



DFPS VISION

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APS Mentoring Program Improving Turnover

In October 2018, [Adult Protective Services \(APS\)](#) launched an employee mentoring program in 19 counties in the Dallas/Fort Worth area.

Trained, tenured employees are paired with newly hired protégés to reduce turnover, foster camaraderie, and improve casework for people the agency serves. APS modeled the program after the successful mentoring program that [Child Protective Services](#) started in 2015.

In the APS program, new employees receive weekly goals to achieve, attend trainings, meet with district management, and check in with their mentors on a regular basis. “The objective is to build better relationships from top to bottom,” explains APS specialist, and lead mentor, Courtney Shaw.

To recruit mentors, APS promotes the benefits of becoming a mentor, such as a stipend and professional development. APS management also helps identify promising mentor candidates. According to Shaw, tenured staff aren’t in it just for a pay increase. Mentors are signing up to help the agency do a better job serving Texans — by reducing employee turnover, eliminating abandoned cases, and improving the overall function of the program.

Karola Brookshire, a mentor in Bonham, has seen the positive effects of the initiative. First, new

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Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services

LEAN Initiative is Changing SWI

[Statewide Intake \(SWI\)](#) is changing the way staff handle incoming calls to report abuse, neglect, or exploitation.

In March 2019, a new training rolled out to help intake specialists quickly assess the most important information to determine whether a call demands an investigation by the agency. Staff who took calls used to spend a lot of time casting a wide net to capture potential abuse, neglect, or exploitation. The change is a key part of the LEAN Initiative, which began in 2017 with a review of all SWI policies and practices, and is already bringing hold times and call times down, reducing post-call documentation, and leaving fewer abandoned calls at the [Texas Abuse Hotline](#).

The LEAN Initiative is about doing more with the same employee resources. According to Intake Specialist Kasey Cash, “It’s been really helpful to me.” Management has been giving staff tips they can immediately use to improve efficiency, such as entering all call notes directly into the IMPACT system.

“We are the front door to the agency,” explains Porscha Roney, a community engagement specialist with SWI. “Through the LEAN Initiative, we are giving intake specialists the tools they need to be the most effective and efficient in their jobs.”

SWI receives more than 750,000 contacts annually, many of which are cases of suspected abuse or neglect. “We are the first person that callers talk to after they decide to make a difference in someone’s

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Tymothy Belseth Pays it Forward and Serves as a Champion for Youth

Tymothy Belseth's mission is to improve the foster care experience for youth as much as possible, and give them a path to prosperity once they reach adulthood.

As a former foster youth who transitioned out of care, Belseth knows what it takes to build supportive, healthy relationships and the importance of foster youth enjoying the same everyday activities that youth who aren't in foster care experience.

According to Belseth, "youth in foster care are used to having people do things for them." Adults in their lives should instead focus on doing things **with** them. That's how authentic relationships based on trust and compassion are built, and those relationships are crucial for foster youth as they transition into adulthood.

Studying Permanency

Belseth is helping conduct the [Texas Youth Permanency Study](#) (TYPS) at The University of Texas at Austin. The study explores how foster youth develop relationships to better understand permanency. He argues that people trying improve the foster-care system don't have enough data about the differences in outcomes for youth after they leave the system.

By studying how foster youth transition into adulthood, Belseth hopes to identify what makes for a better transition, and improve foster youth's success through targeted interventions. "For example," he said, "if we see that the third placement is a problem for a lot of the youth we study, we can put measures in place to anticipate and address those issues in the future. TYPS will help us identify at which junctures we can really make a difference."

After graduating summa cum laude from Texas A&M University-Kingsville with degrees in political science and sociology, Belseth first worked as a Youth Specialist at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) where he helped youth prepare for



Youth Completing PAL (Preparation for Adult Living program)



83% completed PAL in FY 2017

92% completed PAL in FY 2018

adulthood. At the agency, Belseth promoted normalcy as an important focus when creating youth service plans. "I have always been a megaphone for youth in the system," said Belseth.

Preparing Foster Youth for Adulthood

"For foster youth to take advantage of wonderful opportunities like tuition waivers and free healthcare," he said, "they need to have enough ownership and structure in their lives to make mistakes and then learn from them." According to Belseth, giving foster youth a say in their own lives gives them control, builds a sense of responsibility, and ultimately prepares them for adulthood.

While he's excited about the possibilities of the new study, Belseth is also very proud of his four years working at DFPS. "The agency has made some significant contributions to improving the foster care experience and promoting independence for youth," he said. ■

DFPS Attorneys' Expertise Recognized

Nine DFPS attorneys have become some of the first to be officially certified as specialists in child welfare law.

The distinction carries with it increased credibility and the ability to better serve DFPS. In 2017, child welfare became a specialty area of the law recognized by the Texas Supreme Court and in October 2018, the [Texas Board of Legal Specialization \(TBLS\)](#) administered the first ever [Child Welfare Law](#)



Eric Tai, Kellie Price, Lucinda Valdez, and Mark Zuniga

Certification qualifications include:

-  **5 years** as an active member of the State Bar of Texas
-  **3 years** child welfare law experience
-  **60 hours** child welfare law continuing legal education
-  **6-hour** comprehensive examination on child welfare law

DFPS representation

-  **20%** Of the 45 attorneys who obtained certification, nine were DFPS employees

[Certification](#) exam. All nine DFPS attorneys who took the exam passed.

Experts in the Field

According to DFPS Director of Regional Litigation Anna Ford, "Our attorneys are regarded as experts in the field. They provide the initial legal training for new caseworkers, and do some of the most difficult legal case work in Texas." It's not unusual for DFPS regional attorneys to get up early, travel hundreds of miles to court in a distant county, and then come home late at night. "Their workload can be tremendous," Ford says. Ford thinks having so many DFPS attorneys recognized for their expertise by TBLS is giving credit where credit is due, and their success helps improve the reputation of the agency.

Eric Tai, a managing attorney with DFPS, agrees. "Other attorneys and judges can rely on our expertise. This certification adds credibility to our voice in court, which benefits those we serve," he said.

Studying as a Group

Tai helped organize the DFPS study group for the exam. TBLS gave out general guidance for exam preparation, so the study group took it upon themselves to review the Texas Family Code, child welfare policy, the Interstate Compact on Placement of Children, the rules of civil procedure, and many other legal documents. The format of the certification exam is similar to the bar exam, so Tai's group approached studying for it in the same way. Passing both exams means being able to spot legal issues in a compressed time frame and successfully articulating the law on paper.

According to Tai, many people worked hard to make child welfare law specialization official, and he's proud to be part of the very first class. He also appreciates the work of the [Supreme Court of Texas Permanent Judicial Commission for Children, Youth, and Families](#) – the Children's Commission – to get child welfare law recognized by the Texas state bar. "Everyone at DFPS works really hard in the field, and it's gratifying to have our efforts recognized," he said. ■

PEI Programs Improve Outcomes for Families

DFPS Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) pays for and oversees a number of community-based program that focus on identifying and strengthening vulnerable families before they reach a crisis.

These programs are designed to strengthen family relationships, build resiliency, and promote positive outcomes for children, youth, families, and communities in Texas so they can avoid more intense intervention from CPS. Through the [Nurse Family Partnership \(NFP\) Program](#), nurses provide home visits to first-time, pregnant mothers to improve pregnancy outcomes, improve child health and development, improve family economic stability, and reduce the likelihood of child neglect or abuse. With the [Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Early Support \(HOPES\) program](#), PEI pays for an array of community-based approaches to child abuse and neglect prevention specific to the community's particular needs.

NFP is the 'Gold Standard'

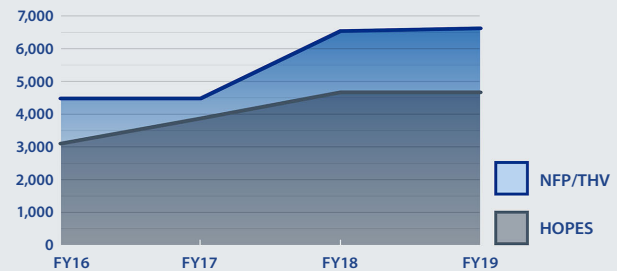
The NFP is an evidenced-based home visiting program. NFP improves pregnancy outcomes by helping women engage in sound preventive health practices, such as seeking prenatal care from their healthcare provider, improving their diet, reducing or quitting cigarettes, alcohol, and illegal substances.

According to Susan Rodriguez, the program manager in Tyler, "it's the gold standard in terms of results." The program has a very specific focus — trained nurses visit regularly with first-time, low-income pregnant women to give them the information and support they need to deliver healthy babies and raise strong children. Shannon Smallwood has been a nurse with the NFP for more than two years. Her favorite thing about her job is being part of something greater and watching her mothers become more empowered. "It's like having 26 daughters," she said.

Laura Young, a nurse supervisor with NFP, explains how the nurses practice motivational interviewing.

PEI Program Outputs

Families Served (FY 2016 – FY 2019)



NFP Families Served

 **3,293** families in FY 2018

"With a cigarette smoker, they wouldn't just say 'you need to quit smoking.' Instead, they talk about the risks of smoking and then encourage the mother to make even the smallest changes," she said.

Coming Full Circle to Help Others

Smallwood said that watching these mothers' lives is "sometimes like looking in a mirror. A common thread in our office is that we all know what it's like to be a new mother. It gives us the heart to do this work." Smallwood's first client in the program lost her baby three days after birth. Now, that same woman sits on a volunteer advisory board and is an effective voice in the community about infant mortality. "She about rocked my world," Smallwood said. "To see her lose her baby, I feel like she has come full-circle" in wanting to help others.

The HOPES Program

Cassandra Archangel has been a parent educator with the HOPES program in Beaumont for three years. Meeting with new parents or families individually, she focuses on:

- Parent-child interactions — developmentally appropriate activities that parents complete with their children.
- Development-centered parenting — information regarding sleep, nutrition, discipline, safety, and more.

- Family well-being — time focused on the whole family unit concerning education, employment, physical and mental health, and more.

Tiesha's Story

Tiesha Webb was one of the youngest mothers Archangel worked with and was 16 when she had Ryleigh. "I counseled her that it's not just about



Tiesha Webb, Commissioner Whitman, and Ryleigh

herself anymore, she's also providing for the baby," said Archangel. With Archangel's help and encouragement, Webb will graduate from high school in May. The HOPES program works around the parent's schedule to ensure that they stay in school or remain employed. "I look forward to her graduating, getting a job, and getting her own place," said Archangel.

"I'm there to make that parent the best parent they can be," said Archangel. She is proud to use her knowledge about children to help grow the horizons of the parents she educates. For her, the toughest part about the job is when she stops seeing a family. "It touches my heart to be that connected to both the parents and their child," she said. ■

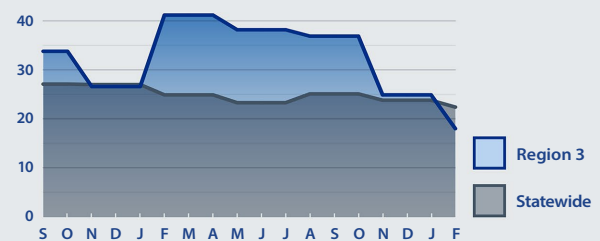
APS Mentoring, continued from page 1

employees coming in have more tools to do their jobs better. Second, mentors also improve since they're held accountable to set a good example for their protégés. "We are going to make everybody better in the process," she said.

Brookshire also enjoys the increased responsibility. It motivates her to see how protégés get better at their jobs after each week in the program. She meets weekly with the mentor team — which includes her, her protégé, and her protégé's supervisor — to review the protégé's individualized goals. At the end of six months, the program administrator determines if the new employee is ready to complete the mentor program.

APS Employee Turnover

Region 3 vs. Statewide (Sept. 2017 – Feb. 2019)



It's a bittersweet time for Brookshire's protégé, Daquana Harris. She's about to complete the program and will miss having Brookshire's support. Before Harris started the program, she was concerned about her abilities. "I was afraid of messing up," she said. Now Harris feels much more confident with her workload. "The mentor program is huge."

One of the unintended results of the program has been team building. Mentors report an increase in overall job satisfaction and it's reflected in the quality of their work. Seeing how they can make a difference in improving the APS program fuels their desire to excel at their jobs, knowing they are doing everything they can to help seniors and those with disabilities.

In January, the APS mentor program expanded to the Houston area, and will soon begin in South Texas and the Rio Grande Valley. ■

Benefit Hunt Helps Foster Youth

The Big Country Children's Benefit Hunt is an annual deer hunt for foster youth.

Led by [Child Protective Investigations](#) (CPI) Program Administrator Marshall Davidson, the first hunt was held near Sterling City in 2017.

In 2018, Davidson helped coordinate another hunt in Sterling City and added a new hunt location near Amarillo. He has plans this year to add a third hunt in Fort Worth and expand the program to include fishing trips and other outdoor activities for foster youth, whose ages range from 12 to 17.

"It's about getting out there and being teens for a day," Davidson said. "It means the world to me to be able to do something for these youth." Every youth who attended was nominated by their caseworker as someone who would benefit from the experience, and then went through a selection and assessment process. In the weeks before each hunt, Davidson taught each youth about firearms and hunting safety, hunting ethics, and wildlife conservation. They also received hunter education certifications and hunting licenses.

Learning and Having Fun

Each youth was paired with an experienced hunting guide. In Sterling City, youth carved pumpkins as part of a contest, shot targets when they weren't out hunting, and looked for arrowheads on the host's property. In Amarillo, youth enjoyed paddle boats and rode a 950-foot zip line. All youth who participated in the hunts got T-shirts, caps, pullovers, and memories that will last a lifetime.

Davidson also saw the effect volunteering has on the adults who help out. "To have a little girl come up to them and say thank you means the world to our volunteers," he said. He arranged to have paramedics on site for safety, and one paramedic team even asked about volunteering next year.

The events, which are a program of BCFS Health and Human Services, were so popular this year, Davidson had to turn volunteers away. "Word is getting out," he said. "People want to be a part of this." ■

LEAN initiative, continued from page 1

life," said Cash. "We are there to help them, support them, and take down their concerns." Cash said she may ask a tenured co-worker for help on calls where she feels she needs guidance on whether to assign an investigation. Intake specialists have strict work schedules, and are required to sign into their phones as soon as they arrive at the office. The graphic nature of many calls makes being an intake specialist stressful. "Looking out for your own mental health can be tough," Cash explained. "After a difficult call, I take a second and focus on breathing exercises."

"There's anxiety associated with the answer button," said Cash, "because you never know what you're going to get." Cash looks at the bigger picture. "I'm helping them take that first step to change a life."

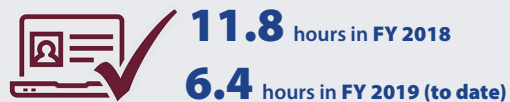
Cash remembers one particularly tough call where a foster mom of a six-month-old baby called SWI because the biological mother, who was dependent on drugs, came and took the baby from her without authorization. "It was heartbreaking and so hard to hear," said Cash.

Cash enjoys her job, despite the difficult work.

"Everyone at the office is supportive," she said.

"Management understands the job is hard and lets us know we are all in this together. It's a good fit for me, helping other people." ■

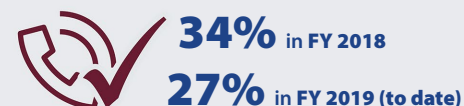
Time to Assess E-Reports



Hold Times for Calls



Adandoned Call Rate



DFPS Employee Debby Tucker Honored

On March 30 the [National Women's History Alliance](#) recognized DFPS employee Deborah D. (Debby) Tucker for her passionate devotion to end domestic and sexual violence.

Tucker, DFPS domestic violence specialist, was one of 11 women honored for their efforts to end war, violence, and injustice.

For over 43 years, Tucker has been a staunch champion for women. In 1973, she volunteered, and then became assistant director of the first rape crisis center in Texas, Austin Rape Crisis Center. Inspired by what she learned there, Tucker went on to co-found and direct the Austin Center for Battered Women, which merged with other centers over the years to become the [SAFE Alliance](#).



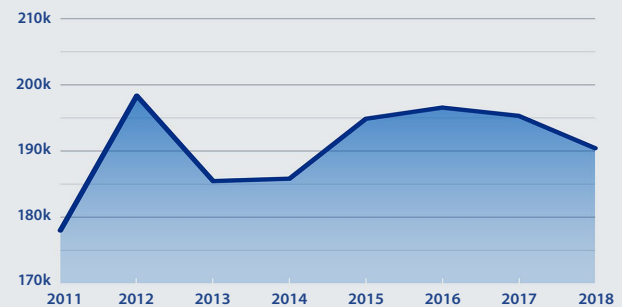
Debby Tucker

In 1978, she co-founded and then became the first executive director of the [Texas Council on Family Violence](#) (TCFV). Tucker worked with communities across Texas to establish shelters and other programs to support people who have experienced domestic violence, and to create the Battering Intervention and Prevention Program to challenge and encourage a person using violence to change. She also promoted policies to improve the way the criminal justice and health and human services systems respond to and prevent domestic violence. Under her leadership, TCFV grew to be one of the largest coalitions in the country and opened the [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#), a 24-hour nationwide resource.

In 1994, Tucker helped write and pass the Violence Against Women Act and in 1998, she co-founded the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, known for its consulting, training and advocacy with organizations such as the military, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, law enforcement agencies, and international organizations. She also co-chaired the Defense Task Force on Domestic Violence from 2001–2003. In 2014, former Governor Rick Perry inducted her in to the [Texas Women's Hall of Fame](#).

Now, she is the domestic violence specialist for DFPS. She helps CPS work with families to address domestic violence as a huge safety risk for children. "Most people

Family Violence Incidents in Texas Reported to DPS (2011–2018)



National Domestic Violence Hotline

 **1-800-799-7233**
www.thehotline.org

using violence will come back to the home, once the CPS case is closed, without having changed their beliefs or behaviors," she explained. Tucker knows we can make children safer by helping the adult victims of domestic violence. "Texas is one of the states out in front in improving policy and practice," she said.

DFPS Associate Commissioner for CPS Kristene Blackstone, agrees. "Debby has been instrumental in shaping CPS's shift in philosophy toward cases involving domestic violence."

"I'm excited for her," Blackstone said. "Debby has dedicated her life and career to helping women overcome violence." ■

Key Performance Indicators

| Data Point | Sept.15 – Feb.16 | Sept.16 – Feb.17 | Sept.17 – Feb.18 | Sept.18 – Feb.19 |
|--|------------------|------------------|------------------|------------------|
| Child Protective Investigations Caseworker Turnover | 30.7% | 27.2% | 25.6% | 29.2% |
| CPS Family Based Safety Services Caseworker Turnover | 22.4% | 19.5% | 20.5% | 21.6% |
| CPS Conservatorship Caseworker Turnover | 20.0% | 19.1% | 16.6% | 15.5% |
| APS Caseworker Turnover | 14.4% | 26.9% | 25.0% | 22.5% |
| Child Protective Investigations Caseload | 16.6 | 16.8 | 12.8 | 13.8 |
| Residential Investigations Caseload | N/A | N/A | 14.0 | 12.1 |
| Day Care Investigations Caseload | N/A | N/A | 12.0 | 10.3 |
| CPS Family Based Safety Services Caseload | 14.5 | 15.9 | 11.6 | 10.4 |
| CPS Conservatorship Caseload (Stages) | 29.3 | 28.9 | 26.4 | 26.4 |
| CPS Conservatorship Caseload (Children) | 20.3* | 19.1* | 18.1* | 17.8* |
| APS Caseload | 30.0 | 34.2 | 31.4 | 32.1 |
| Placements with Relatives | 42.4% | 44.1% | 46.4% | 44.9% |
| Children in Foster Care Placed in Region | 79.5% | 78.5% | 77.5% | 77.0% |
| Youth Completed Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program | 75.5% | 74.4% | 90.1% | 89.5% |
| Average Months to Permanency | 18.8 | 17.9 | 17.6 | 17.5 |
| Total Number of Removals | 9,115 | 9,365 | 9,961 | 9,086 |
| Statewide Intake Total Contacts | 406,787 | 404,560 | 407,226 | 381,090 |

For more information regarding your region or county, please visit the [DFPS Data Book](#).

* Conservatorship caseloads (children) are from February only

Upcoming Events

- **Public Private Partnership Committee Meeting**
Friday, April 12, 2019 in Austin
- **Advisory Committee on Promoting Adoption of Minority Children Meeting**
Thursday, May 16, 2019 in Sugar Land
- **Elder Abuse Awareness Day**
Friday, June 14, 2019 statewide

We Want Your Feedback!

Please take a moment to share your thoughts about the DFPS Vision Newsletter.



Click here to take our quick reader survey.



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