

# Tarrant County Child Protective Services Board



## 2022 Annual Report to Commissioners Court

## 2022 Goals & Objectives Outcomes

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# Tarrant County Child Protective Services Board Annual Report 2021

## 2022 Statistics

In FY22, a total of 24,697 initial intakes were received alleging abuse and neglect of Tarrant County children, an increase from the 22,248 reports received the prior year. Of these intake reports, 17,358 were opened for investigation and 13,286 investigations were completed. Family violence was an indicator in 2,106 of these investigations. The number of DFPS caseworkers responsible for intake, assessment and investigations was 205 staff in FY22.

In FY22, the number of completed investigations that resulted in referrals to Family Based Safety Services was 763 as compared to 705 in FY21.

The number of Tarrant County children removed from their homes decreased from 663 removals in FY21 to 555 removals in FY22. More than 5,500 Tarrant County children were confirmed victims of abuse or neglect in FY22 as compared to 6,500 in FY21.

## CPS Board Activities

**Mission Statement:** To coordinate the County's jointly financed State-administered program of Child Protective Investigations (CPI) and Child Protective Services (CPS) to support the prevention of child abuse and neglect in order to improve the quality of life for children and families.

**CPS Board Meetings:** The CPS Board held ten regular business meetings. Board members made a monetary donation to Community Partners of Tarrant County honoring members of the Tarrant County Commissioners Court in April 2022.

**Executive Committee:** 2022 Officers: Paul Padilla, Chairman, Vanessa Copeland, First Vice-Chairperson; Danny Garcia, Second Vice-Chairman; Katasha Varner, Secretary; and Jim Fletcher, Treasurer.

**Budget Committee:** The CPS Board Budget Committee develops and provides oversight for the annual CPS/CPI department budgets.

***Fund 001 Budget:*** Tarrant County allotted \$2,441,413 for Child Protective Services (CPS) and Child Protective Investigations (CPI) in FY22. This budget included \$2,114,413 to fund 34.5 CPS/CPI staff positions. County-funded CPS/CPI staff are employees of the Texas Department of Family & Protective Services (DFPS). Tarrant County contracts with DFPS to fund these positions and reimburses DFPS quarterly for the actual costs incurred for salary, travel and overhead, along with a fixed rate for infrastructure costs. In FY22, the county paid 71.531% of the total staff costs incurred, with state funds covering 28.469% of the costs. This rate has remained the same for several years.

In addition to DFPS staff costs, the Fund 001 budget included \$327,000 for general CPS/CPI operations and support for children involved with CPI, CPS, and children in foster care. Those funds were designated to provide for:

- Clothing
- Relative assistance
- Foster Care
- Volunteer recognition
- Medical Services
- Medical services
- Transportation
- Legal costs
- Staff training
- Other critical needs

Our Community Our Kids (OCOK) is the Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC) that manages the foster care, case management, kinship, adoption, youth transition services, and reunification services in Tarrant and six other counties in Region 3 West. This is known as Community-Based Care (CBC) which is a new way to provide foster care services because CBC gives local communities the flexibility to draw on local strengths and resources and find innovative ways to meet the unique and individual needs of children and their families. CPI and CPS staff work closely in coordination with OCOK to ensure child safety and improve outcomes for children and families. OCOK and the CPS Board met to communicate goals and objectives, and to address any issues. In addition, OCOK staff provide monthly updates at monthly CPS Board meetings.

### **2022 CPS Board Goals and Objectives:**

#### **Administrative Goals:**

Maintain and refine the CPS Board’s processes while fulfilling the statutory duties and responsibilities outlined by the County and consistent with the mission of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). Continue to increase knowledge and understanding of the complexities of child maltreatment.

This year the CPS Board Members developed set of specific and measurable goals that would support our overall mission discussed above. These goals are listed a below:

#### **A. Improve methods for welcoming new board members.**

- a. Hospitality Committee will create and send a Google form to each board member that will ask certain questions to help get to know a little more about that board member in addition to finding out what talents and abilities that they bring to the board.

**Outcomes:** The committee created and distributed a Google form to all board members to gather pertinent feedback. The information was included in a new electronic board member directory created by the Hospitality Committee.

#### **B. Review and amend the current CPS Board Bylaws.**

- a. Issues and Training Committee will review and discuss the current Bylaws and recommend changes as deemed necessary.

**Outcomes:** The committee held several meetings to review the Bylaws and presented their recommendations for changes to the Board Chairman and entire CPS Board. The revised Bylaws were approved and adopted by the CPS board in October 2022.

#### **C. Each member of the Public Relations subcommittee should commit to visiting one satellite office of DFPS and encourage all members of the CPS Board to participate in this activity.**

- a. Public Relations Committee will visit DFPS offices in Tarrant County to meet staff to address staff morale. All CPS Board members will be encouraged to participate.

**Outcomes:** The committee scheduled several office visits with CPI and CPS staff in Tarrant County. They provided refreshments and expressed their appreciation for the important work the staff do to keep children safe and support families. Feedback received from staff was very positive.

**D. Meet with upper level Child Protective Services (CPS) and Child Protective Investigations (CPI) staff to talk about issues affecting CPS and CPI.**

- a. Legislative Committee will work with CPS Tarrant County Board Liaison to coordinate a meeting with regional directors.

**Outcomes:** Board Liaison coordinated a panel discussion with CPI and CPS Regional Directors, CPS Training Academy Manager, CPS Community Based Care Coordinator, OCOK Chief Operating Officer and the DFPS Public Information Officer. The event was held in June 2022 and gave the CPS Board members a unique opportunity to connect with agency leaders to enhance their knowledge about child abuse and neglect and the successes, challenges, and vision for Tarrant County. The board members came prepared with specific questions which sparked meaningful dialogue. The meeting was engaging, informative and an overall success for everyone in attendance.

**Jury Fund Budget:** The FY22 Jury Fund Budget was \$11,692. CPS uses the Jury Fund to pay for many activities and expenses for the children that we serve. Funds are also allocated for summer camp expenses for children in foster care who are served by Our Community Our Kids. In FY22:

Approximately \$9,500 was spent for needs such as GED classes, driver's education classes, summer camp, sports team expenses and lessons, tutoring, child-care, and gifts for children served by CPI and CPS in Tarrant County.

**IV-E Budget:** The FY22 IV-E budget was \$78,261. The IV-E budget is funded by federal reimbursements received for a portion of the foster care maintenance and administrative expenses paid by Tarrant County. Quarterly claims are filed to recoup all eligible expenses. Tarrant County submitted four quarterly claims during FY22 totaling \$48,788.55 for federal reimbursement. Commissioners Court allows the CPS Board to use these funds to supplement and enhance our county's child protection program.

In FY22, \$20,000 was included in the IV-E Budget for relative assistance grants. This program provides a one-time \$300 per child grant to relatives/kinship caregivers who assume legal custody of Tarrant County foster children to assist them in establishing a home for the child. The relative assistance program was originally funded primarily through the General Budget; however, starting in FY14, the General Fund relative assistance monies have been limited to \$20,000 per year with expenses beyond that amount paid through one of the special budgets. Although this program is not legally mandated, the CPS Board feels this is an essential resource that helps meet the needs of children while keeping them with family members and fictive kin. IV-E budget funds were used to purchase supplies for:

- School uniforms and school supplies for children in need
- Child Abuse Prevention and Awareness Month outreach activities
- Conferences and training for Tarrant County CPS and CPI staff
- Subscription to the PublicData.com, criminal history database
- Fingerprinting fees for relative caregivers in need who are undergoing licensing certification to adopt, or foster Tarrant County children placed in their care by Our Community Our Kids.
- Subscription to the Tarrant County District Attorney's Portal

- Monies from this budget are used to purchase Fort Worth Transportation Authority Trinity Metro bus passes, which are issued to families to assist them in meeting case service goals, such as attending parenting classes, court hearings, counseling appointments and supervised visits with their children.
- More than 100 children received school uniforms that were purchased through Tarrant County and distributed through the CPS Rainbow Room to children in low-income families and kinship placements.
- In FY22, more than 410 CPS children received new backpacks and school supplies purchased with Title IV-E funds and through community donations assembled by staff volunteers, and student interns. CPS staff also coordinated and directed generous donations to Our Community Our Kids to support children in foster care who need school supplies.
- The CPS Board continues to allot IV-E funds to purchase refreshments to support the efforts of the CPS Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) Program. FGDM uses a variety of practices to work with and engage children, youth, and families in safety and service planning and decision-making, both prior to legal intervention and after children have been removed. Providing drinks and snacks to participants enhances the communication process by establishing a respectful, calm, and open atmosphere to promote an honest exchange of ideas and a more creative problem-solving approach for families. This is accomplished through a reimbursement process.
- Funding also continues for the DFPS Staff Development Program, which allots up to \$125 per year to each Tarrant County CPS/CPI Unit to encourage and enhance the ongoing development of staff knowledge and skills. Additionally, up to \$300 is allotted for each of the sixteen Tarrant Program Directors and Program Administrators to enhance their annual program training retreats. These funds may be used at the discretion of each unit Supervisor or Program Director/Administrator to provide refreshments or lunch for staff training meetings or retreats. The DFPS Staff Development Program for FY22 included 52 CPS/CPI organizational units and 14 CPS/CPI Program Directors and Administrators, with approximately \$2,060 spent. In the event that line items in Fund 001 are exhausted prior to the end of the fiscal year, IV-E monies may be used to pay routine Fund 001 expenses.

### Community Partners of Tarrant County (CPTC)

This charitable non-profit organization was established by members of the CPS Board in 1981 under the original name “Kash for Kids,” and continues to provide assistance to children and families served by CPI and CPS. Their mission also includes providing support to front line CPI and CPS staff. The organization also serves as the fiscal agent for Tarrant County National Adoption Day.

**2022 CPTC Officers:** Jerry McCullough, President; Jimmy Walker, 1<sup>st</sup> Vice President; Lesley Baker, 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice President; Debra Wakeland, Secretary; Vanessa Copeland, Treasurer

Community Partners sponsors the *Rainbow Room*, an emergency resource pantry located at two local DFPS Offices, stocked with diapers, formula, children’s clothing, cleaning supplies, personal hygiene items, car seats, pack & plays, and other essential items that may be needed on an emergency basis by CPS/CPI children and their families. Rainbow Rooms are housed at two local offices: the Arlington Sanford Office and the Fort Worth Ben Avenue Office. A county-funded CPS Volunteer Coordinator manages the Rainbow Rooms. The Rainbow Room was recently updated with new paint, storage and organization units for clothing, shoes, diapers, cleaning supplies, and a variety of other

essential items for children and families. CPTC members and a host of community volunteers invested their time, resources, and talents to the special project and assist with regular stocking of inventory.

Community Partners also pays for recreational and enrichment activities for children. CPTC provides funds for sibling visits that are arranged and supervised by OCOK caseworkers, to allow siblings who are placed in separate foster homes to spend quality time visiting and playing together away from the office. This is important and supports normalcy efforts. Community Partners also provides caseworker outing funds, which allow caseworkers to spend some one-on-one time with children in foster care who are on their caseload. They may also pay for transportation expenses for families in need.

Community Partners identified a need for new fundraising activities and therefore did not host the Annual Cops 4 Kids 5k Run and Fun Walk Fundraiser in 2022. Under the direction of the CPS Community Coordinator, a meeting was held with CPTC and local law enforcement agencies to discuss new fundraising partnership endeavors that will continue to support abused and neglected children in Tarrant County. Those in attendance expressed an interest in exploring new ideas in partnership with Community Partners of Tarrant County for 2023.

Community Partners sponsors a holiday gift project that allows donors to purchase a gift for a specific child in need. The 2022 Holiday Hope Project provided holiday gifts for more than 1,200 children residing with family members, fictive kin, and in their own homes through numerous community members and corporate donations.

Community Partners sponsors the *SAVE* (Student and Volunteer Efforts) a specialized child abuse prevention program, which is also supported by grants and other contributions. These funds are used for the direct benefit of SAVE families, meeting needs such as medical care, food, clothing, transportation, and housing assistance. SAVE partners with the following school districts to identify families in need of support: Arlington ISD, Birdville ISD, Fort Worth, and HEB ISD.

Community Partners also provides funds for the operation of the Group Treatment Program, the ROADS (Recovery: Offering Alternatives to Drugs) and Crisis Intervention Program which are educational support groups for parents who are involved with CPS. These are added supports for families to promote healthy parenting, communication, sobriety, and other skills necessary to improve outcomes for children and families.

### **County-Funded Staff Positions**

Tarrant County provided funding to DFPS for 34.5 full-time equivalent staff positions in FY22. These staff positions are in addition to the 430+ state-funded positions allotted to Tarrant County. The county-funded positions include specialized support staff that allow for the addition of services and programs that are not typically available in other county child protection programs, as well as extra county-funded staff who conduct abuse and neglect investigations, support the work of the legal unit, and offer family based safety services to children who remain in their own homes. In March 2020, Our Community Our Kids (OCOK) assumed responsibility for the Conservatorship program (Permanency program under OCOK) for children in foster care along with Kinship and transition support programs for older youth. Under OCOK, this program is now referred to as Permanency.

### **Investigations Program**

On September 1, 2017, the investigative function of CPS transferred to the new Child Protective Investigations program (CPI), which is a separate division from Child Protective Services, though both still remain under the umbrella of the Department of Family and Protective Services. Child Protective Investigations caseworkers investigate reports of child abuse or neglect to determine whether any child in a reported family has been abused or neglected. Caseworkers decide if there are

any threats to the health and safety of all children in the home. If so, they determine whether the parents are willing and able to adequately manage those threats to keep children safe. If CPI concludes that children are not safe, the caseworker will initiate protective services. There are currently three county-funded positions in this program: one investigator, one program director, and a senior-level investigator position. Tarrant County has approximately 292 additional state-funded positions in the Investigations and Alternative Response Program, including program directors, caseworkers, supervisors, and support staff.

Tarrant CPS implemented a voluntary program called Alternative Response Program several year ago. It is a shift in how CPI responds to certain cases of alleged abuse and neglect while still keeping children safe. Alternative Response does not change the number or type of cases to which CPI investigators respond. Instead, some cases that present less immediate safety or risk issues follow an alternative, less adversarial approach to working with families. It allows workers to engage and include families and other community supports to ensure child safety. Serious cases of abuse or neglect still follow the traditional investigation track. Alternative Response cases may transition to a traditional investigation if circumstances change that impact child safety.

**DEC (Drug Endangered Children) Investigator:** This county-funded investigative caseworker serves as a liaison to the Tarrant County Narcotics Task Force and responds to the site of meth lab arrests and other drug arrests when it is known or suspected that children may be present.

### **Conservatorship/Permanency Program**

Effective March 1, 2020, DFPS contracted with private non-profit agency, Our Community, Our Kids (OCOK) to provide the majority of the conservatorship program services in Tarrant and six other surrounding counties. Under OCOK, the Permanency program includes the foster care programs, case management, Kinship, Foster and Adoption, and reunification services. CPI and CPS continues to work closely with OCOK on the coordination of services for children who are subsequently removed from their homes.

**National Adoption Day:** National Adoption Day helps to streamline the adoption process for Tarrant County children in foster care to highlight the need for safe, loving adoptive homes. The Tarrant County CPS Board continues to support these efforts and provided funds to assist kinship placements with criminal background check electronic fingerprinting fees required for all potential adoptive parents. The Annual Tarrant County National Adoption Day celebration was held in November 2022, with 59 consummated adoptions taking place. National Adoption Day is coordinated by Tarrant County Judges, Texas A&M University School of Law, the Tarrant County Bar Association, and volunteers from CASA, Our Community Our Kids, CPS Board Liaison, foster care agencies, and the community. The CPS Board and Community Partners of Tarrant County members attend this annual event.

**CPS / Juvenile Services Liaison:** This caseworker is housed at Tarrant County Juvenile Services and carries a caseload consisting of youth in DFPS conservatorship who are incarcerated in the Texas Juvenile Justice system. This caseworker serves as a liaison between CPS, Juvenile Services, and the Juvenile Court, to better serve youth who are involved with both CPS and Juvenile Services. One-half of the funding for this position is provided by Tarrant County, with state funds paying the remaining costs.

**Legal Unit Staff:** In February 2023, the CPS Legal Unit recently relocated to the Tarrant County Juvenile Courthouse in Fort Worth. This unit represents CPS/OCOK in most civil court proceedings affecting the parent-child relationship. The unit now consists of eight Tarrant County Assistant Criminal District Attorneys who strictly handle CPS/OCOK cases, supported by a team of fourteen CPS employees. Two Legal Liaison positions and four Legal Secretary positions are funded by Tarrant County, with the remaining CPS positions being state funded.

## **Family Based Safety Services Program**

The goals of Family Based Safety Services are to ensure child health and safety, to provide family-focused services, to strengthen families through home and community-based services, and to establish permanency for children. These services are time-limited, tailored to family needs, culturally sensitive, and focused on the strengths of the family. This program includes 18 county-funded positions and 89 state-funded positions.

**Family Based Safety Services:** Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS) are designed to maintain children safely in their homes or make it possible for children to return home by strengthening the ability of families to protect their children and reducing threats to their safety. When a child's safety can be reasonably assured, CPS provides in-home services to help stabilize the family and reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect. Most children receiving these services continue to live at home while CPS works with their families. In some cases, children may live elsewhere temporarily, usually with relatives or close family friends, until it is safe for them to return home. At any point, if staff determines that the safety of a child can no longer be ensured, a plan for the child's safety is implemented immediately. That plan may require a child's removal from the home and/or court action when necessary. Eighteen county-funded staff provide Family Based Safety Services.

**SAVE Program (Student And Volunteer Efforts):** The SAVE Program is a valuable child abuse prevention program which connects Tarrant County families identified as "at risk" with needed resources in their community, prior to a confirmed incident of abuse or neglect occurring. Two county-funded positions, a SAVE Supervisor and a Program Specialist, oversee this program. They train and supervise social work student interns from local universities who provide case management services to the families assisted by the SAVE Program. SAVE interns work with specific elementary schools, primarily in the Arlington, Fort Worth, Hurst/Euless/Bedford and Birdville School Districts, to identify families who may be at risk of child abuse or neglect, and they also accept CPS referrals and self-referrals. In FY22, 12 SAVE interns met with 55 families to assess their needs and provide them with a variety of services in order to reduce the stress in the home and prevent the abuse and neglect of children. In FY22, a total of 127 children in 14 schools were served by the SAVE Program.

## **CPS Support Services**

Tarrant County also provides funding for six positions that support the work of the CPS direct services staff, including:

**Group Treatment Coordinator:** This caseworker-level staff position is responsible for organizing the Treatment Groups for Tarrant County, which provide crisis intervention for families that are dealing with the effects of sexual abuse as well as parenting, anger management and drug education classes using evidence based curriculum and hands-on activities. CPS staff and interns facilitate individualized groups for mothers, fathers, extended family members, and adolescent offenders and their parents. All classes and groups are provided without charge to families served by CPS. Some of the classes have been extended to 12 weeks in order to provide more in-depth education and support to families.

**Rainbow Room Manager:** This volunteer services coordinator manages the Tarrant County Rainbow Rooms - emergency resource rooms housed in two DFPS offices that help caseworkers provide for some of the urgent needs of families and children in crisis. Diapers, infant formula, lice treatment, hygiene items, cleaning supplies, pack & plays and car seats are some of the items that are usually available. The Rainbow Rooms are sponsored by Community Partners of Tarrant County and supported by donations and the fund-raising efforts of numerous community organizations and businesses. The Rainbow Room Manager implemented an online request portal to allow caseworkers to access critical items for children and families from their computer or phone. This new system was

piloted with Tarrant County CPI and CPS caseworkers before roll-out in May 2022 and has proven to be more efficient and useful to staff and service delivery. The Rainbow Room manager also works with volunteers to help organize inventory in Rainbow Rooms.

**Community Coordinator:** This volunteer services coordinator plans and organizes initiatives that channel community support to CPS clients. The *School Supply Campaign* provides backpacks and school supplies to CPS/CPI children each year. The annual *Holiday Hope Project* provides gifts to children in CPS and CPI programs. The Community Coordinator assists with the fund-raising efforts of Community Partners, oversees special projects, works with volunteers, provides child abuse presentations to community groups, and distributes child abuse prevention information at safety fairs and outreach events. This position plans special activities to promote Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month in April.

**Child Protective Investigator Specialist V:** This one county-funded position replaced the county-funded administrative support position. This position serves as a subject matter expert and performs advanced (senior-level) child protective investigations work. The work involves investigating and analyzing protective services problems, assisting in resolving cases and organizational skills of workers in the region. This position will also assist with monitoring and evaluating casework activities. The position also conducts investigations that are of a high-profile nature and/or provide consultation and assistance to staff regarding complex protective services cases and issues. The position serves as a mentor and provides training to investigation staff that need additional development.

**CPS Board Liaison Supervisor:** This supervisor-level position supports the work of the CPS Board and CPTC, and serves as liaison between the Board, CPS staff, and Tarrant County. The Board Liaison also works with the County Auditor's office to certify the quarterly Federal Title IV-E reimbursement claims and compiles the quarterly bills for county-funded staff costs. The Board Liaison is the approval authority for all county funding requests submitted by Tarrant County caseworkers, and coordinates with the Board of Community Partners to develop an annual budget and policies for that charitable fund and assists with managing the financial operations of Community Partners of Tarrant County.

**CPS Board Administrative Assistant:** The CPS Board Administrative Assistant provides clerical support for the Tarrant County CPS Board and Community Partners of Tarrant County. The Assistant attends board meetings prepares minutes and agendas and compiles county statistical reports. The CPS Board Administrative Assistant prepares donation acknowledgement letters on behalf of Community Partners and maintains the income and disbursement records for the charitable account. This position also provides assistance for the Community Services Team (Rainbow Room Coordinator, Volunteer Coordinator, and CPS Board Liaison), and assists the CPS administrative unit with support operations in the Ben Avenue Office, including serving as the secondary Local Office Coordinator.

## **2023 Tarrant County CPS Board Administrative Goals**

**Executive Committee:** 2023 Officers: Vanessa Copeland, Chairperson, Vacant, First Vice-Chairman; Danny Garcia, Second Vice-Chairman; Katasha Varner, Secretary; and Jim Fletcher, Treasurer.

**Budget and Finance Committee:** **Danny Garcia, Chairman,** Jim Fletcher

- A. Create a budget that reflect the historical priorities of previous year's budgets and address future fiscal restraints including risk management, in partnership with the County Budgeting process.
  - 1. Work collaboratively between Budget Committee and Tarrant County Budget Department.
  - 2. Budget Committee to attend Tarrant County Budget Review meeting on May 24, 2023 to discuss the FY23 Budget Request for the General Fund.

**Issues and Training Committee:** **Jim Fletcher, Chairman,** Danny Garcia, Charles Brady

- B. Identify and recommend training relevant to child abuse and neglect for board members. This may include in-person guest speakers, virtual and online training workshops.
  - 1. Solicit recommendations for training from DFPS and The Texas Council on Child Welfare Boards.
  - 2. Make better use of media (Zoom) and obtain a projector for video conferencing.

**Public Relations:** **Katasha Varner, Chairperson,** Debra Wakeland, Jimmy Walker

- C. Develop a social media campaign for the following: National Child Abuse Prevention Month (April) and National Child Safety Protection Month (November)

**Legislative:** **Jerry McCullough, Chairman,** Melondy Doddy-Munoz, Jim Fletcher, Charles Brady

- D. Keep the Tarrant County CPS Board information of important bills that will affect the Child Protective Services System. Work with the CPS Board Liaison to coordinate a meeting with Regional Directors.