



DFPS VISION

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April 2020

A Message About COVID-19

We are all facing uncharted waters due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

These changes to how we live, work, go to school, pray, and play are occurring rapidly and can be difficult. Even in the best of times, change creates stress. DFPS is committed to fulfilling its mission of protecting vulnerable Texans during this unprecedented period in our State's history.

Following Governor Abbott's lead, Commissioner Masters has implemented teleworking for DFPS through May 31. The main exceptions to this are caseworkers serving children, families, and vulnerable adults around our state. We are also maintaining a minimal presence in offices so DFPS clients who come to an office receive assistance.

Receiving reports of abuse

Of course, [Statewide Intake \(SWI\)](#) is still answering calls to the [Texas Abuse Hotline 24/7](#). Calls and online reports are expected to slow while children are out of school — comparable to the dip SWI typically sees over summer break. Since March 16, intake specialists have been asking COVID-19 screening questions when they take reports.

[Child Protective Investigations \(CPI\)](#) continues to respond to allegations of abuse and neglect. When a caseworker visits a home, the worker asks COVID-19

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Texas Department of
Family and Protective Services

Helping Children Prepare for Permanency

The Treatment Family Foster Care program (TFFC), now operating in nine communities across Texas, is helping children in the State's care who are at risk of placement in residential treatment centers (RTCs).

The key element of the short-term program is placing children with foster families where one parent stays home full-time with up to two foster children. Trained in trauma-based models of parenting, the family is surrounded by a team of professionals to help prepare children for traditional foster care or a permanent placement.

"The big thing for me," said Nathanael Lane, a treatment family foster parent, "is the difference between these kids as they enter the program versus when they leave. Getting them ready to interact successfully in society is extremely rewarding."

Available in nine communities across Texas

Treatment family foster care is provided by [CK Family Services](#) in Dallas/Fort Worth; [Arrow Child and Family Ministries](#) in Tyler, Waco, Austin, and Houston; and [The Bair Foundation](#) in Amarillo, Lubbock, San Antonio, and Harlingen.

DFPS hopes to expand the program to more regions this year.

Children 10 and younger are eligible for the six-month program, with the option to extend services

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screening questions and carefully follows CDC safety guidelines to keep clients and each worker healthy.

Monitoring the welfare of children

Monthly contact with children and youth in the State's care is still required, but Child Protective Services (CPS) is using virtual contacts when possible. Caseworkers are still having face-to-face visits when previous issues surrounding the safety or care of a child have been identified.

Across the State, courts are implementing social distancing measures. DFPS staff are working closely with courts to stay in compliance with changing practices.

The Texas Supreme Court Children's Commission has created a COVID-19 resource page with important guidance and updates for DFPS staff, judges, and attorneys handling child protection cases.

Many judges have ordered parent-child visits to take place virtually for now, and caseworkers are using technology to make that happen. In some cases, courts are ordering in-person visitation to continue. At those visits, caseworkers are screening parents and children for COVID-19 exposure, and visitation rooms are being frequently sanitized.

Our most vulnerable populations

Adult Protective Services (APS) caseworkers, whose clients are most at risk for contracting COVID-19, are being encouraged to use virtual visits for all but the most serious allegations.

The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division funds more than 160 community-based organizations that provide parenting support and education to families. These organizations are moving to virtual home-visits, counseling sessions, and parenting support. PEI providers are also organizing the delivery of basic necessities to families like diapers, formula, grocery gift cards, and toys to keep children occupied at home.

The DFPS Vision newsletter was conceived as an outlet for informative stories about the work our agency does across the State to protect and improve services and outcomes for vulnerable Texans.

Please take a moment to read other stories in this newsletter about how DFPS works every day to ensure the safety of Texans. ■



Reporting abuse

We encourage the community to be extra vigilant and report any suspected abuse to **1-800-252-5400** or www.txabusehotline.org



Call 211 for assistance

If you need assistance finding food, paying bills or other essential services, dial 211 to speak to someone locally or visit 211.org to find services electronically.



Employment benefits

If your employment has been affected by the coronavirus, apply for benefits either online at www.twc.texas.gov or by calling the Texas Workforce Commission's Tele-Center at **800-939-6631** from 7 a.m. – 7 p.m. Central Time Monday through Friday.



Youth Helpline

Call 1-800-989-6884 or text 512-872-5777. The Texas Youth Helpline provides prevention services to youth, parents, siblings, and family members who need a caring voice and sympathetic ear. Trained volunteers are on call to provide guidance on youth-related concerns, referral information, or simply listen.



For more information

To learn more about how our agency is providing services for families, children, and vulnerable adults during the current health crisis, please visit our website.



Child Protective Investigations Awarded

In November, [Child Protective Investigations \(CPI\)](#) won the [Child Advocacy Center's Multidisciplinary Team Agency of the Year Award in Henderson County.](#)

[Child Advocacy Centers \(CACs\)](#) provide a safe, child-friendly environment where CPI, law enforcement, district attorneys, and medical and mental health professionals share information and develop coordinated strategies sensitive to the needs of each child. The local CAC, [Maggie's House](#), organizes the Henderson County team.

"This isn't a management award," CPI Program Director Amanda Prewitt said. "It's an award for the staff who go out and achieve things every day. It's also a reminder that our agency is just one piece of a larger puzzle."

"CACs cut down the number of child interviews," CPI Regional Director Keith Gailes said. "They take one (forensic interview) and distribute it to us. This keeps trauma down."

The partnership between CPI and CACs extends across Texas, with 71 CAC locations statewide. All of them use multidisciplinary teams.

"We don't achieve anything without our partners," CAC Chief Executive Officer Joy Rauls said. "One of our biggest partners is CPI. The reason children can come through our door is because they are brought by CPI staff."

CACs offer joint investigation coordination, forensic interviews, medical evaluations, multidisciplinary case reviews, trauma-focused therapy, and family advocacy and victim support.

"The CACs are right there with us every step of the way to ensure children are safe," CPI Regional Director Monica Sanders said. "They are available 24/7, providing critical forensic assessments and therapies for our kids. We couldn't do it without them in the region."

In the last month, CPI has seen a decrease in the number of investigations because children aren't in

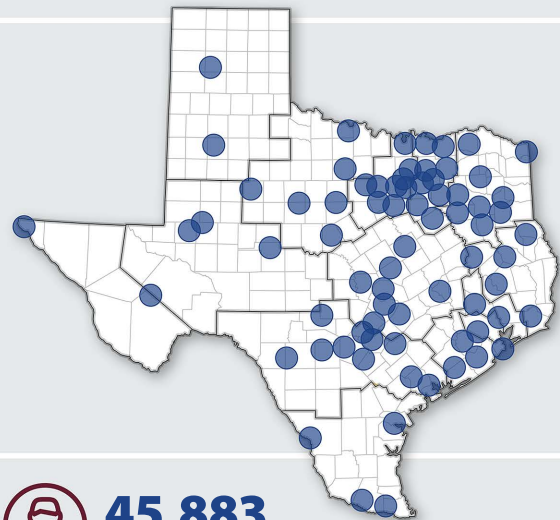


Henderson County Child Protective Services

school, where a lot of safety issues are identified. "We are looking to get the message out about keeping eyes open to signs of abuse in other community areas, like grocery stores," said Gailes.

Investigators are also using virtual methods of contact when possible, like for follow-up meetings with certain families. "We're trying to reduce those face-to-face interactions when possible," explained Gailes, "without compromising the safety of children." ■

CAC Locations in 2019



45,883

Children who were forensically interviewed



23,327

Children who received mental health services

Thank You to DFPS Volunteers

DFPS celebrates its 4,000 volunteers during National Volunteer Appreciation Week, April 19–25.

The agency appreciates volunteers like Debbie Pankhurst, a six-year volunteer who recently remodeled the Haskell County Rainbow Room. When Pankhurst heard the local Child Welfare Board could no longer support the Rainbow Room, she quickly stepped in to help.

Pankhurst cleaned, painted, organized, and labeled the room which is now brightly decorated and fully stocked. Her great work didn't stop there. While organizing the Rainbow Room, Pankhurst noticed that the visitation rooms in the Haskell county office also needed updating.



Six-year DFPS volunteer Debbie Pankhurst

Families use the visitation rooms to spend time together. Understanding their importance, Pankhurst redecorated and stocked them with activities for families to enjoy together. "Debbie is always brimming with good ideas and with plans and solutions for implementing them," said CPS Community Partners Coordinator Kathy Rios. "She is that rare combination of someone who can think creatively and pay attention to details."

We are so grateful for Debbie's hard work and commitment to the children in Haskell County. If you are interested in making a difference in your community, [click here to learn more about volunteering with DFPS.](#) ■



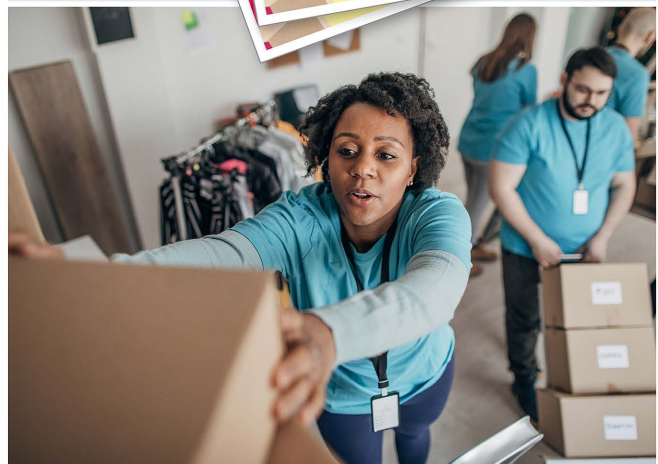
Looking for a Way You Can Help Today?

Texas First Lady Cecilia Abbott is encouraging Texans to help their neighbors in this extraordinary time, or donate to [Rainbow Rooms \(for children\)](#) or [Silver Star Rooms \(for adults\)](#).

These resource rooms are where DFPS caseworkers get supplies to help children and adults who have been abused or neglected. We rely on community organizations to contribute to Rainbow Rooms by donating new clothing, hygiene items, and luggage for children entering foster care.

If you want to help, [download our flyer](#) for a list of needed items. You can drop off new items every Wednesday from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m. at [these locations across the state.](#)

For more information, please visit our website.



APS Turnover Rates Decreasing

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Adult Protective Services (APS) is changing the way caseworkers connect with older adults as they investigate allegations of abuse and neglect.

When possible, caseworkers are using virtual visits to get their questions answered and follow up with clients, because many APS clients are at a high risk of contracting COVID-19. When face-to-face visits are necessary, social distancing is observed.

“We just had an all-staff webinar,” said APS Associate Commissioner Kez Wold, “and the questions we got from staff were ‘Given the current situation, how can I do my job the right way, and keep my clients safe?’”

The agency is also gearing up for when things start to get back to normal for everyday Texans.

“Right now, a lot of our clients aren’t going to their senior center, their doctor, or their day habilitation,” explained Wold. When the recovery process starts, the agency expects to see an uptick as new issues, like self-neglect, are identified.

In the last year, APS has seen significant gains in staff retention. Turnover has decreased and APS leadership attributes the improvements to salary increases for front-line caseworkers, and a new employee mentoring program that helps improve staff readiness and satisfaction.

According to San Antonio District Director Ann Cortez, the mentorship program provides newly-hired workers unprecedented support from their first day on the job. “The ability for new staff to have one

dedicated mentor to ask questions of and shadow, is something new to APS,” she said. “It directly affects the turnover rate.”

Cortez feels staff are doing better work because of having dedicated mentors. “When we have a stable workforce, staff have time to learn their jobs,” she explained. “The end result is better services for our

Adult Protective Services Turnover
Statewide



clients.” According to Cortez, the program will also help APS leadership address pockets of higher turnover around the state when they appear.

The mentoring program launched in Dallas-Fort Worth in 2018 and has expanded into 47 counties in the San Antonio and South Texas regions.

In the next year, APS hopes to expand the program to provide newly-promoted first-time supervisors with formal mentoring from experienced managers. “There’s a lot of wins to be had if we expand this to the supervisor level,” said Cortez. “That’s the direction we’re heading.” ■



April is National Child Abuse Prevention Month

As champions for children, DFPS encourages every individual and organization to do their part to create thriving communities for children and families in Texas.

Governor Abbott proclaimed the month of April as Child Abuse Prevention Month. For the first time in its history, Child Abuse Prevention Month is being observed differently than ever before – not only in Texas, but across the country.

With large events and gatherings canceled because of social distancing guidelines, raising awareness on social media and through word of mouth are more important than ever.

During the month of April – and throughout the year – we can make a difference in our communities by helping families promote children’s physical, social, and emotional well-being, and empowering caregivers to maximize their family’s potential.

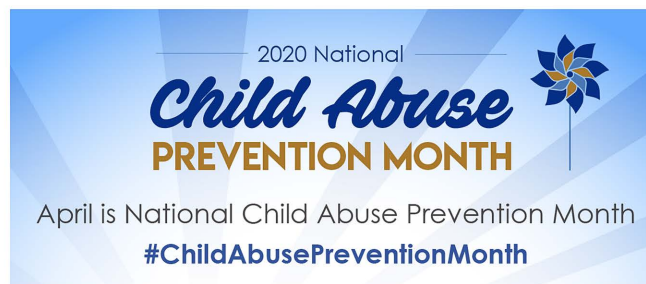
The blue pinwheel symbol

In the spring of 1989, a Virginia grandmother began using the blue ribbon symbol for child abuse prevention as a tribute to her grandson who died at the hands of his mother’s abusive boyfriend.

Since then, concerned citizens have dressed in blue on Go Blue Day as a reminder that we are all responsible for preventing child abuse and neglect. This year, Go Blue Day was Friday, April 3. The blue pinwheel was introduced in 2008 by Prevent Child Abuse America to serve as a reminder of the great childhoods we want for all children.

A focus on prevention

DFPS has unified our efforts to remind Texans of the role they play in protecting children. This year, a letter signed by Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) Associate Commissioner Sasha Rasco was sent to about 14,000 child care facilities, 9,000 residential treatment centers, and 10,000 kinship caregivers,



Resources for parents
helpandhope.org



Tips for caregivers
dfps.state.tx.us



Positive parenting
healthychildren.org



Go Blue support
twitter.com

We can all help by sharing prevention and awareness messages on Twitter and Facebook with the hashtag **#ChildAbusePreventionMonth**.



encouraging them to promote child abuse awareness and order free informational brochures. PEI has also prepared and mailed information packages to 170 businesses, pediatricians, daycares, and after-school programs. ■

Treatment family foster care, continued from page 1

for an additional three months. “Children in the program have complex behavioral, mental health, and emotional needs,” explained CPS Placement Specialist Mira Patel. “They’ve been in psychiatric hospitals or have had a series of failed placements.”



The program’s main goals are getting children on track to permanency and decreasing the number of children entering RTCs.

A rewarding challenge

Joia Robinson, who was originally licensed as a traditional foster parent, became a treatment family foster parent in 2019. “I wanted more of a challenge,” she said. “There’s so much that goes into it, but it’s worth it.”

Case managers typically carry smaller caseloads than in traditional foster care. This helps ensure the family’s emotional and physical needs are being met. The caseworker is part of a larger team of therapists, behavioral skills trainers, and wraparound



coordinators that support the family as they work toward the child’s success.

“To have that team on call 24/7 to help us can really make or break those early days,” said Lane. “Their ongoing support is critical.”

Working on educational needs

Partnering with the child’s school is also important to their success. “These kids have big behaviors,” Lane said, “and they are going to come out, especially at school.” Qualified mental health professionals work to connect the school, foster family, and team therapist to address the child’s educational needs.

The family’s wraparound coordinator works to ensure the child’s voice is heard throughout their time in the program. “We want to get that child to vocalize what they want,” said Michael Scrivner, director of treatment



foster care with CK Family Services. “For them to have a say in their life — that’s normalcy.” The wraparound coordinator also helps the child identify and develop lasting relationships with adults.

The entire team of therapists, caseworkers, and coordinators meet monthly with the whole family to celebrate the child’s progress. “Our entire process is intentional,” Scrivner said. “The child feels wanted.”

“These children have been hurt,” explained Robinson, “they’ve been through a lot, but you can see how far they’ve come.” ■

Key Performance Indicators

Data Point	Sept 16 – Feb 17	Sept 17 – Feb 18	Sept 18 – Feb 19	Sept 19 – Feb 20
Child Protective Investigations Caseworker Turnover	27.2%	25.6%	29.2%	29.4%
CPS Family Based Safety Services Caseworker Turnover	19.1%	20.5%	21.6%	18.1%
CPS Conservatorship Caseworker Turnover	19.1%	16.6%	15.5%	19.3%
APS Caseworker Turnover	26.9%	25.0%	22.5%	17.1%
Child Protective Investigations Caseload	16.8	12.8	13.8	14.3
Residential Investigations Caseload	N/A	14.0	12.1	21.9
Day Care Investigations Caseload	N/A	12.0	10.3	11.2
CPS Family Based Safety Services Caseload	15.9	11.6	10.4	10.8
CPS Conservatorship Caseload (Stages)	28.9	26.4	26.4	25.2
CPS Conservatorship Caseload (Children)	19.1	18.1	17.8	16.9
APS Caseload	34.2	31.4	32.1	30.7
Placements with Relatives	44.1%	46.4%	44.9%	40.1%
Children in Foster Care Placed in Region	78.1%	77.8%	76.9%	76.9%
Youth Completed Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) Program	74.4%	90.1%	89.5%	92.3%
Average Months to Permanency	17.9	17.6	17.5	17.6
Total Number of Removals	9,365	9,961	9,086	8,053
Statewide Intake Total Contacts	404,560	407,226	381,090	393,460

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

Census 2020 Important for Texas



DFPS is joining other Texas state agencies in urging all Texans to take part in the 2020 Census.

The results of the survey are used to determine how much funding local communities receive for key public services and how many seats each state gets in

Congress. State and local officials also use census counts to draw boundaries for congressional, state legislative, and school districts.

To a fast-growing state like Texas, getting an accurate count of all residents is important to providing the services that Texans need.

You can respond to the census online, by phone, or by mail. For more information, visit the [Census 2020 website](#).

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.



TEXAS
Department of Family and Protective Services

Sign up for  the newsletter