

Texas Child Welfare Funders



Newsletter, October 31, 2023

TCWF's Session at Annual PSW Conference

Thank you to those who attended Philanthropy Southwest's 75th Annual Conference session "**Reimagining Child Welfare in Texas Through Collaboration**," hosted by Texas Child Welfare Funders (TCWF). The session **attracted strong attendance and engaging discussion**.

Stephanie Muth, Commissioner of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS), presented a virtual welcome and thank you address that acknowledged philanthropic partners' resources for, knowledge of, experience in, and commitment to child welfare. Commissioner Muth also provided **updates resulting from the most recent Texas legislative session**, including (1) DFPS' focus on moving children to the least restrictive placement for their needs; (2) intensive psychiatric stabilization programs (new in Texas); (3) pay raises for DFPS staff to stabilize the workforce; and (4) a new rate structure to pay for foster care (Texas Child-Centered Care), which allows providers to tailor their services to each child's needs.

Muth also mentioned **Community-Based Care (CBC)**. As of September 1, 2023, CBC went live in Metroplex East, including Dallas, (Region 3e), and CBC will go live in Piney Woods and Deep East (Regions 4 and 5, respectively). **The current plan is for all 254 counties in Texas to make the transition to CBC by 2027.** (Click [here](#) for information about CBC, including a strategic plan and periodic reports from the DFPS Office of CBC Transition.) Muth committed to continuing to partner with the community organizations, including philanthropy, to create a Texas where every child feels safe, loved, and supported.

Anne Heiligenstien, former DFPS Commissioner and Texas Strategy Consultant at Casey Family Programs (aheiligenstein@casey.org), presented on the current child protection system and how it is structured and produces outcomes differently than **a well-functioning system that ensures children are safe with their families, not safe from their families**. Heiligenstien pointed out that Child Protective Services (CPS) cannot accomplish this alone. The recipe for success involves the right policy and practice as well as narrow intervention and wide prevention services that engage the education, medical, behavioral health, childcare, and workforce systems. When the broader systems are engaged in intervention and prevention to support families and children, CPS can remain narrowly focused on ensuring children who have experienced neglect or abuse are not hurt again.

TCWF welcomed two speakers to showcase examples of successful regional collaborations supporting positive outcomes for children in the Texas child welfare system.

Jill McLeigh, Director of Policy, Advocacy & Research at the Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence at Children's Health (jill.mcleigh@childrens.com), presented the history, structure, and communication methods of the **North Texas Foster Care Consortium**, founded in 2015. Find more information about the Consortium and sign up for its newsletter [here](#). The Consortium is an example of a community collaboration across sectors working together to improve outcomes for children. McLeigh gave tips for collaborating, including only creating collaborations when a group has something it can accomplish together that its members cannot accomplish alone. A collaboration needs a backbone structure to support the work as well as regular communication. A successful collaboration will monitor its progress, some of which is planned, and some of which is created by opportunities of serendipity that result simply from convening and working together. Collaborations should create opportunities for people to participate at varying levels of commitment, and collaborations need to leverage input for improvement.

Tanya Rollins, a consultant at Inspiring Voices - Equity and Inclusion Consulting, LLC (ivoices2020@gmail.com), presented the **Travis County Child Welfare Race Equity Collaborative (CWREC)**. Its mission is to focus on racial inequities within the child welfare system in order to confront and acknowledge the racial disparities in our community through building awareness, providing education, advocacy, and holding systems accountable for inequitable practices and policies. CWREC was founded in 2018 in direct response to [data from the Department of Family and Protective Services](#) (DFPS) on Child Removals by Race and Ethnic Group showing Travis County had disproportionate outcomes for African American children compared to Anglo children related to allegations of abuse and neglect, investigations by DFPS, and removals from their home at rates that are far above statewide figures. (E.g., Black children in Travis County are four times more likely to have a report to Child Protective Investigations than White children. And the state separates Black families at a rate six times higher than White families.)

CWREC's [press release](#) on October 2, 2023, announced its full report and executive summary (available on the CWREC website) that analyzed DFPS's data. The Honorable Aurora Martinez Jones, 126th District Court Judge and co-founder of CWREC views the report as groundbreaking for anti-racism work in Travis County. The findings underscore the urgent need for leaders from all sectors of the community including government, business, nonprofit and faith-based, philanthropic, and the community members themselves to collaborate, address the lack of equity and fair treatment, and support child and family well-being in Travis County. CWREC has begun planning the 2024 Statewide Race Equity Convening, and you can express your interest in attending by emailing CWREC@traviscountycps.com

Christine Gendron, TCWF President, moderated a panel discussion with Heiligenstien, McLeigh, and Rollins, followed by a Q&A session. These amazing speakers welcome follow-up conversation whether you attended the conference or not. You may contact them using the email addresses provided.

Again, the TCWF Steering Committee thanks every speaker and PSW staff member who made the 2023 conference session successful.

PSW collects session ideas annually, beginning with a **deadline in February 2024**. The Steering Committee will submit a preliminary idea as a placeholder session for TCWF. **Please contact the [TCWF Steering Committee](#) if you have an idea for a session at the annual PSW conference on October 14-17, 2024, in Santa Fe, New Mexico.**



Reimagining Child Welfare in Texas Through Collaboration

Moderated by: Christine Gendron

President, Texas Child Welfare Funders Steering Committee

Texas Child Welfare Funders



Mission

To optimize the child welfare system from initial report to permanency, ensuring the best outcome for the child.

TCWF Steering Committee

Christine Gendron (President)

Kristy Robinson (Vice President)

Shellie Velasco (Treasurer)

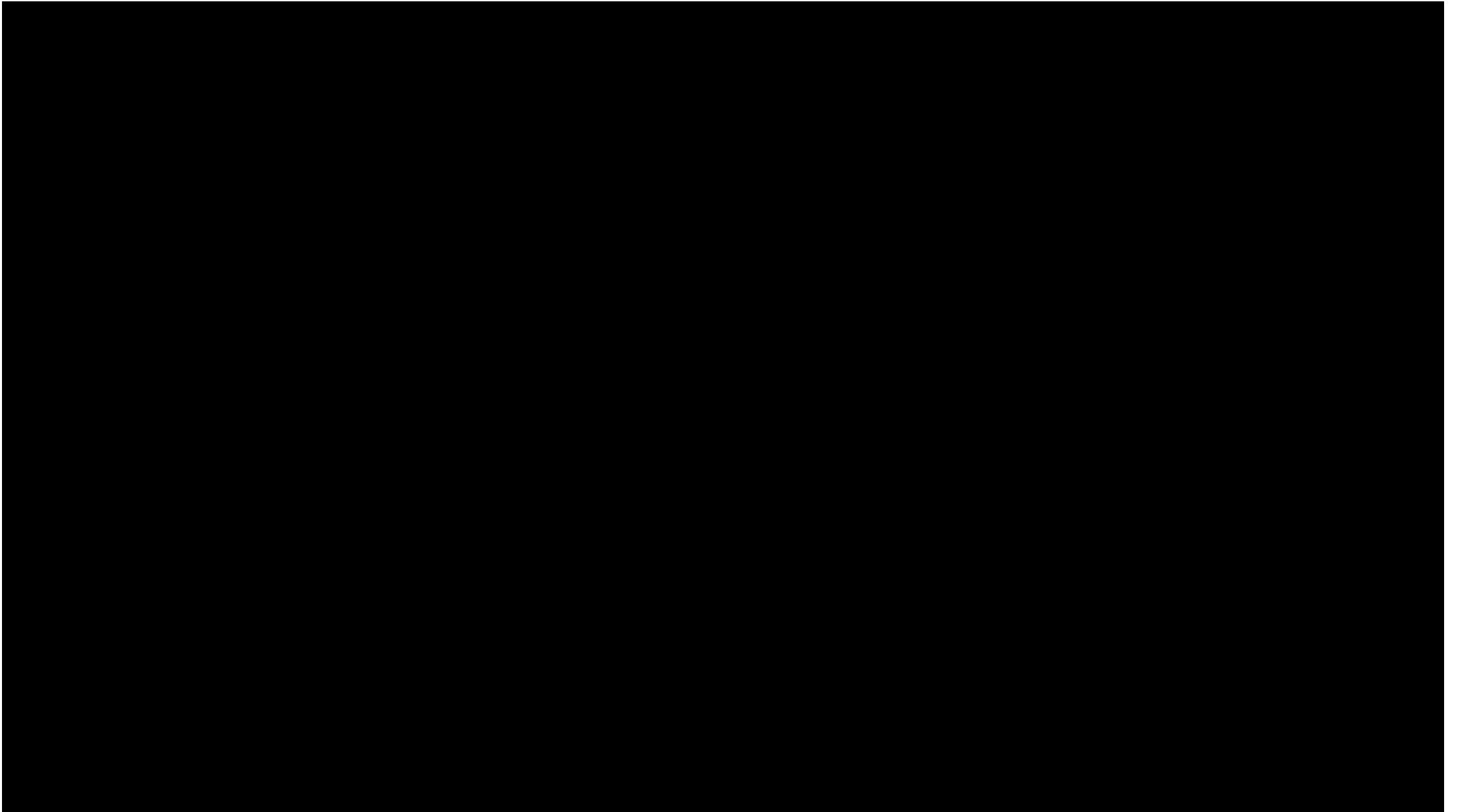
Amanda Finney (Membership Chair)

Michael Martinez (Advisor)



Scan the QR code to learn more!

A Message from Commissioner Stephanie Muth, DFPS





Thriving Families,
Safe Children

Changing the Child Protection Paradigm

Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs

Casey Family Programs is the largest operating foundation focused on child protection and foster care.



Our mission is to provide, improve and prevent the need for foster care. We work with all three branches of government...executive, judicial and legislative... to help achieve this goal.



We work in all 50 states, Puerto Rico, DC, U.S Virgin Islands and with tribal nations.

Child safety is “job one”. Is CPS preventing children from dying or being seriously injured due to abuse or neglect?

One critical measure of safety is fatalities or seriously injured children due to abuse and neglect. That number has steadily increased. Child safety is more compromised today than it has been anytime in the last two decades.

Out of every 100 calls to child abuse and neglect hotlines, only 15 result in child protection services.

What this reveals is that many resources are currently devoted to child safety but are delivered to families who don't want or need CPS services.

This leads to underservice to families who are at high risk of hurting their children, intruding in the lives of families who don't need help and alienating them from seeking help at a later point if they need help.

It also angers families and communities, frustrates caseworkers and alienates mandated reporters.

Who is CPS serving?

Nationally, 69% of children are reported to CPS for neglect only, and only 10.3% are reported for physical abuse only.

In some communities one in every three children will experience some form of CPS intervention.

Data also show a disproportionate number of child removals for Black and American Indian children, in relation to their proportions in the population.

One major factor driving disproportionality in child removals is poverty.

The majority of children who enter foster care, roughly 75%, are victims of neglect only—meaning no physical or sexual abuse was alleged.

“Don’t save me from my family; save my family for me.”

....foster youth

What we’ve seen over the years is that we have ended up identifying out of home placement as equating to safety for children.

We end up ensuring children are safe from their families as opposed to ensuring children are safe with their families.

What’s clear is the right policy and practice is that families are at the core of the solutions we need to ensure child safety.

However, we expect CPS agencies to be all things to all children...we need to be clear that CPS intervention must be more narrowly focused on ensuring children who have been abused and neglected aren’t hurt again.

CPS must be involved in prevention efforts but the broader system, including education, medical and behavioral health care, financial support, child-care, etc. must be involved and must lead those efforts and allow CPS to focus on those children whose safety is truly compromised.

How can CPS resources be better deployed to help ensure children are safe?

In most states, the legislature codifies the definition of child neglect. Statutory changes are needed if we want CPS to focus on helping families whose children are truly unsafe. The Texas Legislature has done so.

The Texas Family Code defined neglect through a list of circumstances that may be considered neglect. The poorly defined definition allowed for issues stemming from poverty to lead to CPS involvement.

The Texas Legislature addressed this by creating a clearer, narrowly crafted definition of neglect to help CPS and judges to better distinguish between circumstances requiring CPS intervention and those that could be addressed through less intrusive community-driven supports.

The Legislature also ended the practice of non-emergency removals.



What is Texas' new definition of neglect?

“Neglect” is defined to mean an act or failure to act by a person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare that evidenced the person's blatant disregard for the consequences of the act or failure to act that resulted in harm to the child or that created an **immediate danger** to the child's physical health and safety. The new law replaced language referencing “substantial risk” with “immediate danger.”

The law also specifies that the definition of neglect does not include allowing a child to engage in independent activities that were appropriate and typical for the child's level of maturity, physical condition, developmental abilities, or culture.

Did these statutory changes work?

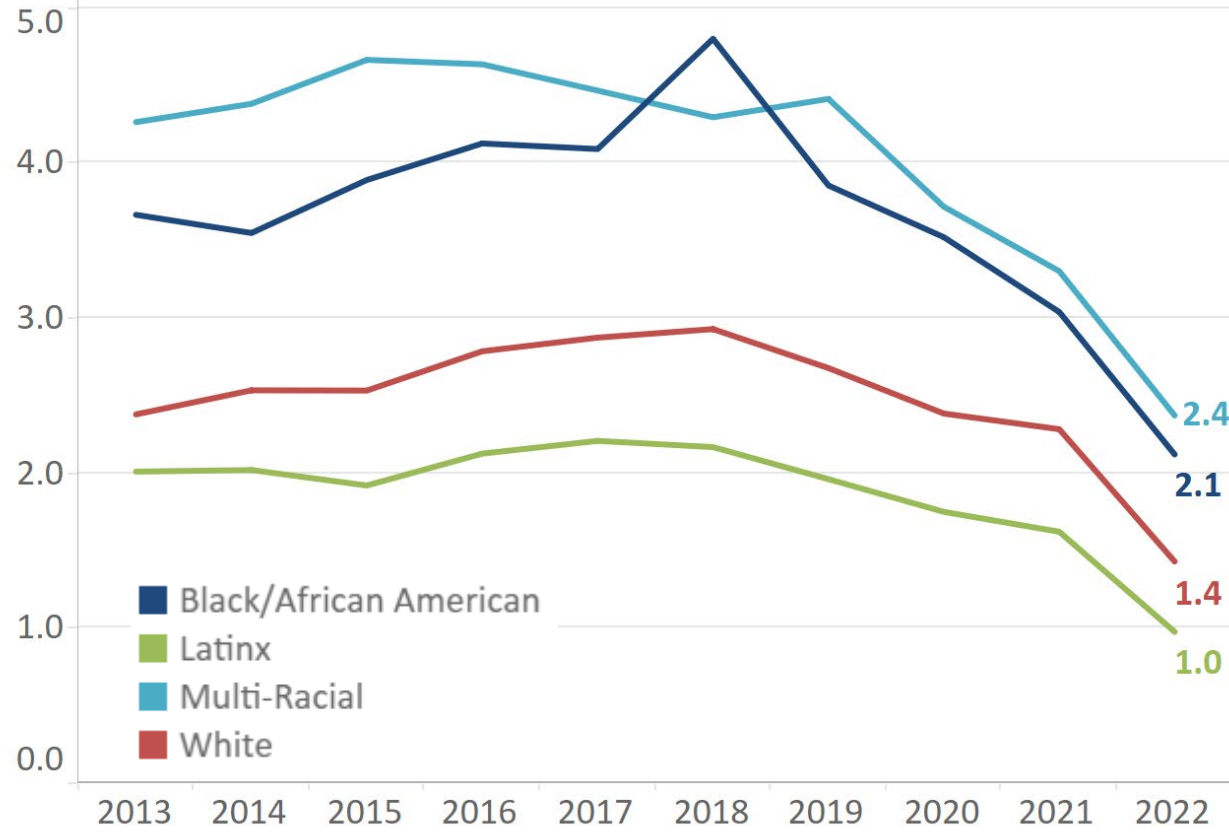
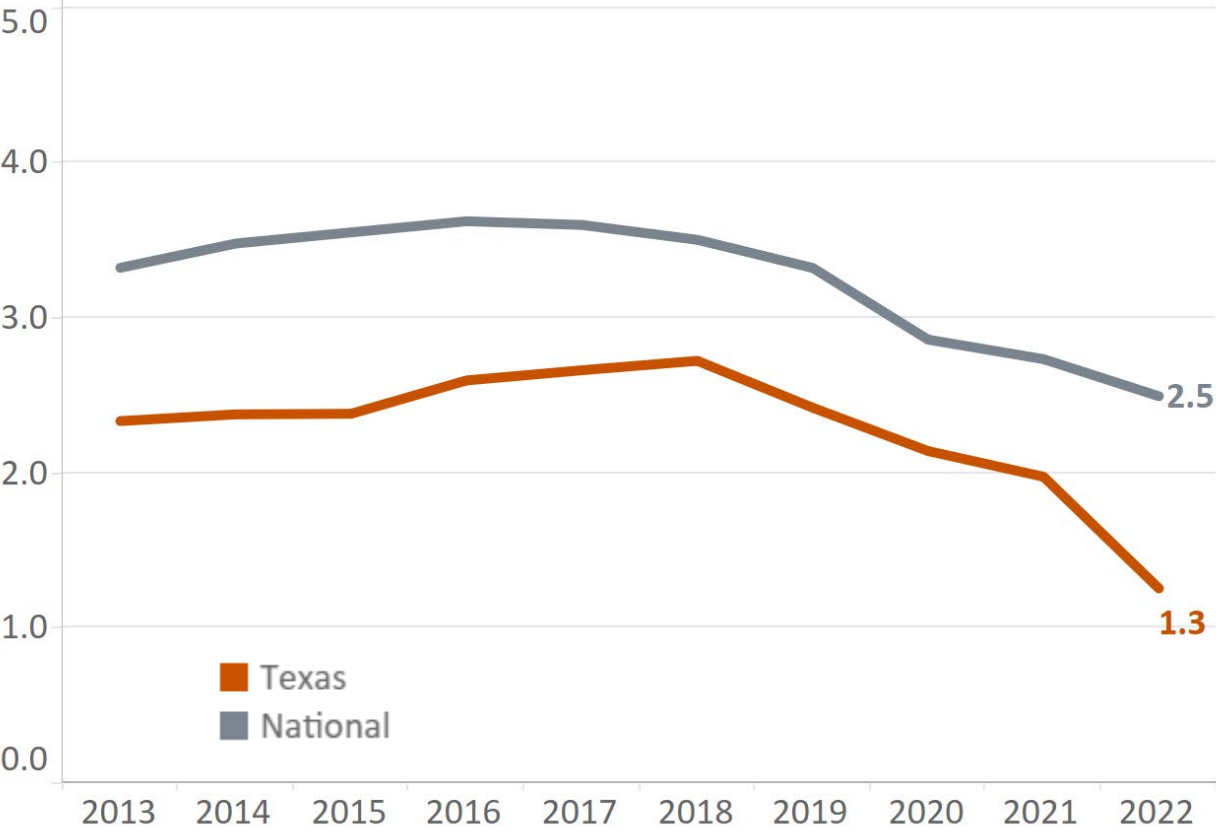
Child removals for 2022 over 2018 dropped by 53% and Texas has not seen reports of increased maltreatment.

While disproportionality of the removal of African American children still exists, all population cohorts saw a like decline in children being removed from their families. No cohort was left behind.



Foster Care Entry Rate | Texas

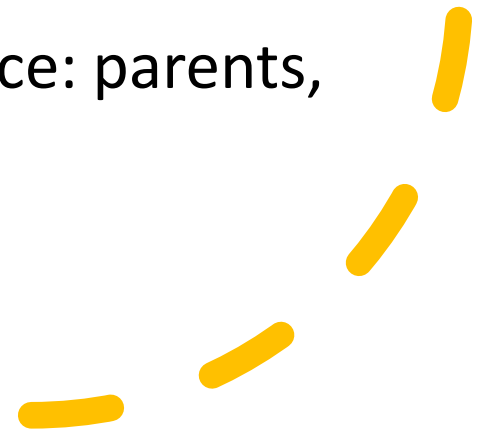
At what rate are children entering care? (per 1,000 in the general population)



Source: Sources: state submitted AFCARS & NCANDS files
Note: Children < age 18

What are other best policies and practices?

- Kinship care as a child's first and best placement
- Community Based Care
- Pre-petition parent legal representation
- Alternative Response instead of "investigations"
- "Upstream" abuse and neglect prevention services
- Access to community mental and behavioral health services
- Engaging those with lived experience: parents, youth and kin.









What can philanthropy's role be in advancing better child protection policies and practice?

Too many of those who seek us out see philanthropy primarily as a funding source. But that perception fails to acknowledge philanthropy's full capacity to make a difference as an influencer, organizer and powerful innovator of change.

Foundations are vital members of the community. We are practice demonstrators. We are strategic partners.



We are advocates for laws and policies that, when fully embraced and fully enforced, will result in meeting the needs of families and keeping children safe.

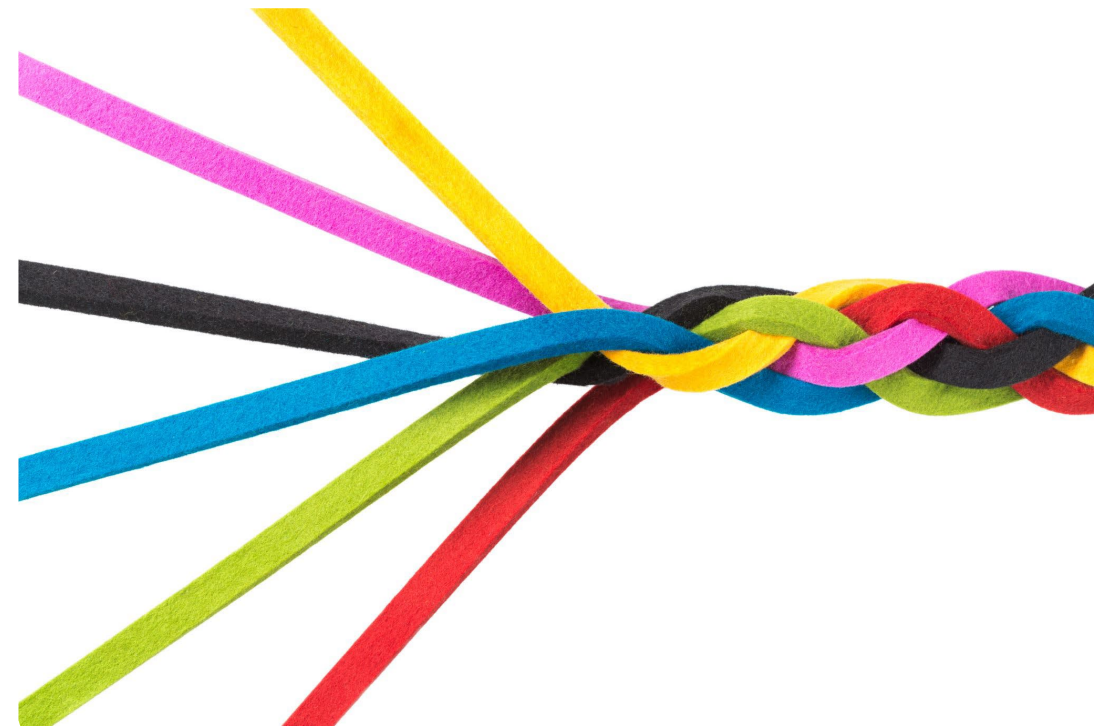
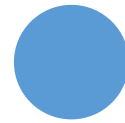


We can create solutions with our state and community partners, by their sides, because they know more about what they need than we do.

Conclusion

A well functioning child protection agency can do much to intervene when truly necessary to help families and keep children safe. But it can't do it all!

CPS is an essential component in a larger, more robust family well-being system that prevents child harm by working in partnership with all five sectors — government, business, philanthropy, nonprofit and faith-based, and community members themselves —to ensure that all families have the capacity to care for their children and that all children thrive in safe, stable, nurturing families and community environments.





- Founded in 2015, led by a steering committee: Dallas CASA, DFPS, OC-OK and Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence
- In 2019, engaged a consultant to meet 4 goals:
 - **Create** a more formal and engaging structure
 - **Increase** the number of highly engaged participants and variety of organizations participating
 - **Provide** consistent, ongoing communication and information-sharing with participants
 - **Move** beyond ideas to action
- In 2020, engaged with the Texas Alliance for Child and Family Services and Meadows Mental Health Policy Institute to conduct an environmental assessment.

Tip #1: A collaboration should only be launched if there is something that can be done together that can't be achieved alone (i.e., working together is going to improve outcomes)!



Structure



- Mission
- Membership process
- Bylaws
- Board of Directors
- Committee structure



Networking and Collaboration



Advocacy



Education and Training



Outreach and Community Engagement



Data and Outcomes

Tip #2: An organization (*backbone*) needs to be tasked with the role of supporting the collaboration.



Communication

NORTH TEXAS FOSTER CARE CONSORTIUM

Home Who We Are Upcoming Events Join Us Resources Job Board
Contact Us

NEW! CBC INFOGRAPHICS FOR EDUCATORS, HEALTHCARE AND CAREGIVERS

NORTH TEXAS FOSTER CARE CONSORTIUM

Committed to promoting the well-being of children in out-of-home care in North Texas.

[Learn more](#)

WHO WE ARE AND HOW YOU CAN HELP...

WHO WE ARE **WHAT WE DO** **JOIN US**

Tip #3:
Communicate Regularly. Keep people engaged by sharing information that they find useful.



Communication



Join us for a Q&A with Empower and a panel discussion on mental health

Wednesday, Aug. 23 | 9 to 11 a.m.

Virtual meeting via Zoom

Add to calendar

Agenda

- Announcements
- Brief Q & A with Empower (Have questions? Submit them [here](#).)
 - Dr. Linda Garcia, Senior Vice President, *Empower*
- Panel Discussion: Supporting the Mental Health of Children in Care
 - Dr. James Norcross, Professor and Chief, Child & Adolescent Psychiatry Division, *University of Texas Southwestern Medical Center*
 - Ms. Regina Walker, Child & Adolescent Services Director, *Metrocare*
 - Nathan Hoover, Vice President of Clinical Operations, *Superior HealthPlan*
 - Trina Ita, Chief Strategist for Behavioral Health, *Department of Family and Protective Services*

If this email was forwarded to you by a colleague, you can sign-up to receive emails about future meetings and events [here](#).

For more information the North Texas Foster Care Consortium, visit our [website](#). Be sure to check out the *new* [job board](#).

Notes and resources from the quarterly meeting

Thanks to everyone who joined us for the Aug. 23 quarterly meeting. A special thanks to Dr. Linda Garcia for answering our questions about the community-based care rollout and to Dr. Jim Norcross, Nathan Hoover, Trina Ita and Regina Walker for sharing their insights and resources related to the mental health of children in care. Resources discussed during the meeting are provided below.

[Recording](#) of the Aug. 23 quarterly meeting.

NEW Resources from the Consortium:

- Community Based Care (CBC) infographics for [healthcare providers](#), [educators](#) and [foster and kinship caregivers](#)
- [Infographic](#) outlining the requirements and benefits of the various options kinship caregivers have in caring for relative children.
- [Recording](#) of the 88th Legislative Session recap.
- Check out our [new job board](#)!

Several resources were shared during the mental health panel discussion. We have attempted to provide links to some of the resources discussed but suggest you listen to the recording for a complete overview.

[Texas Child Mental Health Care Consortium](#) resources:

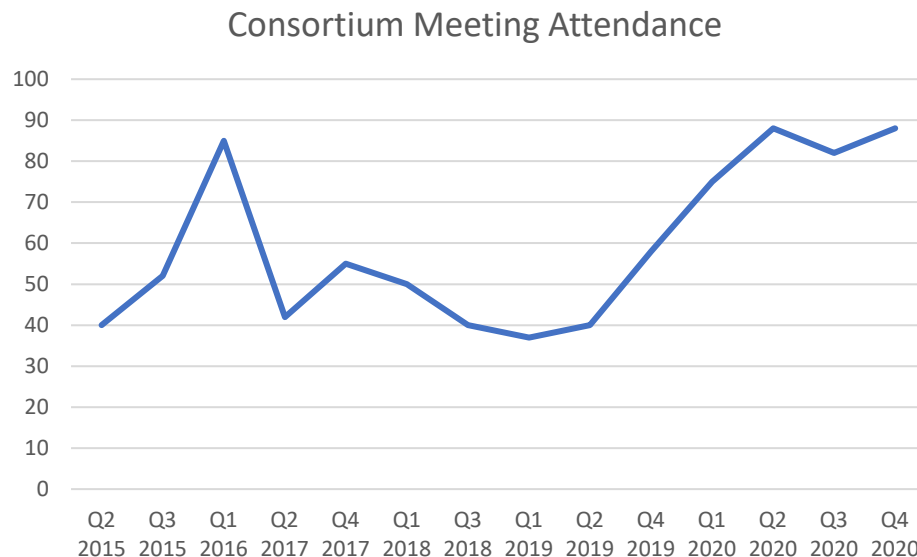
- [Child Psychiatry Access Network \(CPAN\)](#)
- [Texas Child Health Access Through Telemedicine \(TCHAT\)](#)
- [Community Psychiatry Workforce Expansion \(CPWE\) and Child and Adolescent Psychiatry \(CAP\) fellowships](#)

UT Southwestern/Children's Health resources:

- [Behavioral Health Integration and Guidance \(BHIG\) Initiative](#)
- [Suicide Prevention and Resilience at Children's \(SPARC\)](#)
- [Teen Recovery Program for mental health and substance abuse](#)
- [Eating Disorders Treatment Program for inpatient or outpatient care](#)
- [Depression Clinic for children with depression](#)
- [Rees-Jones Center for Foster Care Excellence](#)
- Construction has begun on the [first state mental health hospital](#) in the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex. It is expected to open in 2026 and will include 96 pediatric beds.

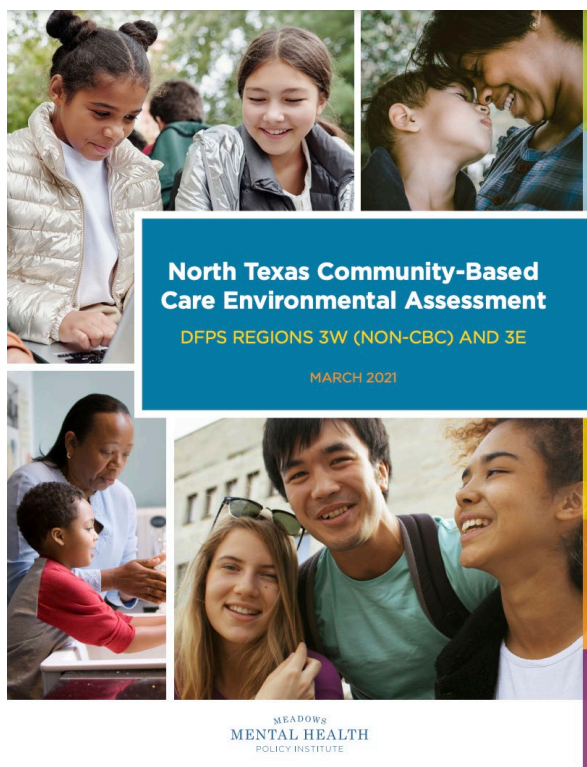
[Star Health Plan](#)

Increase Participation and Multisector Engagement



- Sectors with increasing attendance:
 - CPAs
 - Foster care liaisons
 - DAs, PDs, judges
 - Faith community
- Membership: 54 orgs.
- Mailing list: ~400 people

Cease Opportunity



North Texas Community-Based Care (CBC) Environmental Assessment: 2019-2021

- The goal of the assessment was to provide data, insights, and recommendations to support community planning efforts for CBC.
- The project was supported by a steering committee, the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services, and the Foster Care Consortium.

Tip #5: Create opportunities for serendipity.



Recent Consortium Activities

www.fostercareconsortium.com



Kinship: legislative webinar, infographics

Increasing access to information about availability of supports for kinship caregivers

Community Data Profile

North Texas Mental Health in Child Welfare Summit

Community-Based Care Legal Convening

CBC Infographics

Quarterly Consortium meetings

Continuing to build infrastructure (e.g., job board, mailing list, announcements/requests)

Tip #6: Create opportunities for people to participate at varying levels of commitment. Leverage input in any way you can!



Final Tips/Takeaways



- Have goals, but be flexible
 - **Create** a more formal and engaging structure
 - **Increase** the number of highly engaged participants and variety of organizations participating
 - **Provide** consistent, ongoing communication and information-sharing with participants
 - **Move** beyond ideas to action
- Trust takes time and intentionality
 - 2015-2023
- Interdisciplinary action across levels
 - Grassroots, grasstops, lived experience
- Create opportunities for serendipity
 - CBC Readiness Assessment, launch of CBC, mental health

The background is a purple-to-blue gradient with various colorful geometric shapes including circles, ovals, and elongated rectangles in shades of orange, red, green, yellow, and light blue. The shapes are scattered across the frame, some overlapping.

Travis Co. Child Welfare Race Equity Collaborative

PSW 75th Annual Conference

Introduction to CWREC



"The impact of separating children from their families creates a much larger problem that isn't often considered by the Child Welfare System. The years of pain I endured as I struggled with finding my bio-brother... finally, after 40 years, that dream became my reality." -Mosley Hobson, Former Foster Youth



CWREC Data Analysis and Press Release



Contact us:

- For more information about membership, contact Amanda at amandafinney@kingfoundation.com



Texas Child Welfare Funders



Philanthropy

southwest

Connected, Impactful Philanthropy