outcomes for our young people.

We have improved our partnership with the National Missing and Exploitation Children. Young people listed in our FACTS system as runaway are reviewed biannually to determine accuracy and to review efforts related to locating them. The most recent review noted that staff was reporting per current state and Federal guidelines. Photographs and information regarding missing youth was provided timely to NMEC. Our number of young people exiting care while listed on runaway has slightly decreased from 17 in FY21 to 15 in FY 22. Additional guidance regarding policy and procedures regarding

runaway foster youth was shared with our county offices on April 27, 2023. We will continue to monitor runaway youth in foster care biannually.

ILP Discharges FY2022 by Age	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
Adoption Finalized	29	22	26	22	10	1	1
Adult Custodial Care	0	0	0	0	0	3	4
Child Aged Out	0	0	0	0	5	12	9
Commitment to DYS	1	0	1	4	2	0	0
Commitment to MH	0	2	0	1	0	0	2
Custody Placed with Another Agency	8	5	9	4	3	1	1
Death of Child	0	1	1	1	1	0	0
Emancipation	0	0	1	1	35	77	23
Kinship Guardianship Placement	10	7	3	3	2	0	0
Placed with Maternal Relatives	28	21	29	15	9	4	0
Placed with Paternal Relatives	18	17	16	11	7	0	0
Returned to Parent Father	8	15	11	6	6	1	0
Returned to Parent Mother	46	49	32	33	18	7	3
Returned to Parent Mother/Father	16	11	10	13	7	0	0
Runaway	1	0	1	1	7	6	0
Total	165	150	140	116	112	112	43

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 to adulthood. Youth Leadership will be promoted and enhanced.

Each Year our DREAM Ambassadors and potential Ambassadors participate in leadership training. This year's training was held December 19, 2022. At this annual training, our DREAM ambassadors develop goals and strategies for their year's work at the monthly meetings, our annual Graduation Celebration, and their participation in state and national conferences.

The DREAM Ambassadors will receive and provide leadership training to their peers on a monthly and annual basis. The State ILP staff will assist Children's Aid Society, (ILP partners) with providing relevant and appropriate content for our www.ILConnect.org. This website will 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. Our peer-to-peer training model has yielded success. Youth have been empowered through training and advocacy to participate in ISPs, judicial, staff, foster parent and community stakeholder trainings. Our DREAM Ambassadors also participate in foster and adoptive parent recruiting events in partnership with our Office of Foster Care and Office of Adoption sports recruiting partnership. There has been a shift in the content of the IL Connect website. Youth input has been gathered and youth driven content is being provided quarterly content. Youth input was crucial about the NYTD requirements. Youth input was key in the re-design of our NYTD website as well.

OBJECTIVE

Improve educational outcomes for ILP Youth partnering with our education systems to provide additional supports and services.

As indicated above the State has invested in our children's educational success and it has resulted in very positive results. 165 young people graduated from high school or received their GED during the 21-22 school year. 193 youth are on track to graduate in 2023: a record high for our state's foster youth.

The Fostering Hope Scholarship Program celebrated its sixth year with an additional 18 young people completing 2- and four-year degrees and receiving certifications. About higher education, our Fostering Hope Mentors, Alabama Reach, Alabama Works (Department of Labor), Second Shift Alabama Youth Towers and BigHouse Foundation partners join us in supporting our older youth as they tackle college and careers. We will continue focus on positive educational outcomes for our older foster youth in out of home care. The Children's Aid Society, NSEP, NSORO and Alabama Reach, Alabama Department of Education, Alabama Works, the Alabama National Guard, BigHouse Foundation and Second Shift Alabama Programs have all worked to promote higher education, increase interest in trade and technical schools, and dual enrollment in high schools.

OBJECTIVE

The Department has enhanced its system to track youth exiting care more efficiently due to age from the System of Care 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 ILP Program. 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.

OBJECTIVE

The Department considers all children as "Alabama's Children" without regard to race or culture. The Department recently renewed efforts related to strengthening our relationship with the Poarch Creek Band youth. The tribe hosted a Transition event for us in January and will host a Regional Consultation meeting and a DREAM Council meeting in October 2023.

Services to our Native youth who reside on reservations are accessible when needed. Our tribe has a comprehensive array of services available to tribal youth and do not access our IL services currently. As of this writing, there are no ILP age youth in foster care with the Poarch Creek Band of Indians.

Continued Impact of COVID-19

Our young people who left foster care continue to have negative effects post the pandemic. Young people 21 and older continue to seek assistance related to housing, food and transportation. The information gathered from youth post-foster care related to the Consolidated Appropriation Act has informed several practice changes. Our training and consultations focus on building supportive teams around our young people, offering normalizing activities, procuring appropriate mental health services, engaging youth around their own mental and physical health and encouraging progressive independent living skill opportunities to better prepare them for life post foster care. Our staff, vendor, stakeholders, judges, supervisors, and community members have been provided training and information regarding the vital importance of mentorship, non-traditional permanency options, employment, training, leadership opportunities and encouraging personal responsibility.

VI. CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION BETWEEN STATES AND TRIBES

C 6.

Alabama has one federally recognized tribe, the Poarch Band of Creek Indians (PCI) whose office is located in Atmore, Alabama. Alabama and the Tribe met face to face on April 25, 2023. Alabama's tribal contact is Amanda Montgomery, Family Services Director. The Family Services Director serves as the liaison between the Department and the Tribe to schedule trainings, planned visits, and meetings. All contact persons for the Department and PCI were updated and shared at the most recent face to face meeting. Since the COVID-19 outbreak required strict requirements for tribal members, there have been few opportunities for consultations over the past year.

As COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted, the Department and the Tribe are making concerted efforts to increase the amount of contact and consultation occurring over the next year. Quarterly calls and/or meetings between the Department and the Tribe have been planned to facilitate planning for possible joint trainings and with the intent to establish annual independent living events to be held on the reservation. Further discussion was held around consultation and collaboration related to the upcoming CFSR. As we move toward development of the next CFSP in 2024, as well as the Statewide Assessment that will be completed prior to Round 4 of the CFSR, we have discussed with the Tribe the importance of them having an active role in the provision of feedback and development of goals and objectives. The Department will collaborate with the Tribe to assist with the creation of goals and objectives for the next CFSP. Representatives from PCI also serve on the Escambia County Quality Assurance Committee where they assist in record reviews and offer feedback to the county regarding casework and policy issues. A representative from PCI also serves on the Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative where they are able to share ideas, upcoming training opportunities, services provided, and services needed with the group. Amanda Montgomery, Family Services Director of PCI has been invited to join the State QA Committee.

The Inter-Agency agreement between the Poarch Band of Creek Indians and the Department remains in place with no changes needed. The agreement details who is responsible for protecting children who are enrolled in the Tribe, who is responsible for providing services to tribal children, and steps to take if tribal children are brought to the attention of DHR. The agreement also details guidelines for court involvement if it becomes necessary.

Alabama continues to be in compliance with ICWA mandates. There is an excellent working relationship between the Tribe and the Department. Alabama has a standalone ICWA policy that details the requirements of working with tribal families and children which is available to all staff statewide via DHR Family Services policy. If there are changes to ICWA law and/or DHR policy, that information is disseminated to DHR staff statewide. ICWA is also included in the record review tool used by staff from the Office of Quality Assurance so that if any discrepancies are noted, they can be addressed with staff.

The PCI reservation is located in Escambia County which has the most frequent contact with the tribe. Both PCI and Escambia County DHR report having a good working relationship. The county office and PCI share information fluidly between themselves. Both PCI and Escambia County regularly check with one another if information about a family is needed or if verification of enrollment in the tribe is needed. Both agencies are able to make reports to the other and are able to cooperate in providing services to local families, both enrolled and not enrolled. DHR is also available regularly to answer any child welfare related questions the Tribe may have.

Per the agreement between the State and the Tribe, PCI is responsible for providing services to tribal children. These services include case review, prevention services, and services for children in foster care. 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. Currently, prevention caseloads for PCI providers are between 10-15 families. PCI is able to offer any services needed to tribal families and children based on a need. There are no barriers for provided services noted at this time. If there is not a service available on the reservation, then referrals are made to outside agencies. PCI is able to provide transportation and other services to families and children as well including financial assistance. New to the reservation since the last submission, the Tribe now has a sober living house that is available for parents who have completed drug/alcohol rehabilitation to assist with adjustment to being home and resuming the parenting role. PCI currently has 5 foster homes and no children in foster care at this time. Typically if a child is removed from a parent, they are placed with relatives and services are provided as needed. PCI make every effort to keep children with family rather than placing them in foster care and use the Tribal Court System if needed. The Department has provided PCI with a list of dates and times for Train the Trainer sessions for Trauma Informed Partnering for Safety and Permanence (TIPS) for licensing foster homes. The Tribe also has a preschool and Boys & Girls Club that provide services to children who reside

on the reservation and those who are not enrolled. The Boys & Girls Club currently serves anywhere from 300-500 children. Staff on the reservation are required to complete Mandatory Reporter training offered on-line by the Department and they make reports as required.

Representatives from PCI are aware of the availability of Chafee and ETV benefits for tribal children. They currently do not have any children receiving these benefits but are interested in learning more about the programs and how they can be beneficial to tribal children. A discussion was had about an informational session being held between the Department and the Tribe to ensure that PCI has all of the information needed to understand Chafee and ETV benefits. At this time, the Tribe is not requesting to oversee the Chafee or an ETV program. PCI representatives states they have very few children that might benefit from these programs at this time, and they would refer to the Department as needed for those services as they are needed and available.

Alabama will provide the Tribe with a copy of the final 2024 APSR upon final approval. Copies of APSRs will be emailed to the Tribal Liaison, per the Agreement. Documents from the Tribe to DHR will be sent to the Director of Family Services.

VI. CAPTA

D.

Alabama State Liaison Officer (SLO)

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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.

Citizen Review Panel: Over the next reporting period, Alabama is working towards strengthening the CRP process. The Department is in the process of determining which existing groups could be utilized as a CRP and identifying other community members that could serve on a CRP. Alabama's existing group, the Child Welfare Collaborative Initiative (CWCI) will be one group that will transition to a CRP. Discussion is underway about a possible second group that will transition

and the creation of an entirely new group to serve as the third CRP. Alabama will work closely with the Children's Bureau to ensure that all groups meet the CRP requirements.

Use of Grant Funds

CAPTA funding provides salaries and benefits for 5 Program Specialists, 1 Social Service Caseworker and 1 retired state employee. CAPTA funding also pays for travel for CPS staff to attend the annual Children's Justice Grantee meeting that will be held in Baltimore, Maryland on May 23-May 24, 2023.

Alabama does not create a separate document for plans of safe care. As a state, we have several working agreements with families to provide safety and services in which we incorporate a plan of safe care. In any referral, if it is determined that a safety threat exists, the worker assesses the families ability to make a safety plan with the department to maintain the safety of the child by providing a person who is vetted and can be responsible for the safety of the child/children while the parents maintain custody and work with the department to increase their protective capacities thereby lowering the safety threat to the child/children. Alabama also uses an Individual Service plan for every family with whom we open a case to list the safety concerns, the permanency plan, the services that will be provided by the agency to lower the safety threat and the agreement of the parents and any stakeholders to anything for which they are responsible. Alabama incorporates plans of safe care into each of these documents by including services like drug screens, drug assessments and supervised visitation.

Alabama has divided the state into 5 regions each of which is assigned a child protective service program specialist. Their primary job is to support the county to which they are assigned by consulting on complex case issues in intake, investigations and in home services and completing the Administrative Record Reviews (ARR) for their counties to ensure clients receive due process. As a part of the consultation and ARR process, the specialist make note if a plan of safe care was necessary, completed and is currently being monitored. If there one is needed but not completed, they immediately notify the county director and the CPS program manager to discuss a plan for correction.

These same specialists complete Alabama's safety assessment with the Division of Quality to ensure that children with whom the department has contact are safe and the necessary services are being provided. Each specialist reviews a random pull of screened out reports, intakes, preventions, CAN investigations and open protective service cases. They monitor that Plans of safe care are completed in any prevention or CAN to which they would be appropriate. Any safety concerns including a missing plan of safe care are immediately addressed with the county director and the program manager for CPS to give recommendations for ensuring child safety.

As a part of the support and review, the program specialists are responsible for identifying training needs within their assigned counties. Plans of safe care, safety plans and ISP training has been completed in each county as well as in multiple state wide training sessions to ensure that workers and supervisors understand what a plan of safe care is, when one is required and how Alabama incorporates them into already existing documents and agreements.

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 as 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. From October 2021 – September 2022, the Office of CPS conducted 48,573 Child Abuse and Neglect Clearances.

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 Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention funds to support various parent education and support programs, also referred to as CBCAP. 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.

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 504 referrals made in **FY 2022**, 330 found no concerns. Two children were referred by the DHR Social worker as action needed, and 6 children were already in the system. Five children were activated for a Child Find referral. Twenty-six children were closed by Early Intervention with no further action needed, and 132 were closed due to unsuccessful contact. There were 4 referrals sent to Early Intervention that were children over the age of three year, and 1 child from another state.

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 rise 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. Preventions are taken as a differential response to utilize a different approach to assess and identify the strengths and needs of the family and develop strategies for meeting their needs. Preventions are taken while there has been no reported maltreatment as a means to provide services to families to prevent maltreatment from occurring. Many services are provided to families via the differential response such as referrals to counseling, financial assistance, and others as needed. 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
2021	9,323	13,274
2022	9,864	13,768

*Data Source: Alabama's FACTS System

*Preventions are Alabama's Differential Response

6. Guardians ad-Litem (GAL)

Every child who is the subject of an open case in Juvenile Court is assigned a Guardian ad Litem by the Juvenile Court in the county in which the case is filed. In Alabama, a GAL must be an attorney and must be certified through the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC).

AOC staff 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. It is required by policy that all GAL's are to receive notice of ISP's. All children who are involved with the Court in Alabama are appointed a GAL at the initial hearing. This is monitored via supervisory review. The Deputy Commissioner for Family Services at SDHR or her designee attend every training.

As of May 15, 2023, there were 1044 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. Plans of Safe Care are not separate documents. They are plans that are built into Safety Plans or Case Plans (ISPs) as a case is investigated or opened for services. Substance exposed infants are tracked in the FACTS system at the initial contact

with a family. Steps to ensure substance exposed children are carried throughout the life of the investigation or case as are necessary and are documented in Safety Plans or ISPs. 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. In addition, there are instances in which a plan of safe care does not constitute ongoing services provided by DHR. For example, a relative gets custody, children are adopted, families are linked to community resources.

There were no changes to policy or practice concerning plans of safe care. The plan of safe care is incorporated in the Individualized Service Plan. It is monitored and evaluated by child welfare staff regularly to determine its effectiveness in producing desired outcomes. The state of Alabama did not identify any issues in implementing the provisions and there was no technical assistance needed. Alabama has not participated in a CB site visit relating to the development of plans of safe care for infants born and identified as being affected by substance abuse or withdrawal symptoms resulting from prenatal drug exposure, or a Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

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
2022	703*	151	545	6

Data Source: Alabama's FACTS system

2022: *688 unique children, 15 children with 2 allegations

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 Assessment Training. The Substance Abuse Assessment two-day training was held four times in FY 2022. The trainings were held in Montgomery, which is centrally located, December 6-7, 2021, February 7-8, April 4-5, and June 27-28, 2022. 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. Additionally, this training supports the idea of using the multidisciplinary approach when assessing and working with families struggling with substance use issues. The training increases the knowledge of substance use assessment services throughout the State and encourages communication between child welfare services and substance use assessment providers to better meet the needs of families. Training evaluations continue to reflect very high scores from attendees on the content, structure, and activities provided during the training. Almost 100 people were trained during these 4 trainings. An additional four trainings are scheduled for FY 2023.

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)

Alabama DHR used American Rescue Plan Act supplemental funding to facilitate a multi-disciplinary training in an effort to improve the overall state CPS response. This replaced the annual CPS SW Conference for this year. The focus of this MDT training is for disciplines who have duties related to the investigation and prosecution of child maltreatment cases and included four sessions of the same three-day training in various locations across the state. The training required 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 was held in Florence, Alabama for August 22-24, 2022.

Training included provision of information on primary prevention services, more thorough assessment of allegations of maltreatment, and court preparation. Training also provided information around the impacts of poverty and other factors on systems and on the experiences specific populations have without systems.

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 March 2023, 424 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.

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 used American Rescue Plan Act supplemental funding to facilitate a state-wide multi-disciplinary training program that brought together local county teams of DHR CPS staff, law enforcement, and prosecution staff in an effort to improve the overall state CPS response. There were three training sessions held in different areas of the state. Training

included provision of information on primary prevention services, more thorough assessment of allegations of maltreatment, and court preparation. Training also provided information around the impacts of poverty and other factors on systems and on the experiences specific populations have without systems.

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 will 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.

Alabama has not experienced any barriers with accessing or using the supplemental funds.

VII. UPDATES TO TARGETED PLAN

E.

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. A copy of Alabama's updated Diligent Recruitment Plan has been submitted with the 2024 APSR.

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.

Though the team moved to a telemedicine services model, behavioral services, medication review or both were provided to 66 clients from October 2021 through September 2022. The APMRT provided services to 20 different referring counties in the state of Alabama with 39 referrals for behavioral services and 27 for medication review only. Extensive training continues to be 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 APMRT has safely resumed in-person services and continues to provide a hybrid model consisting of both telehealth and in-person services and will provide in-person trainings to staff and stakeholders. During the period of October 2021 through September 2022, APMRT conducted 393 in-person appointments, 327 telehealth appointments, for a total of 720 completed appointments. The APMRT, found that the telehealth format was not suitable for each referred case, but families were receptive to behavioral and medication review services provided in this format.

The biggest challenge identified by APMRT from October 2021 through September 2022 was the high number cases with adolescent that the team identified as "high needs cases". These cases were characterized by multiple problem behaviors (e.g., theft, lying to caregivers, sexual behavior) displayed by adolescents and numerous barriers to working with the respective caregiver. More specifically, these cases required an extensive amount of time from the consulting LBA as well

as one or more of our prescribers. In turn, the number of youths the respective LBA was able to concurrently serve decreased substantially.

In an attempt to address noted deficits in the APMRT's delivery of behavioral services to complex cases and with adolescents in care, the APMRT is developing two new initiatives. They are developing an assessment tool to determine caregivers' understanding of their (a) need for behavioral interventions, (b) time commitment for collaboration meetings with APMRT personnel, and (c) interest in reducing psychotropic medication. With this information, the APMRT hope to better prepare and assign caseloads. In part, this process also involves analyzing data the APMRT has collected on caregiver contacts with previous families over that past five years. This also includes carefully tracking the time periods by which most beneficial outcomes should be produced. Second, APMRT is expanding the focus of their training with adolescents to include further skill development. That is, in addition to focusing on behavior to improve their relationships with family members and medication self-advocacy (developed in the fall of 2021), APMRT has developed protocols to broaden adolescents' self-management skills sets. These programs currently include financial literacy (e.g., completing taxes, learning how to get a loan), applying for job and admission community college, obtaining a driver's license, making healthy food choices, and general time self-management (e.g., how to create and abide by schedules). The APMRT collective experience that adolescents in child welfare are almost universally deficient in these skills. APMRT is currently working with the Auburn University's recording studio to produce instructional videos that will be available for general use (they will provide the links on the APMRT website). Their preliminary data indicate that adolescents engage with the materials, learn from the instruction, and recognize the value of the training videos. APMRT believes that developing these skills will increase successful independence of adolescents in care. The APMRT provides medication review services to children at risk of placement in foster care as well as those children that enters foster care.

Additional information regarding the protocol for this project can be found in the Health Care Services Plan submitted with the 2024 APSR.

C. Disaster Plan

Alabama had no major disaster declarations for calendar year 2022. There were four (4) severe weather activations for this reporting period occurring on October 12, 2022, October 25, 2022, October 29, 2022, and November 29 2022. These activations were for the Emergency Management Agency only. No Department staff were activated during these times. 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. A copy of Alabama's updated disaster plan was submitted with the 2024 APSR. There were no changes/updates required to ensure uninterrupted essential agency operations during a public health emergency.

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. A copy of Alabama's updated Training Plan was submitted with the 2024 APSR.

Staff of the Department of Human Resources are required to assist during times of disaster in the state. Each staff member completes disaster training annually. The Department has procedures in place to ensure that all citizens of the state, who need child welfare services during a disaster, receive those services timely no matter their racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic background.

VIII. STATISTICAL AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

F.

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 Intake, 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, 90 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, 110 employees)
- Social Worker II (50257, 71 employees)
- Social Service Caseworker I (50246, 416 employees)
- Social Service Caseworker II (50250, 227 employees)
- Senior Social Worker I (50221, 60 employees)
- Senior Social Worker II (50258, 25 employees)
- Total: 1,156 employees

RACE	SEX	COUNT
AMERICAN INDIAN	F	5
ASIAN	F	2
	M	1
BLACK	F	579
	M	55
HISPANIC	F	11
	M	2
NO RESPONSE	F	11
	M	1
TWO OR MORE	F	15
	M	2
WHITE	F	596
	M	40
TOTAL	F	1,219
	M	101
GRAND TOTAL		1,320

***State Of Alabama Personnel as of 04/30/2023**

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.

IX. Financial Information:

G.

Title IV-B, Subpart 1:

The Alabama Department of Human Resources utilized FY 2005 Child Welfare Services (CWS) funds to assist the state in providing Protective Services and Foster Care Maintenance. For specific amounts, please see CFS-101.

Title IV-B, Subpart 2:

The state and local spending figure for the Title IV-B, Subpart 2 programs in FY 2022 was \$5,955,297, compared to the 1992 base year's figure of \$2,792,630.

Alabama does not expect any challenges in expending Title IV-B Subpart 2 funds in a timely manner in FY2024.

Education and Training Vouchers: Please see Attachment C for details.

Payment Limitations:

See CFS 101 for details.