

Georgia Division of Family and Children Services

2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan

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## 2025-2029 Georgia Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)

The 2025-2029 Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) represents a critical opportunity to articulate and integrate the shared vision across the state's child welfare system to strengthen families, prevent child maltreatment and unnecessary family separation, and to outline the concrete steps that implement the vision over the next five years. The CFSP is a vehicle to convene partners, promote program planning and improvement efforts, and determine the services and supports that will further the state's vision and lead to improvements in the outcomes of safety, permanency, and well-being.

The 2025-2029 CFSP goals and objectives have been established from analyses of the 2020-2024 APSR submissions and findings from the Round 4 Child and Family Services Review (CFSR).

### Organization and Vision

The Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is committed, through its child welfare programs, to ensuring the safety, permanency, and well-being of Georgia's most vulnerable citizens.

#### **Vision**

Safe Children. Strengthened Families. Stronger Georgia.

#### **Mission**

Prioritize the safety of Georgia's children in the decisions we make and the actions we take. We strengthen families toward independence and build stronger communities with caring, effective, and responsive service.

#### **Guiding Principles and Values**

1. Commit to the safety of our children in the decisions we make and the actions we take.
2. Empower, strengthen, and support families on their path to independence.
3. Embrace a servant's heart with compassion.
4. Provide caring, responsive, and effective service.
5. Listen and respond to our constituents, communities, and each other.
6. Collaborate with our communities to create systems of support.

7. Develop a professional and efficient workforce that never stops learning and growing.

## **Organization**

As authorized by state law O.C.G.A. §49-2-6, the Georgia Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) is responsible for the administration of funding through titles IV-B (Subparts 1 and 2) and IV-E programs, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) and the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, and provides child welfare services to children and families through its child welfare programs to prevent and respond to child abuse, and ensure child safety, permanency and well-being. The child welfare programs are:

8. Prevention Services
9. Child Protective Services (Intake, Investigation, Family Support Services, Family Preservation Services)
10. Permanency Services (Foster Care and Adoption)

Georgia's child welfare system is state-administered and county-supervised. Direct services to children and families are provided through fourteen regions, covering 159 county departments, in accordance with state law and policy. The map of DFCS counties and regions can be viewed on the [dfcs.georgia.gov website](https://dfcs.georgia.gov). Regional Directors report to one of three District Directors – North, Metro, and South – who each report to the Deputy Commissioner for Child Welfare. The administration requirements can also be found in the Child Welfare Policy Manual, [Policy 1.0: Administration of Child Welfare Services](#).

## **Stakeholder Collaboration to Develop CFSP Goals**

To create a shared vision across the state's child welfare system that supports prevention and positive outcomes for children and families, DFCS creates frequent opportunities for community partners to see their organizations and services as part of the vision and to align resources and supports to achieve the desired outcomes. Multiple community stakeholder meetings were convened to engage the community of child welfare system partners in assessing the goals and strategies of the Division. These meetings are used to identify strengths and needs of the system and determine action steps to improve child and family outcomes.

To develop the CFSP goals and strategies, the Federal Plans Unit convened with staff and stakeholders over a period of 18 months. Division leaders within other program areas also convened their program staff and external partners during this time and shared summaries from these meetings. Recommendations from the state's APSR meetings were also used to develop the CFSP goals. Attendees at all of these convenings were

representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of their communities. Discussions often centered around CFSR data, observations and analyses of outcomes, and suggested ideas for improvement. The presented ideas were grouped into themes, with the most common themes used to develop the CFSP goals. After the goals were developed and approved, staff and stakeholders discussed potential S.M.A.R.T. objectives, strategies, and action steps. Descriptions of stakeholder collaboration is further described below.

The Division's Prevention and Community Support Section works closely with the Children's Trust Fund Alliance to coordinate the Georgia Parent Advisory Council (PAC). PAC has participated in several activities in FY24 that resulted in strategies for improving the child welfare system. The PAC participated in reviewing and providing feedback on the website development for Strengthening Families. Several PAC members participated in Teen Pregnancy Prevention planning meetings and volunteered for the Teen summit in March 2024. From these and other experiences, the PAC members identified specific goals for the child welfare system to improve outcomes for children and families. PAC members were asked to provide specific strategies that would strengthen the state's child welfare system. Parents were asked to share recommendations in the areas of family engagement, prevention initiatives and supports for families, creating and retaining quality staff, services to promote reunification, services to prevention removal of children, and substance abuse recovery and resources. Many of the comments and suggestions are incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) in each region partners with the Adoption Unit to convene regular monthly meetings with child placing agencies, foster and adoptive parent support groups, and service providers. The community of participating caregivers is reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of the state and include communities who have been historically marginalized or underserved. These convenings are used to share agency performance data on child placements and adoption trends, explore recruitment and placement opportunities, discuss observed challenges with difficult-to-place youth, and collaborate on strategies to enhance caregiver recruitment and retention. Meetings also provide resources for caregiver training and support, and ensure ongoing communication between foster and adoptive parents, placement agencies, and DFCS. The information gathered from these meetings is incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

Division staff participate in convenings hosted by other stakeholder groups, to provide information and resources, including the [Adoption and Foster Parent Association of Georgia \(AFPAG\)](#) annual meeting. The 2024 AFPAG annual meeting welcomed 617 individuals in February 2024, who participated in workshops and discussion groups to explore barriers and recommend solutions to improving safety, permanency, and well-being for youth. Workshops addressed a wide variety of critical issues, including creating

safe spaces for LGBTQ+ youth, bias and inequity in child welfare, and educational stability resources for youth. Agency leaders attend the sessions also to hear directly from caregivers and identify areas of opportunity. The information gathered from these workshop sessions is incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

The Division collaborated with the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work to conduct the Georgia Foster and Adoptive Family Assessment. The assessment includes a survey, focus groups, and interviews that will give Georgia's foster and adoptive families the opportunity to share their experience and recommendations within the child welfare system. Survey responses were collected from February through March 2024. Focus groups and interviews were scheduled after completion of the surveys. The goal for this assessment is to better understand the caregiver experience and improve foster and adoptive family recruitment and retention throughout the state. The information gathered from these assessments is incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

Each of the 14 regional C3 Coordinators hosts at least one regionwide stakeholder meeting and four quarterly service array-focused meetings per year. Community partners are invited from child caring institutions and child placing agencies, school systems, educational wraparound services and early learning providers, law enforcement, mental and behavioral health programs, substance abuse treatment providers and recovery support centers, and other service provider agencies. The community of participating service providers is reflective of the racial and ethnic diversity of the state and includes communities who have been historically marginalized or underserved. Discussions center around the regional and state performance on the CFSR QA case reviews, identify service gaps, and facilitate ongoing partnerships. Attendees also discuss policy, practices, processes, and other issues/concerns that may impact positive child and family outcomes. In these joint planning forums, participants are encouraged to provide feedback on strategies and practices that may improve the state child welfare system. Comments and suggestions are reviewed to identify similar themes within counties or regions, or that address similar populations. Comments from the FY2024 regional meetings included services related to quality assessments, complex needs, substance use, and housing. These are incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

Together Georgia is an alliance of child and family service providers representing child placing agencies, mental health service providers, family preservation and support service providers, and child caring institutions, among others. Annually, Together Georgia hosts the Georgia Conference on Children and Families (GCCF). In October 2023, GCCF featured training opportunities, specialized classes, and keynote speakers. The Division

presents several program-specific workshops at the conference to engage providers and use round-table formats to discuss areas of opportunity for the child welfare system. The information gathered from these discussions are incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

The Division engages judicial stakeholders in reviewing data and developing plans for improvement. The principles of continuous quality improvement (CQI) are addressed so that courts are invested in the problem-solving activities and ongoing use of evidence to analyze root causes of observed performance. CFSR and CFSP performance data are shared at these meetings, and discussions are held that ask the questions: “How is the child welfare system doing; can we do it better; can we be more effective”. In FY2024, the Division facilitated these CQI discussions with members of the Court Improvement Initiative (August 2023), Child Welfare Law Specialists (March 2024), the CASA Leadership Summit (October 2023), and judicial stakeholders (usually held with regional leadership monthly or quarterly). These convenings have generated thoughtful questions about policy and practice, and several themes have been identified within these discussions, including the need for quality assessments, evidence-based service providers, increased parent engagement in case planning, and a statewide judicial data reporting system. These are incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

The Division facilitated CQI discussions with the Supreme Court's Committee on Justice for Children (J4C). J4C meets five times each year to review and discuss available child welfare data and what those data mean for the collective work of the child welfare system. The J4C meetings are also used as an opportunity to monitor and review goals, identify opportunities for interventions, and develop strategies for CIP involvement in program planning and improvement efforts within the Division. This effort is intended to ensure judges, attorneys, and legislators are knowledgeable about the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) and the state's Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), and how their work impacts the state's performance on safety, permanency, and well-being for children and families. In FY2024, J4C discussions centered on the findings from the Senate Foster Care and Adoption Study Committee (SR 282, 2023), including the need for a statewide judicial data reporting system, standardized trainings for new judges and attorneys, and increasing Medicaid rates for providers. These are incorporated into the goals and objectives of the CFSP and/or the CFSR PIP.

The Ubuntu Youth Engagement Collaborative was developed in 2023 as a joint effort with the DFCS Youth Advisory Board (Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC)), MAAC's GA EmpowerMENT youth council, and Amerigroup 360° Youth Advisory Council to streamline coordination and leverage youth engagement opportunities. The Division strives to provide fair compensation to youth who participate in Division planning efforts,



as they are sharing their unique expertise and should be compensated for doing so, as are paid staff. The Collaborative met in August 2023 to develop their strategic plan and continues to meet monthly to provide input on youth-related events, share opportunities for youth engagement and feedback, and coordinate youth participation in events. The youth provided recommendations and suggestions for improving the child welfare system through the lens of their lived experience.

In 2023, the Ubuntu Collaborative designed the agenda for a November meeting with the ACF Commissioner Rebecca Jones Gaston. The youth presented data, shared their stories, and demonstrated their unwavering commitment to advocacy for youth in foster care. Ubuntu supported planning for the annual TeensR4ME conference and Celebration of Excellence graduation ceremony. The Ubuntu Collaborative identified key areas from the NYTD survey and the Celebration of Excellence (COE) survey that demonstrate where young people are seeking more support, such as education, life skills training, and financial literacy. These data have illuminated the path for the Youth Engagement Collaborative (YEC) endeavors, and the young leaders are excited about the positive changes that they can bring about together. Ubuntu is exploring the use of survey tools to assess the adequacy and appropriateness of services provided to young individuals in their respective placements, and to capture youth feedback on their experiences while in placement. Findings from these surveys and other youth-led initiatives are incorporated into the goals and objectives for the CFSP and/or CFSR PIP.

In preparation for the CFSR, the Division engaged frontline staff and regional and program leaders to explore case review data using CQI principles. Monthly virtual meetings were held to review state and regional level data trends. Staff were able to identify strengths and barriers to positive safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes. Recommendations from these staff convenings focused on quality assessments, parent engagement, and availability of services for youth with complex needs. Agency-wide convenings (e.g., Café 212, county director summits) engaged staff in discussions about supports that will help staff to be successful in providing quality case management. These findings are incorporated into the goals and objectives for the CFSP and/or CFSR PIP.

Throughout the five-year reporting period, these stakeholders will be involved in activity implementation, as well as monitoring and reporting of progress. As the state works toward achieving the CFSP goals, the effects will be felt across multiple areas, including parent and youth engagement, caregiver support, partnerships with service providers, and employee satisfaction. The Division plans to maintain connections with stakeholders and hold regular check-ins to determine how the strategies are impacting their experiences and operations. The annual regional stakeholder meetings and twice-yearly APSR joint planning meetings are examples of venues to bring all interested partners to the table and discuss activities that have been implemented to date and any observed challenges or improvements. Division leadership also holds regular meetings with the

DHS Board and state legislature to review activity implementation and develop solutions to observed challenges. DFCS program leaders meet monthly with the Court Improvement Program to review areas of shared interest and will continue these meetings to monitor the status of CFSP activities. DFCS program leaders also meet regularly with their program staff and CQI teams across the state; these meetings will include status updates on CFSP activities and any reported concerns from parents, youth, service providers, caregivers, or court partners in the regions. As the CFSR PIP planning committee begins to assess the implementation of PIP activities, those CFSR activities that align with, or support PIP efforts will also be reviewed and monitored for progress.

## Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes

### Georgia CFSR Child and Family Outcomes

Georgia utilizes CFSR data in conjunction with the State's data profile (contextual data report), and data from the State's Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) in the development, planning, and monitoring of Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) goals and other statewide child welfare initiatives. The Quality Assurance Unit utilizes the case review process and standards provided by the Children's Bureau for the continuous measurement of the State's performance in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. The case review data are used at the district, regional, and county levels to evaluate case practice and assist staff and leadership in making improvements to the provision of services for children and families. The CFSR Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) is the only official instrument to be used in rating a case for CFSR determinations of substantial conformity. The OSRI contains the questions, applicability notes, instructions, and definitions, which provide more detailed information.

In 2024, Georgia conducted a state-led CFSR which followed all Round 4 requirements for case reviews.

#### Child and Family Services Review Data Profile – Safety Measures

Georgia received its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile in February 2024 based on AFCARS submissions as of 10-28-23 and NCANDS submissions as of 6-16-2023. The chart demonstrates Georgia's risk standardized performance relative to the national performance on the two Safety Statewide Data Indicators (SWDI).

Indicator	Data Period <sup>1</sup>	National Standard	Georgia	Statistically <sup>2</sup> better (↑), worse (↓), or no different (<->)
Maltreatment in Care	21AB, FY21	9.07	3.43	↑
Recurrence of Maltreatment	FY21-22	9.7	4.5	↑

Data Source: Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile.

Georgia's SWDI performance on safety continues to outperform the national standard for both measures, Maltreatment in Care and Recurrence of Maltreatment. Maltreatment in Care measures the rate of children who are abused or neglected while under court jurisdiction. Georgia utilizes several strategies to reduce Maltreatment in Care, including regular evaluation of foster homes, a robust schedule of required in-person visits with the

child(ren) in care, an emphasis on kin as a first placement, and ongoing training and supports for foster caregivers. Georgia's strategies to prevent Recurrence of Maltreatment include ongoing case management, providing aftercare and wraparound services to the family, and referrals to community agencies and organizations for additional supports (e.g., food assistance, childcare, housing expenses).

## **Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect**

Child Welfare Policy 3.2: Making an Intake Decision requires that intakes are assigned to the Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) track for response within the following timeframes to ensure child safety and wellbeing. All response times are calculated from the date and time of receipt of the Intake Report.

- Immediate: a present danger situation is indicated.
- 24 hours: an impending danger safety threat is indicated and there is no indication of a present danger situation.
- Five weekdays: child abuse (maltreatment) is indicated, however there is no indication of a present danger situation or impending danger safety threat.

### **Strengths**

While there are some instances where families are unable or unwilling to be located, children may be visited at their current location at the time of the report or at school where they can be located easily; non-school age children may be visited at their current location or within the home. Visits can be announced or unannounced; parents may be contacted by phone to schedule a visit within the response time. Case managers are expected to report missed response times to identify areas for improvements. Staff support includes daily logs to monitor response times; calendar reminders; daily cadences to discuss diligent efforts to meet response times; SHINES reports that track pending response times; and regular trainings on ISA policies. Feedback received from the ISA trainings demonstrate that they are helpful for both new hires and veteran staff.

Georgia SHINES data shows small variation between districts in meeting response times. In CY2023, the counties in the South District performed slightly better at meeting response times compared to the North and Metro Districts.

Georgia SHINES Response Times for CY2023

	Intakes Screened In	Met Required Response Time	Percent Met
<b>North District (Regions 1-5)</b>	19,250	16,834	87%
<b>Metro District (Regions 13-14)</b>	15,605	13,560	87%
<b>South District (Regions 6-12)</b>	18,175	16,290	90%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES (CY2023)

## CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data

Safety		State
<b>Outcome S1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.</b>		<b>86%</b>
<b>Item 1:</b>	<b>Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment (18 out of 21 cases)</b>	<b>86%</b>

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

Georgia's CFSR cases were reviewed in January-March 2024. QA case reviewers noted that 100% of the cases reviewed in January and February received a Strength rating for Item 1. There were three cases in the March review sample that did not receive a Strength rating. The Division will take the following steps to ensure all cases selected for review meet the requirement for timeliness of initiating investigations.

### **Planned Activities**

1. Agency leadership and supervisors will monitor response times at the county and regional levels to ensure initial safety determinations are completed in accordance with agency policy.
  - **Benchmark:** The Data Unit will provide weekly data reports to agency and regional leadership to identify trends in assigned cases and response times
  - **Benchmark:** County and regional leaders will schedule weekly and bi-monthly staff cadences to review data reports and address observed challenges

These activities will also be included in the state's CFSR PIP.

## Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

### CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data

Safety		State
Outcome S2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.		32%
Item 2:	Services to family to protect children in home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care (9 out of 42 cases)	21%
Item 3:	Risk assessment and safety management (26 out of 65 cases)	40%

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

### Strengths

In 2021, the Division is entered into a multi-year partnership with Casey Family Programs to develop a “Support Out” initiative that provided short-term (45 days) voluntary Family Support Services (FSS) to eligible families. Families were identified during the intake process and referred to one of four community partner sites: Union County Family Connection, Columbus Community Action Agency, Mother’s Advocacy Project, and Gwinnett County Foster Care Alliance. These FSS partner agencies provide families with services and resources to improve the economic conditions that resulted in the family’s food instability, housing insecurity, and/or employment stressors.

The Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) program supports a robust network of family support providers to address the risk in families where present or impending danger does not exist. PSSF also supports family preservation providers to prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families through intensive preservation services. PSSF resources have been strategically allocated to boost DFCS's ability to identify and address the needs of families within the community, and to expand state-funded child protection and placement service programs. Georgia PSSF funding is used to support DFCS priorities and support children and families most at risk. Contracts with local providers throughout the state make services available to children and families based on the State’s priorities and coinciding local needs assessments.

In 2023, the Division launched the Argo platform as a more efficient tool for case managers to request services for children and families. Argo removes barriers related to provider access and availability by creating opportunities for staff to connect with virtual and telehealth service providers anywhere in the state. Services available on the Argo portal include Early Intervention (EI) and Parent Aide when there is very little safety risk identified, Homestead when there is considerable safety risk, and Comprehensive Child and Family Assessments (CCFA) and Wrap Around when the safety risk is extreme and foster care is recommended. Prevention of Unnecessary Placement (PUP) and DNA/Paternity Testing services are also available at any stage of the case.

The DFCS Delivered Services Unit maintains a statewide directory of service providers and sends it weekly to all staff with the contact information of each service provider and the type of service(s) that can be provided. An example is in the chart below.

	<b>PUP</b>	<b>Homestead</b>	<b>Parent Aide</b>	<b>Early Intervention</b>	<b>CCFA</b>	<b>WRAP</b>	<b>Drug Screen</b>
<b>July 2024</b>	142	142	142	135	139	163	123
<b>July 2023</b>	150	151	147	141	147	162	123

*Source: DFCS Delivered Services Unit (July 2024)*

The Argo Community Portal allows for service requests to be sent to all eligible providers, for providers to respond directly through the portal if they are willing to accept a request, and for DFCS staff to select from the responding providers – all within 24-72 hours. Once providers are registered as Argo users, they can receive referrals from staff and upload documents into the system. Providers can receive Service Requests only from the counties that they serve, and upload documents into the portal for staff to have immediate access (e.g., completed assessments, visitation records, and case notes). Early provider feedback includes appreciation for the ease of the system, and that case information and documents are readily available to the provider to help them prepare for the family interaction. Provider notes that are uploaded into Argo quickly end up in Georgia SHINES (Georgia's CCWIS system). Feedback shared in regional provider meetings shows that providers appreciate the promptness of staff responses to messages and emails, and the building of better relationships with case managers and supervisors.

The Promoting Reasonable Efforts (PRE) Team process convenes the family, agency staff, courts, and stakeholders to prevent the unnecessary removal of children. PRE ensures that DFCS has conducted thorough reasonable efforts prior to removal. PRE Team staffings involve a collaborative discussion of all family or fictive kin connections to the family that may be a placement resource to prevent the child from entering into foster

care. PRE Team staffings provide opportunities to identify available community support services that could benefit the family, help the investigator evaluate the family as a whole and if DFCS intervention is necessary, and prevent entry (or re-entry) to foster care. In FY24, there were over 500 PRE staffings reported. Data are not currently tracked on how many were successful in PRE staffings prevented placement in out of home care.

### **Observed Challenges**

Primary practice that contributes to performance on this outcome is related to service provision, frequency/quality of caseworker visits, and quality of safety plans.

QA case reviewers note that delays in initiation and inadequate quality of services do not address the identified risk/safety concern, particularly around substance abuse issues. Root cause analyses with DFCS staff result in observations that staff can refer families only to the providers that are available and willing. If a needed service is unavailable in the community, there are few, if any, alternative options. There are instances of providers accepting service referrals and then declining due to various reasons; for example, the provider prefers a virtual visit but the youth/family requests in-person service, or the provider does not have a staff person who speaks the specific dialect of the youth/family.

Root cause analyses with DFCS staff and court partners show that caseworker visits should be more frequent, home visits should include observations of risk and safety, and observations/assessments should include all household members. Also, in cases where safety plans are completed, they are often not monitored regularly, fail to involve the entire family unit, and do not fully address the safety concerns or outline the necessary steps to mitigate the risks to the family.

### **Current / Planned Activities**

The Division is developing several initiatives to improve the assessment of risk and safety, and to enhance the state's array of services that protect children in the home and prevent removal or re-entry to foster care. The following activities and benchmark will be completed during the CFSP reporting period.

1. Monitor performance of Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.
  - **Benchmark:** The CAT teams will serve a minimum of 60 targeted individuals each year.



In FY24, the Division received state funding to develop Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams. CAT teams are a behavioral healthcare resource for youth and intended to be an alternative to out-of-home placement for youth with a behavioral health condition, including substance abuse. During the initial program term, children will be referred to the CAT team program by DFCS staff, specifically child welfare intake staff, when a child or family is referred to DFCS for either investigation into a possible complaint or when a connection is made to family support services. This approach allows for DFCS to intervene and provide services to a child prior to their case escalating to the point of removal or placement in Out of Home Care (OHC) or a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF). Upon successful completion, the youth's family will have the skills and support systems needed to maintain improvements made throughout the process.

The CAT team model is based on a family-centered approach in which the CAT team helps parents, families and caregivers obtain services and support as well as aid with referrals. These services include assessment, treatment planning, individual and family therapy, case management and coordination, individual and family skill building and crisis intervention. Each CAT team is comprised of licensed mental health clinicians, behavioral health professionals, case managers, an intake coordinator and program director equipped to support and fully address the needs of children/youth and their families. The number of sessions and the frequency with which they are provided is set through collaboration rather than service limits. The team is available on nights, weekends, and holidays. If interventions out of the scope of the team's expertise or qualifications (i.e., eating disorder treatment, behavior analysis, psychological testing, etc.) are required, referrals are made to specialists, with follow-up from the team. This flexibility in service delivery is intended to promote a "whatever it takes" approach to assisting young people and their families to achieve their goals.

Goals of the CAT project includes strengthening the family and their support systems, decreasing out-of-home placements, including the need for PRTF and residential treatment facilities or DJJ involvement. Additionally, positive outcomes in improving the family and child/youth functioning, decreasing substance use and/or abuse, transitioning the child/youth to age-appropriate services and increasing the overall family's health and wellness. From September to December 2023, the CAT teams reported 22 active cases across three regions.

Implementation supports include the DFCS Care Coordination Treatment Unit (CCTU), which holds regular check-in meetings with staff in the regions to increase referrals and improve outcomes. CCTU will work with agency leadership to address case closure barriers and the program's impact on foster care entry rates.

2. Provide Argo training to educate staff on correct use of the portal.
  - Benchmark: 100% of new case managers will complete the Argo portal training

In CY2023, the Division hired 823 new case managers. The Training and Professional Development (TPD) unit is responsible for ensuring all new staff receive the required training to be prepared for their role and will report on the number of caseworkers that are trained to successfully navigate the Argo portal. Self-paced, on-demand Argo courses are available on the agency's Learning Management System (LMS) training platform. TPD reported 1,177 staff completed the training in CY2023. This includes new hires and current employees (case managers and supervisors).

Implementation supports include the Training and Professional Development unit to track and monitor the number of staff who enroll and complete the online, self-paced training in each quarter. The Office of Information Technology (OIT) Project Management team and the DFCS Delivered Services Unit will provide regular system training to staff and approved providers. The portal is routinely enhanced to respond to user navigation issues. The OIT team will also provide regular data updates to agency leaders on challenges related to system usage. Division leadership will be able to track and monitor various aggregate data points to ensure the user experience is positive and the desired outcomes are met.

3. Recruit service providers to increase and enhance the accessibility of needed services that address identified concerns, particularly in rural and historically underserved areas.
  - Benchmark: At least one contracted service provider for each program area will be available in every region, prioritizing recruitment in areas with the highest need.

C3 Coordinators will coordinate with the Delivered Services Unit (DSU) to develop a directory of service providers in their region, to be updated annually.

Implementation supports include the annual provider fairs and quarterly stakeholder meetings convened by the regional C3 Coordinators. These convenings often serve to recruit new providers to the region and introduce providers to new staff who may be unfamiliar with the resources in their county. DSU will conduct random reviews of contracted providers to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations. DSU will also deliver annual trainings to providers and DFCS staff to improve overall quality and timeliness of services.

4. The number and percentage of successful PRE staffings will be tracked and monitored quarterly by the regional C3 Coordinators to determine efficacy in preventing out of home placements and quality of safety plans.
  - Benchmark: At least 50% of PRE staffings will successfully prevent an out of home placement.

Implementation supports include ongoing training to case managers by the placement Field Program Specialists (FPS) and Care Coordination Treatment Unit on available services for youth with complex needs. C3 Coordinators will support regional staff training on how to effectively conduct a PRE team staffing (e.g., provide staffing form templates and/or standard operating procedures for teams to follow).

5. Partner with Unite Us to develop a proactive outreach and referral system that serves 100 families per month.
  - Benchmark: Provide community wide care coordination for 100 families each month under the Unite Us closed loop referral technology platform.

In FY24, the Division secured a contract for the Unite Us Care Coordination Team to conduct proactive outreach in a project serving 58 Georgia counties. The outcomes of the first year of the contract will be reviewed, and subsequent years will include negotiations with the vendor and DFCS to determine if expansion into the remaining Georgia counties is feasible. Funding for the project is provided by a mix of state and federal CAPTA funds.

Unite Us operates with the understanding that people stay healthier and more productive when their most basic needs are met. Data tools and accountable care networks are critical to proactively engaging individuals and confirming that they get the help they need when they need it. The Unite Us care coordination platform facilitates an environment where clients are connected to services through a comprehensive community network and provides an ability to track every family's longitudinal care journey including every referral, service episode, and outcome.

Implementation supports will include the DHS Office of Information Technology and Georgia Technology Authority to monitor the contractual deliverables. Agency and field leadership will monitor the referral process and client outcomes and ensure staff receive timely and appropriate training on utilization of the technology system.

## Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations

### CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data

Permanency		State
Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations		23%
Item 4:	Stability of foster care placement (28 out of 40 cases)	70%
Item 5:	Permanency goal for child (24 out of 40 cases)	60%
Item 6:	Achieving reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangement (12 out of 40 cases)	30%

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

### Child and Family Services Review Data Profile – Permanency Measures

Georgia received its Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile in February 2024 based on AFCARS submissions as of 10-28-23 and NCANDS submissions as of 6-16-23. Georgia meets or exceeds on two of the five Statewide Data Indicator (SWDI) permanency measures. The state's performance is statistically better than the national standard for Placement Stability and statistically no different than the national standard for Re-entry to Foster Care. Georgia's performance is worse than the national standard on the "Permanency in 12 months" measures.

Indicator	Data Period <sup>1</sup>	National Standard	Georgia	Statistically <sup>2</sup> better (↑), worse (↓), or no different (<->)
Permanency in 12 months (entries)	21A21B	35.2	30.2	↓
Permanency in 12 months (12 – 23 mos.)	22B23A	43.8	36.3	↓
Permanency in 12 months (24+ mos.)	22B23A	37.3	32.6	↓
Re-entry to Foster Care	21B22A	5.6	5.0	<->
Placement Stability	22B23A	4.48	4.07	↑

Data Source: Child and Family Services Review (CFSR 4) Data Profile

The Division engaged staff and stakeholders in CQI exploration of the barriers to positive permanency outcomes (often using the 5 Whys method). Data analyses with stakeholders found that Georgia's child welfare system thoroughly evaluates the need for entry into foster care, resulting in fewer children who enter but also fewer children who stay in foster care for less than 12 months. Disparity analyses noted that teens are most likely to achieve permanency within the first 12 months after entry to care, often due to their dependency findings being related to behavior or CHINS. This is a positive practice, but also impacts the state's performance on the Permanency in 12 measures (12-23 months and 24+ months). Adjudicated dependency is often related to more complex needs (e.g., substance abuse, interpersonal violence, and mental health issues) which require significant service provision, and usually take longer to achieve a positive outcome.

### **Strengths**

The Division supports placement stability and positive permanency with rigorous foster caregiver training and on-demand resources. The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU), in partnership with Training and Professional Development, announced the statewide rollout of a new research-based, pre-service training for Georgia caregivers in February 2024. The National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) will replace the current IMPACT foster parent pre-service training. NTDC has been adapted to address the needs of Georgia families and equips potential foster, kinship, and adoptive parents with the information, resources, and tools needed to parent a child who has experienced trauma, separation, or loss. NTDC also gives parents access to information and resources needed to continue building their skills once they have a child in their home through Right-Time Trainings (RTT) which are available online at any time. The Division also places an emphasis on kin as a first placement and provides initial and ongoing support for kin caregivers and foster placements to ensure they are fully equipped to care for the youth in their homes.

Judicial stakeholders convene regularly for the Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (MDCANI) training sessions, where permanency timelines and expectations are discussed. From 2022-2023, 17 MDCANI trainings were held for over 1,000 attendees, including juvenile court judges, attorneys, GALs, CASA, DFCS staff, and other court partners. Same-day course evaluations show that nearly all participants make significant gains in knowledge and understanding of specific topics after completing the class. MDCANI trainings are supported with funds from the CAPTA and CJA state grants.

In alignment with DFCS' ongoing technology modernization initiatives, The Argo Placement Portal launched statewide in January 2024 as a new tool to support the placement finding process. Staff can request individualized placements quickly and efficiently for youth in foster care and/or create Universal Applications (UA) for

placements. The Argo Placement Portal is designed for CPS and Foster Care personnel (Adoption and CRRU are also included). Staff are presented with a list of available placements based on configured search criteria. Available placements are identified in the portal that best match the child's unique needs and are within a specified distance from the child's removal home. Placements are scored based on location, school district, characteristics, and capacity. Users can drill into each location to review detailed information. Demographic, educational, and health data on the child are pre-populated in the Argo Placement Portal directly from Georgia SHINES to avoid data entry errors. The Argo Placement system allows staff to:

- Search for DFCS foster homes, CPA foster homes, and CCI/TLP/ILP homes for a child by matching the home's attributes to the child's needs.
- Create a Universal Application by leveraging all available SHINES data.
- Make completing UA's more expedient, especially for sibling groups
- Generate a phone list to use when contacting potential homes.

In 2023, the Georgia Senate Foster Care and Adoption Study Committee held several hearings and reviewed safety and permanency outcome data that illustrated the challenges faced by the state's child welfare system. The committee made several recommendations relating to permanency, including:

- Pass legislation to create a uniform statewide juvenile court reporting system
- Contract with more resources to connect non-governmental groups that provide services to at-risk families and children
- Expand infant-toddler courts
- Expand access to training in trauma-informed care for foster and adoptive parents

Additional placement and permanency support will be leveraged through new state laws passed by the legislature in 2023 and 2024:

- [SB 133](#) creates a uniform process for juvenile courts to use when placing a child involved in a CHINS or delinquency case into DFCS custody on a nonemergency basis. Prior to placing a child in DFCS custody, the court shall consider services that could allow the child to remain in the home and efforts made to secure placement other than DFCS custody.
- [SB 376](#) directs juvenile courts to make a determination as to whether a parent has made "substantial progress toward completion of the case plan" at the initial 75-day review, periodic review hearings, and the permanency plan hearing, and requires the juvenile court to conduct a hearing prior to the child's 15th month in foster care to review DFCS's determination that filing for TPR would not be in the best interests of the child and authorizes the appointment of an attorney guardian ad litem who is able to file a TPR petition.

- [SB 401](#) requires juvenile courts to collect timeliness data relating to adherence to dependency time frames and upload those data at least weekly to the Georgia Juvenile Data Exchange. The Administrative Office of the Courts will collect those de-identified data and provide a comprehensive aggregated report to the Legislature annually.

The Division continues to hold PAUSE staffings to stabilize placements that are nearing disruption. The Complex Care Coordinator at the state office is engaged with all PAUSE staffings to help reduce placement disruptions for children with complex needs. The coordinator often partners with the Treatment Field Program Specialists in the regions to provide staff training and identify resources for high-need youth. In FY24, there were 377 reported PAUSE staffings. There is limited data at this time on the percentage that resulted in stabilized placements.

### **Observed Challenges**

Georgia does not have therapeutic foster homes to support youth moving from PRTF to family foster home settings, where they may be more likely to disrupt. Lack of attorneys is also contributing to the delays in permanency, as root cause analyses with court partners indicated that reunification occurs faster and more often when a parent attorney is involved in the case.

CQI exploration with staff and stakeholders has identified specific challenges to stabilizing placements including lack of resources for transgender youth, lack of CCI beds for females, lack of foster homes statewide, and lack of placements for youth with complex needs. Executive leadership and the state legislature are continuing to prioritize solutions to systemic barriers for placement stability.

Root cause analyses with DFCS staff and court partners show that there is a lack of shared definition between DFCS and courts of “safety” and “risk” which can result in delayed permanency outcomes. Barriers to reunification can exist without a shared understanding of what constitutes a safety concern. Currently, judges receive training on title IV-B and IV-E through their two annual conferences, but the presented material is not comprehensive. In 2023, the Court Improvement Program (CIP) supported development of a New Judge training for the Council of Juvenile Court Judges fall conference, due to strong interest across the state. CIP has identified a need for more robust court training in jurisdictions with lower permanency outcomes.

The following activities will be completed during the CFSP reporting period.

### **Current / Planned Activities**

1. Track and monitor available placements for youth with complex needs.
  - **Benchmark:** By 2029, the state will develop or expand placement options for youth with complex needs.

Implementation support from the state legislature includes \$5m to the FY2024 budget to provide alternative housing options for youth with complex needs and \$15m for a child and adolescent crisis stabilization unit. The General Assembly also passed legislation to develop Qualified Residential Treatment Programs (QRTF). In January 2024, Grace's Place opened as a new facility for young survivors of human trafficking. Since May 2022, the Division has offered a \$5,000 incentive and increased the daily per diem to a maximum of about \$344 per day to private provider agencies who take in foster children who have been staying in offices or hotels with the requirement that the child must remain in the placement for at least six months. Within the first month of announcing this initiative, 83 hoteled youth were moved into a stable placement. The Complex Care Coordinator monitors the number of youth placed in hotels daily, as this population tends to be comprised of youth with multiple complex needs. Using point-in-time dates of April 30 and June 30, 2024, the number of hoteled youth was fewer than 10. The Argo Placement tool will also support identification of appropriate placements for youth based on their individual needs, and potentially increase the likelihood of finding a placement in closer proximity to their removal home.

2. Track and monitor the percent of TPRs filed for eligible children within 15 months of entering care, and the percent of cases with a documented exception to file TPR.
  - **Benchmark:** By 2029, at least 50% of children eligible for TPR will have an exception to file documented in the case record by the 15<sup>th</sup> month in care.

DFCS will review case records prior to the 15<sup>th</sup> month in care to determine if a TPR is in the child's best interest and document compelling reasons in the case plan as needed. Additionally, the juvenile court will conduct a hearing prior to the child's 15th month in foster care to review DFCS' determination, pursuant to SB 376. QA reviewers and CQI teams note that TPRs are often not heard in court if the child is not in an adoptive placement, or if the caregiver is actively completing drug treatment (if the dependency is related to the caregiver's substance abuse). In those cases, the agency must document a compelling reason to not file for TPR. Analyses of Georgia SHINES data shows that for the 3,558 children eligible for TPR on 7/15/2024, 46% had a documented exception to file a TPR. This is a significant improvement from Georgia's 2023 CFSR self-assessment report, when a file review sample found less than 10% with a documented exception.



Implementation supports include training and technical assistance provided by Regional C3 Coordinators and Field Program Specialists with staff summits and live learnings to educate case managers on the documentation requirements. The Safety Section will develop training materials and checklists to use in tracking completion of this item. The Safety Section will also work with the DFCS Data Unit to review this data item quarterly and determine if the implemented educational and oversight measures are effective.

This activity will also be included in the state's CFSR PIP to support improvement in the state's permanency-related Statewide Data Indicators and Permanency Outcome 1.

3. Provide targeted training for juvenile court judges and parent/child attorneys on achieving timely permanency.

- **Benchmark:** provide up to ten permanency-focused training opportunities annually for judges and attorneys, prioritizing PIP implementation sites and jurisdictions with the highest need.

In partnership with the Children's Justice Act Task Force, the Court Improvement Program, State Attorney General's Office, and the Office of the Child Advocate, targeted training will be provided to judges, GALs and attorneys on best practices for quality legal representation and achieving timely permanency.

Implementation supports include JCAMP court observation data from CIP to support the development of permanency planning trainings for judges and ongoing monitoring of court performance to observe improvements in hearing quality and timeliness. In addition to a SAAG manual and accompanying educational videos, attorneys can receive permanency-related training at the annual Child Welfare Summit, jurisdiction-specific MDCANI, the annual CJCJ conference, CWLS annual convenings, Court Improvement Initiative annual meeting, sponsored convenings of the State Bar of Georgia and NACC, and other venues. Pre- and post-training evaluations will be collected to determine relevant changes in knowledge and behavior.

This activity will also be included in the state's CFSR PIP to support improvement in the state's permanency-related Statewide Data Indicators, Permanency Outcome 1, and the Case Review Systemic Factor.

**Permanency Outcome 2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children**

## CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data

Permanency		State
Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children		38%
Item 7:	Placement with siblings (23 out of 27 cases)	85%
Item 8:	Visiting with parents and siblings in foster care (14 out of 31 cases)	45%
Item 9:	Preserving connections (19 out of 40 cases)	48%
Item 10:	Relative placement (23 out of 40 cases)	58%
Item 11:	Relationship of child in care with parents (5 out of 29 cases)	17%

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

### Strengths

CFSR data shows strong performance in placement with siblings and relatives (CFSR Items 7 and 10). This is likely due to the Division's practice that any sibling who is separated must be staffed, and temporary sibling separation waivers must have the final approval by the County Director. Permanent sibling separation waivers must have the final approval by the Regional Director. Permanency Field Program Specialists (FPS) within each region review each separation waiver and follow up with counties to assist with practice guidance.

The Division has in place a specialized Kinship Unit to support kin and provide guidance to staff. The Kinship Unit works closely with the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) to address barriers to placement, get homes approved and monitor kinship placements. CRRU holds monthly support calls for kin caregivers to hear from the Division, receive answers to questions and concerns, and learn about resources and upcoming training events. Regions hold weekly cadences to address issues and ensure accountability. The Kinship Navigator program was launched in direct response to the increasing number of grandparents and other caregivers who have assumed responsibility for raising another relatives' child(ren). The program is designed to support and assist relative caregivers, understanding the importance of keeping children within their family unit, when their biological parent cannot adequately provide for them. Kinship navigators are located statewide to assist kinship families in identifying and locating resources within their local community. The program's overarching goal is to close the gaps and/or delays with service delivery to kinship caregivers. The kinship care portal is Georgia's one-stop shop for information, resources and support for kinship caregivers.

The portal supports relative caregivers in obtaining resources to successfully care for children and ensure that relative placements are appropriate and maintained.

QA case reviewers observed good practices related to the quality of visitation (100% for siblings, and 87-88% for mothers and fathers). In addition to in-person, face-to-face visits, additional visits are made throughout each month via virtual platforms such as Zoom, FaceTime, and other tech platforms. For youth and families in the metro areas, bus and transit system access is available.

QA case reviewers noted that performance ratings for father engagement is trending higher from previous years and when compared to performance ratings with mothers. This observation may be due to the sustained efforts by DFCS, CIP, and system partners to engage fathers and encourage legitimation. Several counties have robust fatherhood engagement initiatives in place, including a metro Atlanta partnership with the Department of Child Support Services (DCSS) where fatherhood services are provided and coordinated with Legal Aid and Veterans Affairs to address the needs of veteran participants. DCSS schedules monthly “Fatherhood Conversations” in regions throughout the state to discuss child support services and how they can help fathers play a greater role in their children’s lives. For young fathers in foster care, the Fatherhood program through the DeKalb Access and Resource Center (ARC) assigns a mentor to work with them on fathering, and their rights as the child’s father, including working with the youth to ensure he is legitimated as the father of his child. ARC provides fathers with resources and supports to obtain employment and remain actively involved in the case planning process. ARC has extended hours to facilitate Saturday visits between children and their parents and offer more opportunities for family engagement.

Georgia’s APSR joint planning meetings have highlighted the need to understand and engage mothers and fathers throughout the dependency process and encourage parents to maintain relationships with their children while in foster care. Regular convenings and honest engagement with staff, stakeholders, and parents with lived experience have resulted in increased performance on this measure.

### **Observed Challenges**

Finding permanency for larger sibling groups and children with multiple service needs such as mental health, medical fragility, and delinquent behaviors can be difficult, as well as identifying a caregiver with the capacity to care for these children while deciding about permanency. Subsequently, children with complex needs are often placed in group home settings which makes the possibility of them maintaining permanent sibling connections even more difficult.

When children are placed outside of their legal county, or when parents/caregivers relocate, the challenge remains to find providers who are able and willing to travel several hours for visits. In communities without transit systems, county staff are partnering with informal supports (e.g., faith-based and nonprofit groups) to facilitate visitation between parents, children, and siblings but challenges remain. Solution-focused discussions with county staff and transporters identified a considerable barrier in the method of calculating financial reimbursement for travel-related expenses. Transporters are not currently reimbursed for their travel distance from their starting (home) address to the child's location and back, but only to and from the child's starting point and visitation destination. Particularly in rural areas, the initial distance from the transporter's starting point to the child's location can be a significant number of miles.

The Division has struggled with adequately engaging parents and supporting them in maintaining relationships with their children while in foster care outside of visitation. Nearly half of cases reviewed showed that the child's relationships with their siblings, parents, and community are maintained during the foster care period, demonstrating opportunities for improvement.

### **Current / Planned Activities**

1. Increase available placements for sibling groups to be placed together.

- **Benchmark: By 2029, the state will develop or expand placement options for sibling groups.**

Georgia will focus recruitment efforts on communities with high response rates and offer tailored training and support to existing placement resources to address the specific needs of youth in care. According to the 2025-2029 Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan, the state's current total of active foster homes as of April 2024 is 7,153. DFCS' greatest need for placement resources are families willing to foster children 12 – 18 years old and sibling groups. DFCS regional CRRU administrators report needing on average 313 additional foster homes to support sibling placements. The state's average length of onboarding and approving foster and adoptive families is currently 7.2 months, and a placement resources current average length of service is 37 months.

Activities and benchmarks are described in Permanency Outcome 1 and the 2025-2029 Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan. Implementation supports include the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit, the Care Coordination Treatment Unit, and the Complex Care Coordinator. Regular staffings will be held with CRRU, CCTU and the county staff and leadership to review the current challenges related to separate

sibling placements and identify potential solutions to address them. These often include one or more siblings that have a complex medical or behavioral need.

2. Support judicial efforts to promote and maintain positive and nurturing relationships between children in foster care and their parents.

- **Benchmark: provide up to ten permanency-focused training opportunities annually for judges and attorneys.**

The Division will support the Court Improvement Program (CIP), the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA), and the Children's Justice Act Task Force (CJATF) to provide permanency-focused training opportunities in jurisdictions statewide. In addition to the annual Child Welfare Summit and judges conference, the Multi-Disciplinary Child Abuse and Neglect Institute (MDCANI) MDCANI course provides an in-depth training to DFCS staff, judges, attorneys, CASA/GAL, and other court partners. Throughout the training, participants work collaboratively through scenarios that are designed to enhance the skills needed for their roles. At the close of each training, participants identify specific steps to improve collaborative practice in their jurisdictions. In 2023, the MDCANI faculty began developing a new Part 3 course, which is an immersive, skill-building experience that encourages attendees to think critically about all aspects of a dependency case with the goal of strengthening hearing quality and ensuring better permanency outcomes. These will be delivered statewide and monitored for efficacy throughout the 2025-2029 CFSP reporting period.

These activities will also be included in the state's CFSR PIP.

Implementation Supports to address parent-child visitation and relationship building include the Argo Placement Portal (to increase the likelihood of locating appropriate placements for youth in closer proximity to their removal home) and the Communicare portal to send regular updates and notices to parents, and calendar invites to court hearings, medical or school appointments, and other activities (e.g., sports or recreational events). These tools will support youth in foster care to stay connected to their families and communities.

Case managers will use the portal to encourage parent participation in the child's activities, chat in real-time regarding transportation or other barriers, and connect the foster caregivers with the parents to encourage regular mentoring and co-parenting activities. The LMS staff training portal provides on-demand access to the Communicare training. Since July 2023, over 1,690 staff have completed the LMS training module. Training and technical assistance is also regularly provided to staff by regional Field Program Specialists and C3 Coordinators. OIT provides ongoing updates to agency

leadership on the usage trends and opportunities for Communicare system enhancements.

The Georgia Parent Advisory Council has provided recommendations to the Division on how to improve parent-child relationships while the child is in foster care. Some of these strategies have been addressed with the recent implementation of the NTDC caregiver training. Foster parents are encouraged to use a partnership parenting model and work with the parents to improve the chances of reunification and ensure positive outcomes.

**Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs**

**CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data**

Well-Being 1		State
Outcome WB1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs. (Item 12 must be a strength for the Overall Rating to be Substantially Achieved)		12%
Item 12:	Needs and services to child, parents, and foster parents (8 of 65 cases)	12%
	12A-Needs assessment and services to children (28 of 65 cases)	43%
	12B-Needs assessment and services to parents (6 of 59 cases)	10%
	12C-Needs assessment and services to foster parents (17 of 37 cases)	46%
Item 13:	Child and family involvement in case planning (29 of 63 cases)	46%
Item 14:	Caseworker visits with child (32 of 65 cases)	49%
Item 15:	Caseworker visits with parents (15 of 58 cases)	26%

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

**Strengths**

Item 12A: QA case reviews note that performance is significantly higher for assessing needs of children compared to the follow-up and implementation of all needed services and that the agency performed better at case planning activities with children (74%)

compared to mothers (58%) and fathers (52%). The Division routinely collaborates with stakeholders to engage youth with ILP services. Independent Living Specialists (ILS) within the regions provide monthly calendars and reminders of the Opportunity Passport Program (for youth over the age of 18) and various training sessions and workshops offered for ILP eligible youth who are 14 – 21 years of age. Partners include the Multi Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC), Bethany, Amerigroup, nSoro Foundation, Angels in Paradise Inc., and the University of Georgia Fanning Institute.

Item 12B: Parental needs are assessed through a combination of informal and formal means. Informal assessments include regular, quality discussions with the parents regarding their needs and whether any services in place are effective in meeting those needs, observations of parent's demeanor, of their home environment and of their interactions with the children, and the use of collateral contacts to inform the needs assessment. Formal assessments include Comprehensive Child and Family Assessments (CCFA), mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, and parental fitness assessments.

Item 12C: With the assistance of the Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) and Child Placing Agencies (CPA), the needs of Foster Parents are regularly assessed and met across the region. The needs of foster parents are addressed by the regional CRRU team members at each re-evaluation (during home visits and contacts prior to home visits). CRRU team members are accessible to their foster parents around the clock via cell phone, email, or text. When an issue arises, CRRU team members respond to the foster parent and then reach out to placement case managers, supervisors, county directors, or other agency or community resources to assist. The CRRU teams have a strong working relationship with the caregivers in their region and often act as a liaison between the foster parents and other agency staff.

Regions continue to hold monthly Foster Parent Calls where updates and training are provided to participants, and an opportunity to express any concerns or ask questions is available to foster parents at the end of the call. Feedback provided by foster parents following the calls has been positive.

The Division collaborated with the Butler Institute for Families at the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work to conduct the Georgia Foster and Adoptive Family Assessment. The assessment includes a survey, focus groups, and interviews that will give Georgia's foster and adoptive families the opportunity to share their experience and recommendations within the child welfare system. Survey responses were collected from February through March 2024. Focus groups and interviews are being scheduled after completion of the surveys, in summer/fall 2024. The Division will review the findings of the assessment in FY2025 to better understand the caregiver experience and implement

specific steps to improve foster and adoptive family recruitment and retention throughout the state. Implementation efforts will be monitored and reported through the annual updates in the Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan.

CIP is encouraging judges and attorneys to set aside time for the parents to talk about their case plan involvement. This will be addressed in judicial permanency-focused training sessions, as described in the activities for Permanency Outcome 2.

Data reported in the annual Monthly Caseworker Visit reports show that case managers are meeting the “Every Child Every Month” goal to visit children in foster care at least once per month, with more than half of those visits occurring in the child’s residence, as required under PI-12-01. Since FFY 2015, Georgia has exceeded the requirement that 95% of children in care receive at least one monthly caseworker visit. Georgia has also exceeded the requirement that at least 50% of the total number of monthly visits must occur in the child’s residence.

### **Observed Challenges**

CQI analyses for Item 12A identified root causes often due to challenges in obtaining needed assessments and services timely, including trauma assessments, and contacts with collaterals to assess progression and ensure referred services remain appropriate.

CQI analyses for Item 12B identified root causes often due to lack of quality engagement with parents. Cases did not consistently demonstrate adequate discussion with parents regarding allegations, additional issues of the case, permanency planning, service provision, and behavioral change necessary to adequately assess needs. The Division does not have strong supporting evidence that parents are routinely engaged and is exploring opportunities with CIP and the courts to improve parent engagement.

### **Current / Planned Activities**

1. Recruit service providers to increase the accessibility of needed services that address the identified concerns, particularly in rural and historically underserved areas.
  - **Benchmark:** At least one contracted service provider for each program area will be available in every region, prioritizing provider recruitment in areas with the highest need.

During CFSR stakeholder interviews, gaps were noted for services relating to transportation and housing in rural areas, substance abuse services, particularly for



fathers, specialized services for children with complex needs, and ABA therapies for children with autism disorders. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about long waiting lists and the quality of some of the services.

Implementation supports include the annual provider fairs and quarterly stakeholder meetings convened by the regional C3 Coordinators. These convenings often serve to recruit new providers to the region and introduce providers to new staff who may be unfamiliar with the resources in their county. DSU will conduct random reviews of contracted providers to ensure compliance with their contractual obligations. DSU will also deliver annual trainings to providers and DFCS staff to improve overall quality and timeliness of services.

The Argo Community Portal is developed to create a simple and efficient process for staff to complete service authorizations for needed assessments and support services. Use of the portal will result in timely service requests and follow-ups with selected providers, and a direct method to upload and review provider case notes and documentation.

2. Improve workforce effectiveness in parent engagement strategies for assessment and case plan development.

- **Benchmark:** Recruit individuals with lived experience in a peer specialist program.

Staff are encouraged to conduct ongoing case plan monitoring at each home visit and discuss the strengths and challenges of the case plan during the visit. The Division is developing strategies to improve workforce effectiveness in engaging parents in case plan development, discussions of family strengths and needs, as well as evaluating case plan progress. These efforts are described in CFSP Goal 1: Build Workforce and Staff Competencies. Field Practice Coaches and over-the-shoulder supports for new case managers have demonstrated effectiveness. One avenue under development is to recruit individuals with lived experience in a peer specialist program, to collaborate with DFCS staff in the development of parent engagement strategies and improve parent partnership in case planning. The Division has encountered some challenges with this recruitment strategy relating to adult criminal records but is working with other state agencies that have successfully implemented this type of peer support program to identify solutions. Improved engagement will result in more quality caseworker visits.

Additional strategies (e.g., conversation guides to ensure visits are comprehensive) that address the issue(s) unique to each region are being developed within the regional QA and CQI teams. QA Reviews have noted in cases where fidelity to the regional CQI strategy was maintained, the case rated a strength on items related to quality parental engagement. This observation has reinforced the alignment of quality performance with CQI-developed engagement tools for case managers and supervisors. Regional

supervisor summits are conducted quarterly by the QA/CQI teams and provide specific guidance on defining quality. Cases are debriefed with supervisors to demonstrate what quality visits look like. Feedback from attendees is positive. Regions are increasing live-learning and scheduling discussions in Case Manager/Supervisor Summits and Lunch & Learns. Feedback from frontline staff indicate they appreciate the one-on-one feedback and ability to get clarity about questions they have.

CIP is encouraging judges and attorneys to set aside time for the parents to talk about their case plan involvement. This will provide additional oversight for staff to ensure parents are engaged early and often in case planning.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs

Well-Being Outcome 3: Children receive appropriate services to meet their physical and mental health needs

## CFSR Round 4 Preliminary Data

Well-Being 2		State
Outcome WB2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs		56%
Item 16:	Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs (25 of 45 cases)	56%
Outcome WB3: Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs		24%
Item 17:	Physical health of the child (24 of 54 cases)	44%
Item 18:	Mental and behavioral health of the child (8 of 45 cases)	18%

Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit (2024)

## Strengths

Georgia has committed resources to improve student performance and increase access to educational support services. The Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL) is working with DFCS and other child serving agencies and organizations to build an Early Childhood System of Care that promotes coordinated policy and collaborative service delivery to support the many young children with (or at risk for) social, emotional, and behavioral health needs and to promote healthy social and emotional development for all children. DECAL offers support for inclusion through a team of regionally based Inclusion and Behavior Support Specialists, who provide a variety of resources, strategies and support to programs, classrooms, and the community. They are also working to promote and increase inclusive childcare options for children with disabilities and their families in their communities.

The Division's Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit provides regular training and engagement opportunities in the counties which are facilitated by the regionally assigned Education Support Monitor. Information shared

during these sessions is often region- and county-specific and may include guest presenters who represent the local school systems and organizations within the area. EPAC also reviews IEPs of students in foster care to ensure they are receiving the appropriate supports needed for academic success. From January 2023 through December 2023, EPAC audited 863 IEP's. Out of those 863 IEP's 688 were current and in force. For the 175 that had expired, EPAC contacted the child's case manager and the school to get the IEP updated. Beginning in February 2024, the EPAC team is requesting all student records and taking the responsibility to ensure all youth that have IEP's have been identified and the current IEPs are uploaded and documented in SHINES.

The Division is expanding access to community advocates that will have a positive impact on educational outcomes for children in care. Georgia Appleseed provides direct legal representation for children in foster care who face unique barriers to school success and expands access to behavioral supports at school. Georgia Appleseed developed a free online training course for [Advocating for Children in Foster Care](#) for caseworkers, foster parents, and attorneys advocating in a disciplinary hearing for children in foster care.

In 2022, the Division created an Office of Health Law and Policy, which includes a Foster Child Passport Team and an Appeals Team. The primary goal of the Appeals Team is to advocate for the children who are insured under the Amerigroup Georgia Families 360 (Medicaid) plan to ensure compliance. The Division hired three Medicaid attorneys to review claims, dispute decisions, file appeals, secure reversals, and negotiate resolutions. The team provides specific training and education to DFCS field staff on all types of appeals, including psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF) admission denials and discharges, medical treatments including dental services, and non-PRTF psychological assessments and treatments. Additional OHLP reviews address dental benefits, pharmacy/prescription drug coverage, and support services (therapy/skills training). From July 2023 through March 2024, OHLP administratively appealed at least 200 denials of hospital stay or service and initiated another 67 fair hearing requests before the OSAH court.

The Wellness Programming and Consultation (WPAC) Specialist and regional Treatment Field Program Specialists access the "significant health conditions" report in Georgia SHINES to provide oversight and support to county staff on needed health care.

### **Observed Challenges**

Staff and stakeholders are noting an increase in children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), who require more specialized services. Executive leadership and the Georgia Legislature are exploring options to increase mental health provider rates and expand service options for communities experiencing provider shortages. There are extremely limited Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) providers through GF360 and extensive wait

lists for ABA or autism-specific therapies. Unfortunately, this issue exists across all fee-for-service and managed care Medicaid for children in Georgia. To address these regional shortages, virtual care has been utilized heavily throughout the COVID-19 public health emergency, but not all youth are able to engage fully using the virtual platforms, particularly for mental health needs, and reliable internet continues to be a challenge in some rural areas.

### **Current / Planned Activities**

1. Support youth in care with educational resources to maintain grade level performance
  - **Benchmark:** Utilize 5,000 hours each year for tutoring services for youth in care by 2029.

EPAC initiated a contract with Tutor.com in FY2024 to ensure all children and youth in foster care have access to individualized academic support. The contract purchased 5,000 hours of annual tutoring at no cost to youth; unused hours can roll over into the next year. Tutors can assist with homework, improve writing skills, help students study for tests, and review difficult concepts. In the month of March 2024, 474 sessions were completed, with 62% of those served in metro Atlanta counties (region 14). Most tutor time (42 hours) was spent on elementary subjects (K-2 grade). Student feedback rated the tutoring sessions at 92% for “helping to improve grades” and 94% for “helping to be more confident about schoolwork”.

2. Establish additional oversight of psychotropic medication for children in care.
  - **Benchmark:** Execute contract in 2025 with medical provider for additional oversight of psychotropic medications.

County leadership is responsible for oversight of psychotropic medications. As described in the Health Care Oversight Plan, authorization from the County Director and/or Regional Director will be obtained prior to administering psychotropic medications to children in foster care except in emergency situations. Authorization shall be provided to the prescribing physician within two business days of request. **(Exception:** When children are receiving in-patient treatment (e.g. Crisis Stabilization Unit (CSU), Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)) the consent decision is to be provided within 24 hours of the requested from the facility. If it is not possible to obtain written informed consent prior to starting psychotropic medications, verbal consent may be obtained from the County Director/Regional Director. However, the Authorization of Psychotropic Medication for Children in Foster Care must be received by the County/Regional Director

and provided to the prescribing physician no later than the next business day following verbal consent.

Informed consent is not required when dealing with emergency circumstances such as suicidal ideation, severe psychosis, self-injurious behavior, physical aggression that is dangerous to self or others, or severe impulsivity that endangers self or others. Also, if psychotropic medications were initiated on an outpatient basis and the physician determines that withholding any medication can be detrimental to the patient's health.

DFCS will ensure the child's caregiver understands the requirements to notify all prescribers of DFCS guidelines regarding consent and take the medication consent documents received from DFCS to all the child's behavioral health appointments. DFCS will ensure that caregiver understands to delay filling prescriptions until consent is given by DFCS, follow DFCS guidelines regarding administering psychotropic medications, and complete and continually update the foster care individual child medication log.

DFCS case manager will monitor the well-being of each child on prescribed psychotropic medications. DFCS case manager will document the name of each medication taken, frequency, and prescriber in GA Shines as well as collect and review the medication logs maintained by the caregivers to ensure medications are being taken as prescribed. DFCS case manager will be available and responsive to any hospital or other entity providing hospitalization or treatment services to manage the behavioral health needs of children foster care.

## CFSR Systemic Factors

### Statewide Information System

**Item 19:** *How well is the statewide information system functioning statewide to ensure that, at a minimum, the state can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care?*

Data are entered timely and are routinely checked for accuracy and completeness. The state can readily identify the four items for every child in foster care. The State's CCWIS system (Georgia SHINES) records important demographic information for all children/families, foster care placements, and permanency goals for children in care. Georgia's Child Welfare Policy Manual requires data updates into Georgia SHINES within 72 hours of occurrence. The status and demographic characteristics are tracked on the Person Detail page. The Placement page tracks the location of the child. Goals are listed on the Case Plans page. The Division assigns specialized staff – Performance Management Field Program Specialists (FPS) and Data Integrity Specialists (DIS) – to monitor the accuracy and completeness of this information.

### Data Quality

The below table demonstrates initial error-free data percentage from January through December 2023, prior to DIS review and correction. (100% - (# Data Present / Total # Applicable Children)). After the DIS work with the case managers, the error-free data percentage reaches 100% in these measures, ensuring that the Division maintains accurate and complete information on the demographics, person characteristics, legal status, and placement location (address) of every child in foster care.

DFCS policy requires all data entries within 3 working days. Data entry updates to legal status are often dependent upon receipt of the court order, which happens weeks after a decision is made. Case managers have virtually no control over how responsive the courts and medical providers will be to provide information in a timely manner. There is not a standardized process in place to track the number of days from receipt of the court order to the entry of legal status data, as well as certain person characteristics that may emerge after the child is in care.

The Division will utilize the Data Integrity Specialists to conduct regular and frequent data reviews to ensure timeliness of entry once required data components are received.

	Demographics	Person Characteristics	Legal Status	Placement Location	Goals for Placements (Permanency Goals)
<b>Jan-23</b>	99.85%	98.80%	99.64%	97.74%	92.49%
<b>Feb-23</b>	99.87%	99.38%	99.46%	98.24%	92.69%
<b>Mar-23</b>	99.93%	98.52%	99.65%	98.12%	92.69%
<b>Apr-23</b>	98.62%	98.65%	99.61%	98.07%	92.45%
<b>May-23</b>	99.46%	98.69%	99.51%	97.87%	93.00%
<b>Jun-23</b>	99.79%	98.96%	99.81%	98.08%	93.06%
<b>Jul-23</b>	99.74%	99.07%	99.72%	97.95%	93.97%
<b>Aug-23</b>	99.75%	98.91%	99.53%	98.15%	93.36%
<b>Sep-23</b>	99.75%	99.16%	99.70%	98.33%	93.24%
<b>Oct-23</b>	99.70%	98.39%	99.86%	98.66%	93.36%
<b>Nov-23</b>	99.72%	98.53%	99.81%	98.51%	92.72%
<b>Dec-23</b>	99.66%	99.03%	99.82%	98.09%	93.17%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

## Placement Data Timeliness

The below chart provides timeliness of Initial and Subsequent Placement data entry in Georgia SHINES during CY2023 (“days” shown are calendar days).

Placement Type	Total Placements	Within 3 Days	% Within 3 Days	Within 5 days	% Within 5 Days
<b>DFCS Family Foster Home</b>	5,510	2,005	36.39%	2,516	45.66%
<b>CPA Family Foster Home</b>	4,747	1,630	34.34%	2,082	43.86%
<b>Kinship - Relative</b>	1,870	624	33.37%	907	48.50%
<b>Child Care Institution</b>	1,661	620	37.33%	755	45.45%
<b>Hospital</b>	989	277	28.01%	369	37.31%
<b>Other</b>	2,355	706	29.98%	920	39.07%
<b>Total</b>	17,132	5,862	34.22%	7,549	44.06%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES



## Case Review System

**Item 20:** *How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that each child has a written case plan that is developed jointly with the child's parent(s) and includes the required provisions?*

Georgia's Child Welfare Policy Manual requires developing written case plans for children in foster care by engaging the parents/guardians during the family team meetings. The Division finds that most children in care have a completed case plan within 60 days. Additionally, most case plans are approved by the court within 60 days, demonstrating that children are having their court hearings early and often.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Completed Case Plans within 60 Days	69%	77%	72%	74%	78%
Approved Case Plans within 60 Days	62%	70%	66%	68%	72%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

The Division does not have strong supporting evidence that parents are routinely involved in the development of their case plans. The Division is exploring opportunities with CIP and the courts to improve parent engagement. Specific strategies are not confirmed at this time but will be developed and implemented for the CFSR PIP and are expected to increase performance in this measure.

**Item 21:** *How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that a periodic review for each child occurs no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review?*

CFSR4 stakeholder interviews with attorneys and judges confirmed that courts are scheduling periodic reviews at least once every six months. Georgia SHINES data shows 99% of children receive an initial court review within the first six months of foster care, and 88-91% of subsequent reviews are held timely at least once every six months.

	CY2019	CY2020	CY2021	CY2022	CY2023
<b>Timely Initial Periodic Reviews</b>	15558/15767 99%	13902/14042 99%	12829/12969 99%	12403/12582 99%	12518/12688 99%
<b>Timely Subsequent Periodic Review</b>	14050/15767 89%	12377/14042 88%	11545/12969 89%	11408/12583 91%	11294/12689 89%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

## Practice Supports

Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §15-11-102) requires an initial periodic review hearing to be held within 75 days following a child's removal from their home. An additional periodic review shall be held within four months following the initial review. Georgia's Child Welfare Policy Manual provides requirements and procedures for periodic reviews to align with state and federal laws.

SB 401 (2024) will require juvenile courts to collect timeliness data relating to adherence to dependency time frames and upload those data at least weekly to the Georgia Juvenile Data Exchange. The Administrative Office of the Courts will collect those de-identified data and provide a comprehensive aggregated report to the Legislature annually. This will support more accurate reporting in the future.

Specific strategies are not confirmed at this time but will be developed and implemented for the CFSR PIP and are expected to increase performance in this measure.

**Item 22:** *How well is the case review system functioning statewide to ensure that, for each child, a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body occurs no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter?*

CFSR4 stakeholder interviews with attorneys and judges confirmed that courts are scheduling permanency hearings at least once every 12 months. Georgia SHINES data shows 99-100% of children in foster care receive an initial permanency hearing within the first 12 months, and 97-99% of subsequent reviews are held timely at least once every 12 months thereafter.

	CY2019	CY2020	CY2021	CY2022	CY2023
<b>Timely Initial Permanency Hearings</b>	12405/12407 100%	11578/11580 100%	10445/10446 100%	9694/9696 100%	9931/9934 100%
<b>Timely Subsequent Permanency Hearings</b>	12064/12407 97%	11290/11580 98%	10321/10446 99%	9584/9700 99%	9846/9940 99%

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

## Practice Supports

Georgia law (O.C.G.A. §15-11-102) requires a permanency plan hearing to be held within nine months of the date the child is considered to have entered foster care for children under seven years of age at the time the dependency petition is filed (and any siblings that enter care at the same time). A permanency plan hearing must be held no later than 12 months after a child seven years of age or older is considered to have entered foster care, unless a sibling group enters care at the same time and at least one member of the group is under seven years of age at the time the dependency petition is filed, then the permanency plan hearing for the entire sibling group shall be held no later than nine months after the children are considered to have entered foster care. Subsequent permanency plan hearings shall be held at least every six months after the initial permanency plan hearing or more frequently as deemed necessary by the court.

SB 401 (2024) will require juvenile courts to collect timeliness data relating to adherence to dependency time frames and upload those data at least weekly to the Georgia Juvenile Data Exchange. The Administrative Office of the Courts will collect those de-identified data and provide a comprehensive aggregated report to the Legislature annually. This will support more accurate reporting in the future.

Specific strategies are not confirmed at this time but will be developed and implemented for the CFSR PIP and are expected to increase performance in this measure.

**Item 23:** *How well is the case review system functioning to ensure that the filing of termination of parental rights (TPR) proceedings occurs in accordance with required provisions?*

The below chart shows the average time, in months, from a child's entry into care to the finalization of the adoption.

Year	Entry to First TPR	Entry to Second TPR	TPR to Adoption	Average Time to Adoption
2018	20.88	23.44	11.99	35.53
2019	21.22	24.66	12.73	37.34
2020	22.33	25.67	14.15	39.89
2021	24.63	27.8	13.82	41.6
2022	26.48	29.39	13.14	42.49

Source: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

For the year ending December 2023, there were 5,420 youth eligible for TPR. Of those, 1,958 had a compelling reason documented and 376 had a timely TPR petition filed.

### Practice Supports

The Division will continue to leverage Georgia SHINES to alert staff of upcoming or overdue TPR dates, and the expertise of Regional Adoption Coordinators (RACs), who are state office consultants providing hands-on guidance and support for children with an adoption goal. These cases are most often identified through the state's CCWIS system (Georgia SHINES). Most of the RACs work on cases where parental rights have been terminated and the agency is trying to move them to permanency. For those without TPR, the RACs work with the county to develop the TPR packets and provide guidance on needed documentation. The county staff will pull the packet together, change the goal to adoption, and support the TPR filing. Regional CQI teams also support the RACs by developing best practice guides and toolkits for staff to use when a child is approaching the 15<sup>th</sup> month in care.

Throughout the CFSP reporting period, the Division has engaged with CIP and the courts on improving this measure, by ensuring the case manager has identified the compelling reason not to file TPR and documented that in the case plan. Specific strategies are not confirmed at this time but will be developed and implemented for the CFSR PIP and are expected to increase performance in this measure.

**Item 24:** *How well is the case review system functioning to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child?*

[Senate Bill 439 \(2020\)](#) became effective January 1, 2021 and provides for enhanced notice to and improved participation of foster, pre-adoptive, and relative caregivers in certain court hearings. It also provides for the court's consideration of issues relevant to a child's placement, care, well-being, and permanency raised by such persons; and requires certain findings be made by the court, including whether the caregiver was provided notice of the hearing or review, including the method, and whether the caregiver expressed an interest in being heard at the hearing or review. Since the passage of the law, there has been an increase in caregiver notifications.

Georgia Code §15-11-109 requires DFCS to give written notice of the date, time, place, and purpose of the review or hearing, including the right to be heard, to the caregiver of a child, the foster parent of a child, any pre-adoptive parent, or any relative caring for a child. The written notice shall be delivered to the recipient at least 72 hours before the review or hearing, except in the case of preliminary protective hearings or emergency hearings when such notice is not possible, by United States mail, e-mail, or hand delivery. Each county has a process in place for providing notice to caregivers. A statewide data system to collect this information is not currently available.

**Strategy:** The Division will collaborate with the Office of Technology (using Georgia SHINES) and the state legislature to develop a system that tracks the date notice is sent to each caregiver, and that the notice includes language that the caregiver has a right to be heard.

Georgia utilized qualitative data obtained from interviews, surveys, and internal case reviews to evaluate the functioning of this item. In February 2023, the Division surveyed foster, adoptive, and kin caregivers at Georgia's annual Adoption and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG) conference. Attendees were asked to participate in a voluntary survey to learn more about their lived experiences with Georgia's child welfare system. Nearly 200 individuals responded out of 500 attendees. Survey questions asked about the quality and availability of services, receiving notice of hearings and their right to be heard, their treatment in court, their access to case managers, CASAs and attorneys, and similar themes.

Out of 175 AFPAG respondents who were able to answer the question about being notified timely of upcoming court hearings, 117 (67%) report receiving notice prior to the hearing.

## Quality Assurance System

**Item 25:** *How well is the quality assurance system functioning statewide to ensure that it is (1) operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family*

*Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, (2) has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety), (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates implemented program improvement measures?*

Georgia operates an identifiable quality assurance (QA) system that is in place in the counties/regions where the services included in the CFSP are provided and the system evaluates the quality of services, identifies the strengths and needs of the service delivery system, provides relevant reports, and evaluates implemented program improvement measures. The case review system utilized by the QA team is high-functioning and directly models the CFSR process, in that cases are not only reviewed for compliance, but case specific interviews are conducted for each case to offer a thorough, comprehensive assessment of the state's true performance with regards to federal requirements related to work with families. There have not been any areas of concern identified for the QA system.

In 2023, the QA Team reviewed all 18 CFSR items, with 25 cases each month (15 FC/10 FPS), utilizing a 12-month period under review, and interviews with all case participants (case managers, supervisors, parents, children, foster caregivers, service providers, and legal stakeholders). All cases from case sample listings were reviewed using the Round 4 Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI). In addition, interviews were conducted with participants (family members, stakeholders, etc.) related to the cases.

Stakeholder engagement throughout the QA process utilizes surveys to gather information related to service delivery and systemic factors. Stakeholders can participate in both the case specific interviews and their overall assessment of the child welfare system. For example, a service provider would be asked case-specific questions about the family with whom they work. In addition, this same service provider would be interviewed as a stakeholder and asked questions related to their overall services, relationship, and collaboration with others across the child welfare system.

Stakeholders include but are not limited to:

- Legal stakeholders (judges, SAAG (Special Assistant Attorney General), CASA (Court Appointed Special Attorney), GAL (Guardian Ad Litem), Citizen Panel Member, etc.)
- School personnel (teachers, counselors, principals, etc.)
- Law Enforcement
- Medical Providers (doctors, dentist, hospitals)
- Mental Health Providers (therapists, counselors, hospitals)
- Homestead/Parent Aide Providers

- Other service providers (substance abuse, Domestic Violence, parenting classes)
- DFCS Case Manager/Supervisor

Stakeholders are asked to provide a rating of Excellent, Good, Fair or Poor in applicable areas based on their role with the agency. These ratings are combined and reflected in the quarterly CWQA trend reports. Each stakeholder is asked to rate the areas of their knowledge (i.e. service provision, legal). Not all stakeholders will be able to provide feedback ratings on all areas, and if necessary certain areas will be marked “NA” for a particular stakeholder.

Georgia DFCS believes that mentoring provides excellent opportunities for transference of knowledge, and the cornerstone skills of assessment, engagement, and supervision, are necessary for staff to effectively do their jobs. CQI teams across the state have been developing and implementing practices to address the identified areas needing improvement. Continued support of and fidelity to the CQI process will only strengthen Georgia’s performance and service to families.

Veteran QA and CQI staff have been uniformly trained on the CFSR Round 4 federal review process, guide, and items. The QA and CQI units, as well as other agency staff and stakeholders, seek and receive technical assistance and training from the Children’s Bureau as needed.

All QA and CQI members have received CFSR Round 4 training conducted by the Unit Manager and Program Manager. Training session topics included:

- The Round 4 OSRI
- Children’s Bureau Technical Bulletin 13
- CFSR Round 4 Procedures Manual
- The use of Statewide Data Indicators
- Case Related-Interviews
- Peer/Second Level Interviews
- Stakeholder Surveys
- An overview of the QA process
- Conflicts of Interest
- Conducting case-related interview (Review of the Case Related Interview Guides with Instructions in OMS was a required prerequisite)
- Writing high quality Rationale Statements (Review of the Round 4 Guide for Writing "No" Narratives and Rationale Statements and the Reviewer Brief: Understanding Federal Expectations for Rating Cases in OMS was a required prerequisites)
- Process for addressing safety concerns

- Tracking questions and issues on the application of the OSRI

In addition to the before mentioned developed internal training curriculum, all QA reviewers were additionally required to complete the below Children's Bureau issued training prior to the onset of Georgia's CFSR Round 4 review:

- OSRI training (Parts 1, 2, and 3) located in OMS
- The Layla Morgan mock case located in OMS

Ongoing training ensures consistency and correct interpretation of current CFSR review items by reviewers. All veteran staff have access to and have previously reviewed the online training for the OSRI instrument on the CFSR portal. CFSR resource materials are reviewed as they are made available.

Ongoing training efforts include workgroups to focus on any questions that have arisen regarding the OSRI and ratings and ensuring consistency and fidelity. Interrater reliability reviews and policy trainings are completed annually. The review team is comfortable in engaging the Children's Bureau partners in trainings and "Question and Answer" sessions as needed.

To ensure consistency of ratings and support ongoing staff development, peer and second level reviews are completed for each case reviewed. Each month reviewers are paired for "peer review" assignments. Peer assignments alternate monthly. Peer reviewers read each other's cases prior to the Unit Manager for accuracy and consistency of ratings. Peer reviewers' feedback is captured in the QA notes section of the OSRI in OMS. Any unresolved issues are brought to the attention of the Unit Manager at the time of the second level review and discussions are had to ensure resolution prior to finalizing the case. All cases are reviewed at a second level by the Unit Manager and that feedback is also documented. The Program Manager also periodically reviews cases at a third level to ensure consistency and fidelity.

The Unit Manager and Program Manager typically alternate reviewing cases alongside the review team to ensure direct, hands-on knowledge of the review process is retained.

The QA team has consistently yielded comprehensive evaluative data and trend reports that document conformity with standards that address safety, permanency, and well-being. Routine statewide reporting is provided on all outcome measures to CQI teams, supervisors and county directors, state office program leaders, and stakeholder convenings (e.g., MDCANI trainings and regional stakeholder meetings). Delivery methods have included:



1. The Trend Comparison Chart
2. CFSR Trend Reports (for each District following each review, and quarterly statewide reports)
3. District/Regional Comparisons
4. Collateral Contact/Supervisory Staffing/Documentation Data

Supervisory focus groups allow the opportunity for QA reviewers to provide one-on-one individualized feedback regarding review results at the field level and prioritize the cornerstone skills that are needed to successfully engage with parents and providers to achieve positive outcomes and highlight good case practice. The Focus Groups are attended by front line and leadership staff in the regions. Supervisors are encouraged to ask questions during these focus groups and promote continued improvement among the case managers under their supervision. This work is ongoing.

### **Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)**

Evaluation and implementation of program improvement measures are promoted through the state's CQI efforts. Each region has an assigned QA Specialist to assist the CQI teams with educational needs related to CFSR. CQI teams include frontline staff and supervisors, county leadership, and the regional C3 Coordinator. CQI teams are operational in all fourteen regions and the Child Protective Services Intake Communications Center (CICC). CQI teams use Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model to conduct root cause analysis. This model includes six categories within two domains that indicate the areas that influence the work: Environment (Expectations and Feedback; Tools and Resources; and Incentives and Consequences) and Individual (Knowledge and Skills; Capacity; and Motivation). Each team also uses a Performance Improvement Process planning worksheet to develop and evaluate strategies. This process consists of five phases: Performance Analysis, Cause Analysis, Intervention Selection and Development, Implementation and Change Management, and Evaluation. When developing interventions, CQI teams create a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP). Once the performance problem and cause have been analyzed, the strategy is included in the QIP, as well as how it will be measured, and its expected outcome. CQI training is provided to individual teams on an as-needed basis to ensure they understand, and can effectively use, the CQI tools and resources.

The QA/CQI teams rely on the OSRI reports to pull de-identified review guides for distribution each month. The Ratings by Case report is used for preparation for case debriefs as needed. The State Rating Summary report is used to pull the data for each month's trend charts (statewide data, and then broken down by district and regions). The QA/CQI team can also pull county level reports from this resource if needed. The Face

Sheet and Participants Interviewed reports are used to track the number and type of participants engaged regularly through the review process. The QA/CQI teams regularly use the 18 Item Specific reports to look at breakdowns of performance for each measure within the items and to evaluate case practices (strengths and areas needing improvement). The analysis of information from these reports is used to develop statewide trend reports and the content for the regional focus groups.

The Division's statewide CQI team consists of regional C3 Coordinators, field program specialists, county and regional leadership, and program directors in safety, permanency, and well-being. This team meets monthly to review the QA data and practice standards, and to explore root causes for observed performance. The Division also meets with stakeholder groups to have targeted CQI discussions, review existing data, and develop strategies and solutions to improve observed performance. Feedback from these CQI discussions helped with developing the CFSP and CFSR PIP goals and strategies.

Feedback loops typically use the CQI Facilitator and Specialist who divide the counties into two groups and send each group their respective review results via an Excel spreadsheet. In the accompanying email, the CQI team requests the scheduling of individual team meetings with all staff involved in the review (SSS, CM, CD). These meetings are arranged to provide an overview of county-wide trends, offer policy reminders, and clarify the expectations for CQI reviews. Additionally, staff members have the opportunity to ask questions regarding their specific review results. Each meeting is expected to last between 10 and 20 minutes.

Other feedback processes occur after the regional/county teams complete monthly targeted case reviews targeting their strategy, and the results are provided either via email or a one-on-one feedback session. Feedback is provided via a one-on-one session with the CQI facilitator, CQI Specialist, or a CQI member and the staff member whose case was reviewed. The supervisor is also invited. Some of these teams will also provide educational sessions if it is determined that knowledge around a skill needs further development. Additionally, teams also have regional representatives who take the CQI message back to their county teams. County feedback is also provided through the regional rep.

The Family First CQI team has county representatives who give/receive feedback to/from the FF CQI team regarding challenges for implementation.

In 2022-2024, the Division created a leadership CQI team consisting of regional C3 Coordinators, field program specialists, county and regional directors, and program directors in safety, permanency, and well-being. The team met monthly to review the QA data and practice standards, explore root causes for observed performance, and consider strategies to improve outcomes. The state CQI team did not implement strategies but

Regional C3 Coordinators and CQI leads attended these convenings and shared the recommendations with their regional teams. Regional teams received this information and incorporated it, as appropriate, to develop and evaluate local initiatives. Additional CQI discussions continue to be held with external stakeholder groups (e.g., courts, caregivers, providers) to review existing data and develop strategies and solutions to improve observed performance.

Example of CQI review, strategy implementation, and feedback that supported the development of CFSP Goal 1.4:

- In Region 4, through cause analysis, it was determined that the **root cause** /performance problem was: 1. Lack of quality engagement as it relates to needs and services of children, parents, and foster parents. 2. Supervisory staffings were compliance driven rather than being of quality; also lack of expectations/feedback. 3. Lack of supervisory oversight.
- In an attempt to positively impact Items 12, 14, and 15, the **CQI strategy** was created. The strategy consists of 8 staffing review questions in which the CQI team completes monthly targeted case staffing reviews (for foster care and family preservation) and provides feedback to the supervisors. The emphasis is around the supervisors structuring their staffings around the 8 review questions. In order to **monitor** the efficacy of the strategy, the results of the targeted case reviews are tracked and trends identified/discussed. Additionally, the cases reviewed for CWQA are examined to determine if the strategy was utilized (the staffings structured around the components of the 8 review questions).
- In looking at the targeted monthly case review results, from over the past 12 months, although the scores fluctuate, there does appear to be a positive trend to indicate that the scores are showing improvement. Additionally, the May 2024 CWQA review, the region's well-being items scored higher compared to the last 2-3 years' performance.
- The heart of the CQI strategy is the **feedback loop**. The CQI Team reviews supervisor staffings each month (CQI specialist will provide a secondary review of the same cases in order to ensure accuracy). The results of the reviews are sent, by email, to the Supervisor and County Director, and the reviewer will then meet with the Supervisor, via Teams, to go over a 10-15 minute debrief discussion on the results of the review.

There are no updates at this time on how CCWIS enhancements or updates will be used to support CQI/QA and how the agency will ensure the coordination of the CCWIS Data Quality Plan and Biennial Review strategies with ongoing CQI/QA activities.

## Staff and Provider Training

**Item 26:** *How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that initial training is provided to all staff who deliver services pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions?*

Initial training is provided to 100% of staff. New Worker Training must be completed within 120 days of hire.

The Human Resources department automatically registers new staff for the New Worker Training, which has resulted in increased participation and on-time completion. The HR department notifies the Training unit of the number of new hires twice each month, so the Training Unit can arrange for availability of classroom space and training staff. This collaboration ensures new workers receive training immediately and eliminates delays.

The below chart describes the number of new case managers and the median number of days to complete the new worker training from 2022-23.

Year	Number of New Workers	Median Days to Complete Training	Percent Completing New Worker Training	Percent completing within 120 Days
CY2023	884	98	99%	(778) 88%
CY2022	928	84	99%	(882) 95%

Source: DFCS Training and Professional Development Unit

New staff are paired with a Field Practice Coach (FPC) within several days of hire if the region has one available. Seasoned staff can volunteer for the FPC role and must receive specific training and certification from the Training Unit before starting. CFSS Round 4 stakeholder interviews demonstrated the positive experiences of new case managers when a FPC was available to mentor. Feedback from case managers with an assigned FPC mentor reported being better prepared for the role and greater understanding of the required policies and procedures.

Findings from the Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment in 2022 reported that nearly three-quarters of case manager respondents agreed that “information given in the interview was enough to make an informed decision about the reality of the job” (73%), and that “training they received when they were hired prepared them for this job” (70%). Two-thirds of case manager respondents (66%) agreed that “the agency hires people whose experience/ education prepared them for the job”.

**Strategy:** The Division is developing focus groups, surveys, and other tools to collect more comprehensive data on the preparedness of new workers for their jobs.

A Case Manager Competency Tool will be utilized by front line supervisors to evaluate the preparedness of the case manager after completion of new worker training. The purpose of the “Case Manager Competency Development Tool” is to provide purposeful feedback and guidance to assist the supervisory-case manager skill development process. This tool focuses on important aspects of case practice that are not routinely addressed during monthly case staffings and is meant to supplement post-child welfare academy case manager learning and development. Data will be shared in future APSRs.

**Item 27:** *How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that ongoing training is provided for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP?*

Continuing professional development opportunities are available to 100% of staff. Training hours are available through conferences, summits, and DFCS provided courses. Courses are available in both in-person and virtual formats. Staff are required to complete 20 hours of ongoing training annually.

The below chart demonstrates the percentage of staff completing continuing professional development hours in each calendar year.

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>0-19 hours</b>	66%	76%	66%	58%	63%
<b>20+ hours</b>	33%	24%	33%	42%	37%

The Division’s career pathway requires staff to have completed the 20 hours of professional development trainings annually to be eligible for a promotion. Staff who obtain a Master of Social Work or a master’s degree in behavioral sciences are eligible to receive a 10% pay increase when they begin employment or when the degree is obtained (for current employees). A 10% salary supplement is also offered to employees who have or obtain the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) credential.

**Strategy:** The Division is developing focus groups, surveys, and other tools to collect more comprehensive data on the preparedness of supervisors for their jobs.

The Supervisor Academy training is required for new supervisors within 45 days of promotion and includes online and in-person components, as well as over-the-shoulder mentoring and administrative functions. Instructors for this course are former supervisors

and county directors. Supervisors must complete 20 hours of professional development annually. The below chart shows the number of supervisors completing the Supervisor Academy from 2020-2023.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
<b>Supervisors trained</b>	95	98	149	142

The Division has offered a “Raise the Bar” legal training course for several years which includes a mock trial experience. This training is facilitated by a former judge and prepares staff for court. Staff evaluations of the course have been routinely positive, so CIP added funds to increase the course availability for staff. The Division continues to develop and evaluate additional training opportunities for staff, including podcasts, short on-demand videos that address a variety of topics, and workshops on request.

***Item 28:*** *How well is the staff and provider training system functioning to ensure that training is occurring statewide for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state licensed or approved facilities (that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV-E) that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?*

#### Initial Caregiver Training

The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU), in partnership with Training and Professional Development, announced the statewide rollout of a new research-based, pre-service training for Georgia caregivers in February 2024. The National Training and Development Curriculum (NTDC) will replace the current IMPACT foster parent pre-service training. NTDC has been adapted to address the needs of Georgia families and equips potential foster, kinship, and adoptive parents with the information, resources, and tools needed to parent a child who has experienced trauma, separation, or loss. NTDC also gives parents access to information and resources needed to continue building their skills once they have a child in their home through Right-Time Trainings (RTT). RTT is available online at any time. Designed as a hybrid model that can be delivered both virtually and in-person, the curriculum and RTT themes are accessible from the agency’s learning management system, IOTIS.

As of June 30, 2024, Training and Professional Development has trained 337 DFCS staff, foster home development contractors, and Child Placement Agency (CPA) trainers. As a result, 225 caregivers have completed the NTDC pre-service model throughout the state.

In 2023, there were 5,037 caregivers approved. This number can serve as the estimated number of caregivers that completed pre-service training. The state's annual goal is to increase the number of approved homes by 20%.

### Ongoing Caregiver Training

Resource Development (RD) staff must verify that all approved foster caregivers obtain a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of Continued Parent Development (CPD) each calendar year. Foster caregivers are now afforded more flexibility in obtaining those hours; the policy now allows that annual training hours can also be obtained from personal growth and development activities (e.g., counseling, support groups, stress management, nutrition, etc.). Hours from these activities need to be verified with a written statement by the professional providing the service.

The Caregiver Coaching Academy continues to assist caregivers with obtaining their ongoing CPD hours by providing caregivers with one hour of training for each session they attend. Caregivers can also obtain training through the Georgia Center for Resources and Support, which offers several live trainings each month and hundreds of on-demand courses tailored to specific needs of children and families. TBRI trainings are encouraged for caregivers to support caring for youth with behavioral or complex needs. Participants report positive feedback after attending a TBRI training. The Division also utilizes a relative support network to include monthly sessions for relatives on topics directly related to children in foster care and relative supports. Completed caregiver trainings are tracked and monitored in Georgia SHINES.

Caregiver Feedback Surveys are administered to caregivers during their annual re-evaluation, requesting feedback on a variety of topics. OPM regularly review the survey responses and works to address any areas of concern. The below table summarizes the foster parent experience related to training and preparedness in 2023. Over 90% of respondents agreed that the training offered to them helped them to meet the needs of the child(ren) in their care.

Tell us about your experience as a Foster Parent			
	Yes	No	Total
Did you feel confident in your ability to meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	84	2	86

Did you feel that your family was well matched with the child(ren) placed in your care?	76	6	82
Do you feel that you were offered support services to help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	71	12	83
Do you feel that you were offered training which could help you meet the needs of the child(ren) placed in your care?	76	7	83

Source: DFCS Diligent Recruitment Plan, 2023

### Initial CPA/CCI Staff Training

New case management staff are required to complete a 40-hour Foundations classroom training. The Office of Provider Management (OPM) team monitors training compliance. At the conclusion of each training course, participants are assessed on their knowledge. A passing score is 80%. When CM staff don't complete the training by the required deadline, a non-compliance letter is sent to the agency, advising that the staff member is not able to continue serving in a CM role until the training has been completed. These individuals are required to be removed from the CM role and reassigned to another position within the agency.

OPM request participant feedback via surveys to determine if the Foundations course trained them adequately to do their job. In the most recent survey, 100% of child welfare workers and 83% of supervisors said it did. OPM regularly reviews the feedback to make enhancements to the Foundations training.

### Ongoing CPA/CCI Staff Training

OPM also holds a monthly partnership meeting with all CPA providers, and quarterly partnership meetings with CCI and ILP providers. These partnership meetings are held in a virtual format. In these meetings, OPM provides training on various topics, technical assistance, policy updates and discusses trends related to program operation. Feedback from providers suggests that they find the trainings beneficial, and the trainings meet the attendees' expected goals.

When child welfare policy is newly developed or updated, the information is shared throughout the agency and to providers via the GA+SCORE website. This site is a single point of access for foster caregivers, RBWO providers, and DFCS staff. GA+SCORE also provides direct links to training registration for RBWO Foundations, IMPACT/NTDC and Train-the-Trainer, Reasonable and Prudent Parenting, Every Child Every Month, Casey Life Skills Assessments, and others.



	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
CPA staff required to complete RBWO Foundations	137	117	86	148	129
CPA staff completing the course by the end of the calendar year	129	83	71	108	125
CPA caregivers required to meet annual training hours	4,365	4,216	3,974	3,643	3,670
CPA caregivers completing the annual training requirement by the end of the calendar year	3,094	3,227	3,015	2,718	3,615

Source: DFCS Office of Provider Management

## Service Array and Resource Development

**Item 29:** *How well is the service array and resource development system functioning to ensure that the following array of services is accessible in all political jurisdictions covered by the Child and Family Services Plan (i.e. statewide)?*

1. *Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs;*
2. *Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children in order to create a safe home environment;*
3. *Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable; and*
4. *Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.*

The state provides an array of services to support children and families through a continuum of public and private agencies, organizations, and funding sources. During CFSR4 stakeholder interviews, gaps were noted for services relating to transportation and housing in rural areas, substance abuse services, particularly for fathers, specialized services for children with complex needs, and ABA therapies for children with autism disorders. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about long waiting lists and the quality of some of the services. Assessments and services for parents is an area of concern for the Division, with ongoing exploration of barriers and solutions. The Division is coordinating with public and private agencies, and the state Legislature, to better understand and address these service needs. SR282 created the Senate Foster Care

and Adoption Study Committee in 2023, which heard from several individuals about the need for more funding and service availability for courts and families. These would lead to healthier families and better outcomes. The Committee also heard about the need for more investment in front-end behavioral health services to lower the acuity of need and later costs. The Committee made several recommendations in the 2024 legislative session targeting these areas of need across several state agencies to improve outcomes for children and families. Agency leaders are meeting regularly and collaborating to ensure the recommended steps are implemented. Specific areas of discussion include ABA, services for children with autism and other behavioral health needs, and medically fragile youth. Several of these are incorporated into the CFSP goals and objectives, including the recent DHS technology modernization efforts, which are targeted toward improving service timeliness or quality gaps.

### Assessment Services

- Systems are in place to ensure children are referred for trauma and health assessment within 10 days of entering care. The Argo Provider Portal was developed as part of the Division's technology modernization efforts and allows for service authorization requests to be sent out to all providers quickly. The portal supports staff in selecting a provider that can provide the service in a timely fashion. Case Managers can use the Argo Provider Portal to access a more expansive list of possible providers and connect with providers who can offer more individualized services. Case managers can also receive attachments from providers directly to their external documentation in Georgia SHINES. Early results show increased timeliness of service initiation.

### Basic Services

- The Division has developed a statewide safety net for basic services through [State of Hope](#), an initiative that seeks to encourage nonprofits, philanthropies, government, businesses and communities to collaborate closely to build local safety nets that will prevent conditions that contribute to disparities in education, threaten a family's self-sufficiency and could lead to child abuse and neglect. Community providers who are invited to join the State of Hope ecosystem receive up to \$50,000/year in grants supported by PSSF and CAPTA.
- In 2023, there are 455 sites participating in the SoH ecosystem (funded and unfunded organizations).

### Health Services

- The Division has expanded access to health services through telemedicine. Clients can connect with therapists and providers outside of their community using virtual visits, reducing the likelihood of transportation barriers or long wait lists.
- The amended FY24 state budget included \$15 million in transferred and new funding to support construction of the Gateway child and adolescent crisis stabilization unit in Savannah.

#### ILP Services

- The Division has expanded services for older youth, by leveraging the resources of the Chafee/GA-RYSE Independent Living program and CREW-Cultivating the Rising Experienced Worker program, along with the [Multi-Agency Alliance for Children \(MAAC\)](#). Older youth in care have increased access to transportation, employment, healthcare, and housing supports in their communities. Life skills programs are routinely offered for youth, and transitional meetings include local service providers and youth advocates, so that young people can ask questions and receive specific guidance on their needs directly from the individuals responsible for the programs.

#### Language Services

- When there is a language barrier, translation services are available for clients. The Georgia Department of Administrative Services (DOAS) secured a statewide contract for translation and interpretation services. Staff can request translation services for non-English speakers through regular protocols. For the deaf and hard-of-hearing community, the Georgia Commission on Interpreters maintains a list of recommended sign language interpreters who have demonstrated knowledge of legal settings and legal language.

#### Substance Abuse Treatment

- The Division has expanded partnership opportunities with substance abuse treatment providers and recovery community organizations (RCO) through the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD). These collaborations support caregivers with substance use disorder often by using peer recovery coaches to help families who are experiencing similar circumstances. DBHDD supports the Georgia Council for Recovery to offer the Certified Addiction Recovery Empowerment Specialist (CARES) Academy to create a workforce of peers. The CARES Academy is a 40-hour training course with lectures and workshops, and the first of its kind in the country to be Medicaid billable.

**Item 30:** *How well is the service array and resource development system functioning statewide to ensure that the services in item 29 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?*

The state provides an array of services to support children and families through a continuum of public and private agencies, organizations, and funding sources. During CFSR4 stakeholder interviews, challenges were identified with individualizing services, particularly in case plan development, families in rural communities, and for children with complex needs, including autism disorders. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about long waiting lists and the quality of some of the services.

Strategies to improve the individualization of services are also referenced in Item 29, including expanding partnerships with behavioral health organizations to provide more robust treatment options for families. These include the FFT and MST options provided through Family First, and the newly formed Community Action Teams. In addition, the state is seeking to expand the number of accountability courts over the next several years, including family treatment courts (FTC), to better meet the specific needs of caregivers. Current performance data on the efficacy of FTCs are limited, but anecdotal evidence suggests it is a helpful resource and results in positive outcomes.

Additional strategies to improve service array and individualization of services will be developed and incorporated into the CFSR PIP.

The Division developed a survey to obtain feedback from people with lived experience on a variety of metrics relating to their involvement with the child welfare system. In December 2022, 81 youth responded to the survey; all were age 14-17 and currently in foster care. In February 2023, 186 foster and adoptive caregivers responded to the survey. The below table shows the responses for the service-related questions. Youth were more likely than caregivers to rate their satisfaction with services as excellent/good.

		Excellent/Good	Fair/Poor	Skipped/Unable to Answer the Question
YOUTH	How responsive was DFCS and other providers to your specific racial and cultural needs?	77%	16%	7%
	How well did DFCS and other providers make sure you received the services and supports you requested?	63%	35%	2%

	How satisfied are you with the services and supports offered to you by DFCS?	91%	5%	4%
CAREGIVERS	How responsive was DFCS and other providers to your specific racial and cultural needs?	72%	18%	10%
	How well did DFCS and other providers make sure you received the services and supports you requested?	59%	41%	0%
	How satisfied are you with the services and supports offered to you by DFCS?	75%	23%	2%

Source: DFCS Lived Experience Survey, Dec 2022 and Feb 2023

## Agency Responsiveness to the Community

**Item 31:** *How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that, in implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and developing related Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs), the state engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?*

The Division has frequent and robust engagement with child welfare stakeholders (e.g., court partners, service providers, placement providers, and prevention services) across the state, and responds to recommendations made by stakeholders and persons with lived experience. Descriptions of involvement with developing the CFSP goals and objectives are included in the [Stakeholder Collaboration](#) section of this report.

### Technology Modernization

As part of the agency's technology modernization effort and in response to requests from foster parents and CASAs, the Division developed Communicare, a set of interconnected web portals specifically designed to support and enhance child welfare programs. This portal serves three primary user groups – Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), foster parents, and parents – and seamlessly integrates with Georgia SHINES to ensure efficient and secure data management and communication. Communicare was launched in DFCS regions 2 and 5 in October 2023, and rolled out statewide in January 2024. Communicare features include chat capabilities, multi-channel notifications, mobile

friendly access, secure data management, child data and case documentation access, document upload and sharing, calendar sharing, and appointment creation.

## Data Sharing

The Division provides child welfare data to the public through the [DHS data dashboard](#) and continues to promote feedback loops with the field, judges, medical providers, educators, and the CAPTA Citizen Review Panels. Community members are permitted to participate in DHS Board meetings – the meetings are open to the public.

DFCS continues to work with the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) and the Department of Public Health (DPH) regarding Plans of Safe Care and ways to provide services for families with substance affected newborns. Many contracted organizations receive referrals directly from DFCS, as well as hospitals, healthcare providers and courts.

The Georgia Department of Education provides access for DFCS case managers and Education Support staff to the [Department of Education \(DOE\) Statewide Longitudinal data \(SLDS\) dashboard](#). This dashboard allows staff to view historical education records including enrollment history, attendance, assessments, and grades, and current information such as school and special education services. In participating schools, Individual Education Plans can be assessed. DFCS Education Support Monitors also complete educational evaluations and connect youth to tutorial resources as needed.

The Division has monthly leadership calls with the Court Improvement Program to review concerns, share data, and collaborate on solutions to improve permanency outcomes. CIP has provided feedback on direct case involvement, bringing both concerns and successes to the agency along with recommendations. DFCS staff also participate in the Justice for Children committee of the Georgia Supreme Court, regularly sharing CFSR performance data and trends with the judges, attorneys, and legislators in attendance.

Provider meetings are routinely held with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC), Together Georgia, the Adoption and Foster Parent Association of Georgia (AFPAG), the Foster Stronger Coalition, and others. The Commissioner also participates in Supreme Court of Georgia's Justice 4 Children Committee, Safe Harbor Commission, and the First Lady's Children's Cabinet.

The Policy and Regulations Unit has a staff person who serves as a liaison to the Georgia Tribes. The Governor's Council on American Indian Affairs meets bi-monthly to discuss concerns with tribal burial sites in Georgia, legislation that may impact tribal communities, and child welfare issues (as needed). The tribal liaison facilitates discussions and updates

of the CFSP and invites the tribal leaders to any DFCS meetings relevant to the development of the CFSP and APSR.

***Item 32:*** *How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that the state's services under the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?*

The Division regularly coordinates with other federally funded agencies and organizations serving overlapping populations of children and families.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is funded totally by federal funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). No State appropriations are used in the administration of this program. The Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program within 149 of the state's 159 counties. The 10 counties which DCA does not administer are: Bibb, Chatham, Clayton, Cobb, Dekalb (Decatur), Fulton (Atlanta), Glynn, Muscogee, Richmond, and Sumter. These counties are served by their own respective housing authorities.

DFCS staff in the regions maintain processes for requesting HUD resources. Georgia's housing voucher program maintains a long waiting list of applicants. Staff can encourage or assist families or young adults formerly in foster care to request HUD vouchers from the local housing authority and be placed on the waiting list. The Division has a partnership with Project Community Connections, Inc., a non-profit that provides housing assessments, counseling, and advocacy for families in metro Atlanta. For every family placed into housing, PCCI also provides case management and follow-up services.

Georgia SHINES data reports in CY2023, 82% of children aged 0-5 were enrolled in an early education setting (i.e. Early Head Start, Head Start, Pre-Kindergarten, or other quality rated childcare programs). Georgia has 32 agencies that offer Head Start and Early Head Start services through a variety of models based on the needs of the local community. These models may include center-based care, home visiting, childcare partnership locations, and family childcare homes. These services are provided to over 28,000 low-income preschool children birth through five-years-old and their families. According to the Georgia Head Start Association's annual report, in FY22, 902 children experiencing homelessness and 334 children in foster care were enrolled.

The Early Childhood Collaboration Unit was created to provide comprehensive monitoring, consultation, support, and advocacy for children in care, ages birth – 5 years old, who qualify for early childhood educational programming and/or childcare (Head



Start, Child and Parent Services (CAPS), and Georgia Pre-K). Quarterly training is provided for DFCS staff, foster caregivers, and placement providers to provide information on the resources available from the ECCU. With an emphasis on building and fostering relationships that support educational stability at an early age, the ECCU works collaboratively with partners to ensure the educational needs of this population are met. Partners include the county DFCS offices, other state agencies, and external stakeholders, such as the [Georgia Head Start State Collaboration Office](#), whose mission is to foster partnerships between federally funded Head Start programs and other entities in the state that serve low-income children (birth to school entry) and their families.

The Division has an established referral process that provides a direct pathway to enrollment in Head Start. Staff worked collaboratively with the State's Head Start Collaboration Office, Head Start Association, and all Head Start and Early Head Start grantees throughout the state to develop this Head Start Referral Process:

1. DFCS Field Operations Staff initiates the Head Start referral and submits it via email utilizing the DFCS HS/Pre-K Referral Form.
2. Early Childhood Coordinators contact the HS/EHS Programs for availability and provide status updates (enrollment availability and next steps for enrollment) to field operations.
3. The Head Start Grantee contacts the Foster Parent/Case Manager to schedule the application appointment.
4. After completion, the grantee emails the Early Childhood Coordinator to provide an enrollment update.

Child Welfare Policy 10.16 describes requirements and practice guidance to submit the Head Start referral form electronically to [dfcs.headstart@dhs.ga.gov](mailto:dfcs.headstart@dhs.ga.gov) on all children age birth to five years. In CY2023, approximately 20 referrals were submitted via email and were then connected to a Head Start grantee.

Referring children to Head Start is always the first choice. However, due to the families' immediate supervision needs, enrolling the children in Head Start programs is often challenging. Observed barriers are related to the program requirements, enrollment process, and slot availability. In addition, Childcare and Parent Services Benefits (CAPS) are more accessible and often utilized in situations where Head Start programming is unavailable.

The Department of Public Health (DPH) is a partner to provide screening and support to birth mothers and families with substance use issues, and to provide health assessments for infants and young children through Children First, the single point of entry for all DPH Child Health programs and services for children from birth to five years old.



Children First links eligible children to early intervention services, as well as other public health programs and community-based resources.

The Division utilizes [Georgia Gateway](#) as a streamlined, one-stop-shop resource for individuals in the community to apply for, check, or renew benefits, as well as report household or income changes and upload required documents. Georgia Gateway served as a critical tool throughout the Covid pandemic to ensure users were able to remotely request medical assistance, childcare benefits, SNAP, or TANF, and explore eligibility for other cash and food assistance programs. Participating agencies on the Gateway platform include DFCS, Department of Community Health, Department of Early Care and Learning, and Department of Public Health. Gateway continues to be updated for a more user-friendly experience and to provide additional resources. This work is ongoing.

The Division's Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) is currently leading, supporting or serving in a partnership role in all statewide early childhood and child maltreatment prevention efforts in Georgia, and is committed to continued collaboration, participation in strategic planning processes, enhancing relationships among partners, assuring alignment of early childhood strategies and activities, presenting information to policy-makers and advocacy groups, maintaining a focus on the vision, and providing leadership in all arenas. PCS uses CBCAP funds to prioritize ensuring that services are well integrated into the state's continuum of family-centered, preventive services for children and families. For example, home visiting programs funded through MIECHV, which is administered through Georgia's Department of Public Health, benefit from the First Steps referral and screening services funded in part by PCS.

The Division of Child Support Services (DCSS) within the Department of Human Resources serves as a resource for DFCS case managers and communities to support non-custodial parents in caring for their children. The DCSS Fatherhood Program is well-regarded within the counties and holds monthly "fatherhood conversations" to provide individualized support and resources to interested parents, including emotional wellness training and accountability coaching. The most recent fiscal year data show that 4,588 Georgians received services from the program, 865 enrolled participants were referred to GED or short-term training programs, \$5.5 million collected, and financial support was provided to 10,585 children whose parents are enrolled. The DCSS Fatherhood Program partners with Omega Psi Phi fraternity, Georgia Department of Labor, Georgia Department of Corrections, the Technical Colleges of Georgia, the Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Goodwill Career Center.

## [Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention](#)

**Item 33:** *How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that state standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?*

DFCS Resource Developers (RDs) complete comprehensive written evaluations of the overall quality and functioning of each approved caregiver every other year that includes a recommendation for reapproval or disapproval. RDs also review the initial and re-evaluations completed by the RBWO private providers. In reviewing these, the RDs confirm that the foster parent received the required training, medical, number of home visits and safety screenings completed timely. A home cannot be approved without pre-service training or a medical and safety screening.

Performance Based Placement (PBP) is a system of monitoring and data reporting that generates scores for RBWO providers. PBP scorecards are produced quarterly using providers' self-reported data, data from Georgia SHINES, and results from OPM monitoring activities. Scores are distributed to providers and posted publicly each quarter. DFCS case managers use provider scores to inform placement decisions. OPM uses provider scores to identify opportunities for technical assistance and training. Any PBP score below 70% is a failing grade and will require a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). A PIP is required whenever a provider fails to achieve at least a score of 70% in any of the overall review categories which are Safety, Permanency and Well-Being and/or if scores within those categories are below the 70% threshold.

The below chart demonstrates the number of scored programs in each quarter of FY2022-2023 that earned a failing grade.

	FY2023				FY2022			
	Q4	Q3	Q2	Q1	Q4	Q3	Q2	Q1
<b>CCI</b>	4/118	5/116	3/118	5/120	5/125	4/127	3/129	7/131
<b>CPA</b>	7/104	7/103	4/102	8/104	3/100	2/101	1/106	3/109
<b>ILP</b>	20/44	9/44	11/44	19/53	23/54	22/61	23/67	23/66
<b>TLP</b>	2/9	2/9	0/9	0/9	1/10	1/10	1/10	2/10

Source: DFCS Office of Provider Management

The Monitoring Specialists with OPM conducts Safety Checks twice each year of all providers. Safety Checks review all RBWO staff and CPA caregivers for five required safety check items:

1. Criminal Background Check
2. Pardons/parole history
3. Sex offender history
4. CPS history
5. Department of Corrections

OPM staff completed 100% of the 504 required Safety Checks in CY2022. Each Safety Check review looks at all five required safety check items and a Corrective Action Plan (CAP) is requested if there are any safety checks out of compliance. 240 CAPs were requested in CY2022 due to non-compliance with at least one of the safety check items. OPM does not collect data to show which safety checks were non-compliant for each Safety Check Review.

***Item 34:*** *How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that the state complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?*

DFCS Child Welfare Policy and RBWO Minimum Standards uniformly outline the requirements for criminal background checks. Staff must conduct a check of the Georgia crime information databases on adult household members as needed when providing Child Protective Services (CPS), including when assessing Safety Resources and Temporary Alternatives to Foster Care, as well as a check of national and state crime information databases utilizing electronic fingerprinting (Live Scan) on any prospective foster and adoptive parent before the applicant may be finally approved for placement of a child, regardless of whether foster care maintenance payments or adoption assistance payments are to be made on behalf of the child. This includes all adults (age 18 and over) residing in the home (permanently or temporarily) who have access to children placed in the home. The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) within the Department of Human Services is responsible for reviewing criminal background information and providing clearances on CPA families, CCI direct care staff, and CPA/CCI case support workers. OIG also provides criminal background checks for DFCS foster family homes determination if they may be approved to provide foster care.

There were 504 Desk Safety Checks required in CY2022, and 100% were completed by OPM staff. As a result of the Safety Checks, 240 Corrective Action Plans (CAP) were requested due to non-compliance. OPM identified 33 CAPs due to non-compliance with the criminal background check requirement.

CPA providers are required to update the criminal background check during the annual re-evaluation period. In the instance that a re-evaluation is not completed timely and the home goes into unapproved status in SHINES, the CPA is required to have the criminal background check completed on the caregiver and submitted to OPM so that the home can be placed back into approval status. OPM has developed a process by which CPA providers will be sent alerts at multiple time intervals when there is a criminal background check coming due. This is in place to aid CPA providers in tracking upcoming criminal background checks that are due to be repeated.

***Item 35: How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide?***

The Division ensures that the diligent recruitment of prospective foster and adoptive parents reflects the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the State's care. Data on the demographics of children in care can be found at [dhs.georgia.gov/division-family-children-services-child-welfare](https://dhs.georgia.gov/division-family-children-services-child-welfare). Georgia's Round 4 CFSR Statewide Assessment provides descriptive data on the race/ethnicity of foster children and their foster placements. In most cases, the race/ethnicity of the child matches that of the foster placement. The Division recognizes this opportunity to recruit additional Hispanic and Asian caregivers to serve as placement resources for children.

To ensure continued recruitment of caregivers that reflect the racial and ethnic diversity of children in care, OPM is only considering applications for providers that are offering placement services that meet the current placement needs of the Division. OPM posts the current placement needs on the GA+SCORE website. Interested providers are directed there when they have an interest in obtaining a contract with the Division as a placement resource.

A key DFCS recruitment strategy is the Foster Georgia parent inquiry line (877-210-KIDS) and the FosterGeorgia.com website. It is the first point of contact to obtain information about becoming a foster or adoptive parent in Georgia. The Foster Georgia line continues to be staffed five days a week, Monday-Thursday 8 AM – 6 PM and Friday's 8 AM–5 PM. The Live Chat feature through Foster Georgia is open Monday – Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM. The Foster Georgia inquiry line is included in all recruitment materials and communications about fostering and adopting.

As part of Georgia's technology modernization efforts, CRRU is preparing to launch a modernization project in 2024 specifically aimed at streamlining foster parent inquiries, onboarding, approval, and re-evaluation process. Additional strategies for improving recruitment and retention of caregivers are referenced in the state's Diligent Recruitment and Retention Plan and include improving organizational effectiveness regarding resource development and placement matching, streamlining effectiveness of recruitment and placement support for youth, creating separate kinship foster home approval standards, and retaining approved caregivers for at least five years.

**Item 36:** *How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide?*

The Division's Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) works with all 50 states, District of Columbia, and the Virgin Islands, to facilitate timely placements for children.

Cases are monitored weekly by ICPC staff to ensure timeliness. ICPC staff maintain a database of all cases and send monthly updates to regional CRRU staff that identify any home study requests that are approaching the 60-day overdue mark. CRRU teams are required to respond to ICPC with the requested progress updates on the overdue cases within five days of receiving the information. In many regions, CRRU staff have developed a Standard Operating Procedure manual to define the processes and timelines required to complete interjurisdictional home studies within the prescribed time frames. Regions with active SOPs in place and dedicated staff are able to adhere to the required timelines. ICPC also sends monthly updates to other states when overdue home studies are identified; however, responses are not always received within the requested five-day period.

#### **ICPC Foster and Adoptive Home Study Requests**

		<b>CY2022</b>	<b>CY2021</b>	<b>CY2020</b>
Georgia as Sending State	Number of ICPC home study requests sent to other states	302 -98 for Adoption -204 for Foster	265 -115 Adoption -150 foster	266 -103 Adoption -163 Foster
	Number of ICPC placements	138/302 (46%) -61 for Adoption -77 for Foster	107/265 (40%) -60 Adoption -47 Foster	139/266 (52%) -79 Adoptions -60 Foster
	Timely home study completed by other states	94/302 (31%)	93/265 (35%)	81/266 (30%)
Georgia as Receiving State	Number of ICPC home study requests received from other states	707 -184 for Adoption -523 for Foster	706 200 Adoption 506 Foster	702 209 Adoption 493 Foster

	Timely home study requests completed for other states	192/707 (27%)	178/706 (25%)	126/702 (18%)
	Number of ICPC placements	194/707 (27%) -58 for Adoption -136 for Foster	220/706 (31%) -76 Adoptions -144 Foster	140/702 (20%) -61 Adoption -79 Foster

Source: National Electronic Interstate Compact Enterprise (NEICE)

The Georgia Legislature supported the revision of the ICPC with SB483 (2024), which simplifies and expedites interstate placements of children. This new code section will immediately replace the current ICPC state code upon enactment of the national revision by the 35<sup>th</sup> state.

## Plan for Enacting the State’s Vision

The 2025-2029 CFSP must address the state’s plan for improving its child welfare programs, services, and outcomes for children and families over a five-year period. It is based on:

- Data collected from the state’s 2020-2024 CFSP
- ACF Data Profiles
- Data and stakeholder interview findings from CFSR Rounds 3 and 4
- Recommendations from staff and stakeholder discussions
- Recommendations from the state’s CAPTA Citizen Review Panels
- Recommendations from the Youth Advisory Board and Parent Advisory Council
- Recommendations from the Court Improvement Program

The state will make efforts to adopt and implement strategies that adhere to a Health Equity Framework, which expands data collection and reporting to assess causes of disparities, leading to increased capacity of the organizations in the child welfare system. This approach works to achieve fair and just distribution of the social resources and social opportunities needed to achieve well-being.

To develop the CFSP goals and strategies, the Federal Plans Unit convened with staff and stakeholders over a period of 18 months. Division leaders within other program areas also convened their program staff and external partners during this time and shared summaries from these meetings. Recommendations from the state’s APSR meetings were also used to develop the CFSP goals. Discussions often centered around CFSR data, observations and analyses of outcomes, and suggested ideas for improvement. These ideas were grouped into themes, and the most common themes were used to develop the CFSP goals. After the goals were developed and approved, staff and stakeholders discussed potential S.M.A.R.T. objectives, strategies, and action steps. Descriptions of these convenings is described in the [Stakeholder Collaboration](#) section.

<h3>Goal 1: Build Workforce and Staff Competencies</h3>
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Child welfare systems nationwide are experiencing increased staff turnover and vacancy rates among frontline workers. There are not enough staff to do quality work, and the combination of high expectations and low pay only exacerbates the workforce crisis, leading to a negative impact on child welfare outcomes. The state is employing creative solutions to recruit and retain talent, along with providing increases in pay and improved

employee benefits. Georgia intends to implement these strategies that will increase staff recruitment and retention, staff competency and staff support, thereby creating a professional and efficient workforce. An increased workforce with improved competencies will result in improved safety, permanency, and well-being.

The 2020-2024 CFSP included strategic goals and objectives to create a competent, satisfied, effective, and ever-developing workforce. The Workforce Excellence project with the National Child Welfare Workforce Institute (NCWWI) provided support for this goal for the duration of the CFSP reporting period. The partnership resulted in two organizational health assessments, regional Action Teams, Implementation Teams, change initiative projects through the LIFT Academy, and a statewide Workforce Advisory Council. While some of these initiatives are no longer active or placed on pause, the Division continues to explore opportunities to build workforce and staff competencies.

Staff competencies are observable skills and behaviors that contribute to workplace success. Staff competencies give employees a common language to describe how they work together, what to expect from each other, and how to maximize their potential. Workforce support provides a way to sustain effective provision of services, through practice changes, staff changes, and other external stressors. By focusing on this goal area, DFCS can target its recruitment of talented individuals and leverage their abilities to achieve positive outcomes for children and families, while promoting a positive organizational climate. Staff competencies and workforce supports will address the following objectives:

- Accountability: holding oneself and others responsible and accountable to meet commitments.
- Collaboration: building partnerships and working collaboratively with others to meet shared objectives.
- Instilling Trust: gaining the confidence and trust of families and caregivers through honesty, integrity, and authenticity.
- Valuing Differences: recognizing the value that different perspectives and cultures bring to an organization.
- Workforce recruitment and selection: a broad range of activities associated with recruitment practices to attract a large, diverse pool of candidates and then selecting the best people using standard and inclusive protocols.
- Work conditions: Staff at all levels must receive competitive and equitable salary, compensation, and benefits and have the necessary tools and resources in the office and field to feel safe, supported, and valued as professionals and individuals.
- Training and professional development: Education at universities and colleges generates a pool of workforce candidates with entry-level knowledge, while professional development prepares newly hired staff with the knowledge and skills



to do the job and seasoned staff with ongoing skill development and potential for advancement.

The state will implement and update, as needed, the following workforce recruitment and retention strategies throughout the five-year CFSP reporting period to ensure ongoing improvement in observed outcomes and staff competencies. Additional supports may be developed as the child welfare system stakeholders evaluate performance and obtain access to new and improved training platforms and resources.

CFSP Goal 1 is also referenced in Safety Outcome 1, Permanency Outcome 1, and Georgia's CFSR PIP to increase the timeliness and quality of case management activities.

### **Objective 1.1: Increase number of new DFCS case managers hired annually**

- Benchmark: DFCS will increase the annual number of new hires, reaching 950 new case managers in 2028

### Recruitment Strategies

#### Title IV-E Education Program

- The title IV-E child welfare education program is a partnership between DFCS and participating universities – Albany State University, Augusta University, Fort Valley State University, Georgia State University, Kennesaw State University, Savannah State University, and the University of Georgia. Individuals selected into the Title IV-E Program must first be accepted into a participating Georgia School of Social Work, and the program pays for tuition, fees, and a stipend for books and mileage. The program aims to develop and retain an educated, professional, stable, and committed workforce for DFCS. Students selected for the program are required to work in a social services position for one calendar year for every academic year of funding received.

#### Peers with Lived Experience

- The Division is exploring strategies to recruit parents with lived experience for a Peer Specialist program. Similarly, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) employs Certified Peer Specialists (CPS), who work from the perspective of their lived experience to help build environments conducive to substance use recovery. DFCS has observed challenges in recruitment relating to criminal records and is collaborating with DBHDD to overcome these observed barriers. The Division is also exploring

options to recruit former foster youth for positions within the Department of Human Services (DHS).

#### Realistic Job Preview Days

- The Division is employing virtual reality headsets as a recruitment tool at job fairs and other hiring events. Introducing the experience of case management for prospective employees enhances the recruitment of candidates who are better prepared for the work. Prospective employees can also speak directly with current DFCS case managers, supervisors, hiring managers, and human resources representatives at these events.

#### Salary Enhancements

- Veterans hired by DHS who are eligible for veteran's education benefits may receive a salary enhancement up to \$2,400 per month in tax-free benefits through the GI Bill On-the-Job Training (OJT) Program. Eligible veterans can receive these benefits as income supplements for up to 24 months for entry-level positions.
- The Division's career pathway rewards staff who obtain a Master of Social Work (MSW) or a master's degree in behavioral sciences. They are eligible to receive a 10% pay increase when they begin employment or when the degree is obtained (for current employees). A 10% salary supplement is also offered to employees who have or obtain the Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) credential.

#### **Objective 1.2: Decrease the number of case managers leaving DFCS annually**

- Benchmark: No more than 500 case managers annually will terminate employment with the agency by 2028

#### **Objective 1.3: Increase the percentage of DFCS case managers with at least 12 consecutive months of employment**

- Benchmark: 80% of case managers will remain in their role for at least one year by 2028

#### Retention Strategies

Child welfare staff that experience secondary traumatic stress, exposure to violence on the job, or work-related burnout are more likely to leave the job to protect their personal health and wellness. In the 2022 Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment

(COHA), staff reported relatively high levels of work-related burnout. Respondents reported that the work is often or very often emotionally exhausting (46%) and that they feel worn out at the end of the working day (45%). Half of the respondents (50%) indicated having enough energy for family and friends in their leisure time. 61% of staff who work directly with families indicated that they had been exposed to violence in the field (e.g. yelled at, shouted at, or sworn at by a client or other household member); 31% had been threatened by a client without physical contact. Approximately 45% of staff respondents reported PTSD-level symptoms (a score of 38 or more) in the past seven days due to secondary traumatic stress. Staff were most likely to experience thinking about clients when they didn't intend to (36%), trouble sleeping (26%), and trouble concentrating (25%). Staff were relatively satisfied with their workplace physical environment (e.g., workspace, cleanliness), technology access, and safety when in their DFCS office. Respondents were most satisfied with their physical safety in the office (88% were satisfied or very satisfied; 7% indicated this was not applicable to them).

Georgia's Child Protective Services Advisory Committee (a CAPTA Panel) initiated inquiries in 2022-2023 to identify root causes for staff turnover. No specific root causes were identified, and the CPS Advisory Committee recommended in their 2024 annual report that the Division continue efforts to identify the reasons for high staff exits, low staff retention, and decreased numbers of staff with employment longevity. The CPS Advisory Committee further recommended that the Division implement strategies for improvement that address the reasons why staff terminate their employment. Division leadership is taking steps to address the issues that lead to work-related burnout and staff turnover and ensure staff feel safe and supported. The Division recognizes that staff at all levels must receive competitive and equitable salary, compensation, and benefits, and have the necessary tools and resources in the office and field to feel valued as professionals and individuals. These supports will improve staff retention at all levels.

### Peer Support

- Several regions utilize Lead Case Managers and Mentor FPS to provide peer support to new staff. Action/Implementation Teams and the planned DHS Workforce Council are other tools that the Division will use to improve staff competency and provide peer support to the workforce. Creating a work environment where peer support thrives can mitigate burnout, improve worker well-being, and reduce turnover.
- The Division is actively recruiting experienced staff to serve as Field Practice Coaches to increase new worker confidence and competence. Field Practice Coaches (FPC) are seasoned field staff who provide regular over-the-shoulder training and support to new hires. Coaches are compensated for each new worker

that they mentor. To serve in an FPC role, staff must complete specific FPC training and receive certification from the Training Unit. New workers are paired with a FPC within several days of hire if the region has one available. FPC must possess knowledge of federal and state laws, and agency policy, and have received at least a 3.0 rating on their most recent annual performance review. FPC must obtain 20 hours of professional development training each year and cannot have any disciplinary action. Feedback from case managers who have a FPC mentor report being better prepared for their role and have greater understanding of the required child welfare policies and procedures.

### Personal and Professional Development

- The Division provides in-person and virtual training opportunities through several platforms and venues, including the Learning Management System, summits for frontline staff, county directors, and regional directors, and professional development conferences. The Office of Human Resources promotes the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) monthly learning series featuring experienced EAP trainers who conduct live training sessions. These sessions are often scheduled during the midday/lunch hour and cover an array of topics focused on improving and managing staff emotional health and leadership skills, including “Battling Burnout”, “Supporting Colleagues through Difficult Times”, “Managing Psychosocial Risks in the Workplace”, and “Self-Care Toolkit”.

### Compensation

- In addition to job training tools and over-the-shoulder support, the state legislature has recently approved several increases in salary for staff. In the FY2024 budget, employees received a \$1,000 bonus, and the FY2025 budget provided a 4% cost of living increase with an additional \$3,000 salary increase for DFCS frontline caseworkers. All staff have the option to convert 40 hours of annual leave into a one-time cash payout, resulting in a 2% salary increase.

### **Objective 1.4: Increase the percentage of case managers/supervisors reporting “feeling prepared for the work” after completing New Worker Training**

- **Benchmark:** Over 70% of case managers will feel prepared for their role by 2028

## Evaluating Staff Preparedness

### Case Manager Competency Development Tool

- The Division is taking steps to improve staff preparedness by implementing an individualized Case Manager Competency Development tool. This tool is meant for new case managers during their first year of employment to help with targeted skill development, but it can also be used with veteran staff. The Competency Development tool assists supervisors in providing purposeful feedback and guidance for case managers. Supervisors can focus on important aspects of case practice that are not routinely addressed during monthly case staffings and supplement preparedness strategies and learning after completing new worker training. The tool is separated into three primary program areas; Child Protective Services (Investigation, Family Support), Permanency (Foster Care, Adoptions) and Resource Development. Case managers will earn a rating on each competency from “1: Beginning to demonstrate understanding of the standard” to “4: Exceeding proficiency”. If progress is not being made in a specific area or within a reasonable time frame, supervisors will target learning strategies and development for that area of work. While this tool is meant to be developmental and prepare staff for their specific program area, it is also useful in supporting performance ratings during annual evaluations or aid in the implementation of work plans and disciplinary actions when necessary for low performing staff.

### Quality Assurance Case Review Findings

- The Quality Assurance Unit conducts case reviews statewide for the purpose of evaluating the quality of Georgia’s child welfare casework based upon CFSR criteria. The reviews track identified key skill sets needed for practice improvement in all program areas and across outcomes. As part of the QA review process, interviews are conducted with case managers and supervisors on the quality and effectiveness of their training and their preparedness for the job responsibilities. Findings from these reviews will be used to determine the quality and effectiveness of staff training and workforce development initiatives.

### Training Preparedness Survey

- In spring 2024, the Training and Professional Development Unit implemented a “Training Preparedness Survey” which is administered to case managers 60 days after completing New Worker Training. The goal of the survey is to obtain comprehensive data on the effectiveness of initial training. Results will be reviewed regularly with the training unit staff and agency leaders to identify areas for improvement.

Goal 1: Build Workforce and Staff Competencies			
Objective	Activities	Performance Improvement Targets	Status Update
Objective 1.1: Increase number of new DFCS case managers hired annually	Refer to “Recruitment Strategies”	Baseline CY2023: 883	
		CY2024: 900	
		CY2025: 925	
		CY2026: 925	
		CY2027: 950	
		CY2028: 950	
Source: DHS Office of Human Resources			
Objective 1.2: Decrease number of DFCS case managers leaving the agency annually	Refer to “Retention Strategies”	Baseline CY2023: 623	
		CY2024: 600	
		CY2025: 575	
		CY2026: 550	
		CY2027: 525	
		CY2028: 500	
Source: DHS Office of Human Resources			
Objective 1.3: Increase the percentage of DFCS case managers with at least 12 consecutive months of employment	Refer to “Retention Strategies”	Baseline 2023: 75% (1213/1617)	
		CY2024: 76%	
		CY2025: 77%	
		CY2026: 78%	
		CY2027: 79%	
		CY2028: 80%	
Source: DHS Office of Human Resources			
Objective 1.4: Increase the percentage of case managers/supervisors reporting “feeling prepared for the work” after completing New Worker Training	Refer to “Staff Preparedness”	Baseline CY2023: 70%*	
		CY2024:	
		CY2025:	
		CY2026	
		CY2027:	
		CY2028:	
*Baseline Source: 2022 NCCWI Comprehensive Organizational Health Assessment will <u>not</u> be repeated Source: QA Case Reviews and Training Preparedness Survey			

### Implementation Supports, Collaboration, and Evaluation Tools

The Georgia Child Welfare Training academy is one of the primary tools the agency utilizes to prepare staff for their future career in child welfare. From the initiation orientation through classroom training, the goal of the curriculum is to not only prepare staff for case management duties, but to provide opportunities for staff to receive support and feedback as they navigate through the system.

The Supervisor Academy is an immersive practical, relevant learning experience for all new Social Services Supervisor and is an entirely new curriculum. This curriculum is also implemented in partnership with the supervisor mentor program. Supervisor Mentors sit-in throughout the modules to serve as experts to provide experiential knowledge and feedback to classroom participants and carry forward that knowledge during the individualized mentorship sessions. The supervisor mentor program focuses on the educative, administrative and supportive functions of supervision to help support retention of both supervisors and front-line case managers.

The Division has placed an increased emphasis on the Field Practice Coach Program. It is very important that each newly hired staff member be assigned a person to serve as their Field Practice Coach (FPC) both prior to beginning Fundamentals Training and after they achieve Provisional Certification. Field Practice Coaches play a pivotal role in helping to support, mentor and provide guidance to staff as they transition into a full caseload. During a recent round of focus groups, only about 50% of staff surveyed indicated that they had a Field Practice Coach during their training sequence. Those that had a Field Practice coach indicated a much more supportive training experience.

The agency has developed a Case Manager Competency Tool to be utilized by front line supervisors. The purpose of the “Case Manager Competency Development Tool” is to provide purposeful feedback and guidance to assist the supervisory-case manager skill development process. This tool focuses on important aspects of case practice that are not routinely addressed during monthly case staffings and is meant to supplement post-child welfare academy case manager learning and development.

The Training and Professional Development unit is supporting the field in the recruitment and selection process through the support and use of virtual reality goggles and scenarios. The VR goggles provide prospective applicants and opportunity to gain a realistic perspective of child welfare work. The VR goggles are being used in special Realistic Job Preview Days; during Hiring Fairs in advance of the interview; and at University Partner Social Work student recruitment fairs.

University Partners with the agency’s Title IV-E program have developed student mentoring and support programs. Current and former IV-E students participate in these groups to help provide mentorship, guidance and support for students and employees once they begin internships and their work obligations. The purpose of these programs is to provide support and help retain IV-E students beyond their obligation time.

The Child Welfare Training Collaborative (CWTC) offers training to community partners, creating shared understanding of issues facing children and families and strengthening collaborations to promote better outcomes for Georgia’s children. The Collaborative program goals include:

1. Build stronger collaborations among the Division of Family and Children Services and its partners.
2. Increase the capacity of diverse community partners to better respond to the needs of children and families involved with DFCS

The DHS Training and Professional Development Unit gathers data regarding the functionality of the training system as a component of CFSR reviews. The recent implementation of focus groups together with a comprehensive evaluation survey gather information from staff on how well the new worker training sequence prepared them for their roles as case managers. As a result of data from 2023 and 2024, the Training and Professional Development Team is increasing SHINES training for staff. The training team is also revising the new worker training curriculum to focus more on the implementation of policy into practice.

## Legal Workforce

The Division is collaborating with the Attorney General's office, the Court Improvement Program (CIP), and the CJA Task Force to improve the quality of the state's legal workforce, which will result in improved representation for all parties in dependency proceedings. This includes strategies for increasing the recruitment and retention of parent, child, and agency attorneys, and juvenile court judges, and evaluating their preparedness for the role. [Georgia's CIP Strategic Plan](#) provides more information on the specific strategies and action steps to build the state's legal workforce and competencies.

Strategies include convening the annual conference for State Assistant Attorneys General (SAAGs); developing the SAAG training manual and disseminating it to new and existing agency attorneys; delivering regular training opportunities for parent and child attorneys and juvenile court judges; and awarding CJA grants that prioritize training for parent, child, and guardian ad litem attorneys, and projects that support innovative practices that use more collaborative approaches to representation. CIP is utilizing the Judicial Court and Attorney Measures of Performance (JCAMP) tool to assess the quality of attorney practice and court performance during observed hearings. The findings from these JCAMP observations will be used to refine existing workforce development strategies for attorneys and judges and inform new efforts.

Building the child welfare workforce and improving staff competency should result in improvement across several CFSR outcome measures. More staff in the field who are trained and competent will be better able to respond timely to allegations of child maltreatment (CFSR Safety Outcome 1), understand the needs of the child and family to establish appropriate permanency goals and ensure placement stability (CFSR



Permanency Outcome 1), and increase opportunities for children to maintain connections with their families and communities while in foster care (CFSR Permanency Outcome 2).

		2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028
Safety Outcome 1	Observed	87%					
	Target		87%	88%	88%	89%	90%
Permanency Outcome 1	Observed	11%					
	Target		16%	20%	24%	28%	32%
Permanency Outcome 2	Observed	39%					
	Target		41%	43%	45%	47%	49%

The “observed” calculation is an annualized value based on the total cases reviewed by the DFCS Quality Assurance Unit during the year.

## Goal 2: Increase Front-End Supports for Families

The 2024 AFCARS report showed that the number of children in foster care has decreased for the fourth consecutive year. The national data report concludes that the Family First Prevention Services Act has been instrumental in shifting the focus toward preventing foster care placements and preserving families. Georgia is working to identify specific prevention and early intervention strategies that will prevent child maltreatment and reduce the need for foster care entries. Many factors that contribute to these outcomes are related to social determinants of health that are known to contribute to poor child well-being outcomes and involvement with the child welfare system. These include economic instability, housing instability, neighborhood and built environment, education, food, community and social context, and health care.

A stable, healthy, and affordable home provides a foundation for well-being and prosperity for children, families, and communities. Job skills training, literacy programs, mental health services, substance abuse prevention, and stable employment are all necessary to access and maintain affordable housing, which can positively affect many social determinants for children and families, including academic performance, physical, and mental health. Families that struggle to achieve or maintain housing stability are at elevated risk for a wide range of poor outcomes, including child abuse and neglect. Evidence suggests that aiding with housing and other concrete needs (e.g., clothing and furniture) may reduce the risk of abuse and neglect.

Using feedback and recommendations from staff and stakeholders, the Georgia Parent Advisory Council and Georgia Peers Advocating for Change, the Division intends to leverage the 2025-2029 CFSP to further investments in communities with family support

initiatives designed to increase front-end supports and services for families that will result in reduced maltreatment referrals and removals. Recent recommendations from the CPS Advisory Committee also addressed the need to adapt practice to more effectively direct resources and support to families in need while safely supporting the prevention of removals to foster care. The state will continue to implement and update, as needed, the following prevention strategies throughout the CFSP reporting period to ensure ongoing improvement in observed outcomes and reductions in maltreatment allegations. Additional strategies may be developed as the child welfare system stakeholders evaluate performance and secure or expand partnerships with service providers.

CFSP Goal 2 is also referenced in Safety Outcome 2 and Georgia's CFSR PIP to increase safety services and reduce out of home placements.

**Objective 2.1: Partner with Unite Us to develop a proactive outreach and referral system for families to access needed supports.**

- Benchmark: Provide community wide care coordination for 100 families each month under the Unite Us closed loop referral technology platform.

Parents and youth with lived experience have described a primary reason for involvement with the child welfare system is that families do not know how to access resources. Current challenges in prevention are observed through the high volume of reports for families who just need resources. In addition, juvenile courts have untapped potential as an early intervention point but need better tools and support coordinating services. In FY24, the Division secured a contract for the Unite Us Care Coordination Team to conduct proactive outreach in a project serving 58 Georgia counties. The first year of the contract will be reviewed for outcomes, and subsequent years will include negotiations with the vendor and DFCS to determine how to expand into the remaining Georgia counties. Funding for the project is provided by a mix of state and federal CAPTA funds.

Unite Us operates with the understanding that people stay healthier and more productive when their most basic needs are met. Data tools and accountable care networks are critical to proactively engaging individuals and confirming that they get the help they need when they need it. The Unite Us care coordination platform facilitates an environment where clients are connected to services through a comprehensive community network and provides an ability to track every family's longitudinal care journey including every referral, service episode, and outcome. Unite Us also provides data visualization tools to support staff in identifying the total number of referrals, referrals per user, average referrals per family, referrals that are sent but require action, and other performance indicators to quickly address strengths and gaps.

Implementation supports will include a resource directory, self-referral pathway, and augmented early intervention at juvenile courts. The DHS Office of Information Technology and Georgia Technology Authority will monitor the contractual deliverables. Agency and field leadership will monitor engagement activities, including workflow planning, engagement sessions with end users and managers, and trainings for user groups, as well as the referral process and client outcomes.

**Objective 2.2: Leverage the State of Hope initiative to address basic safety net services including education, trauma awareness, quality care giving, and economic self-sufficiency for vulnerable youth and families with a human-centered approach.**

- **Benchmark:** Provide State of Hope funding support for at least 25 nonprofit or business organizations annually.

During the 2020-2024 CFSP reporting period, the Division set a strategic priority to leverage and invest in communities to provide adequate and effective service capacity. This was achieved through several initiatives, including development of the Division's State of Hope initiative, a statewide safety net that leverages nonprofits, philanthropies, local governments, and business with small grants of up to \$50,000 to provide basic services that threaten a family's self-sufficiency. PSSF and CAPTA grants are used to support State of Hope partnerships and other initiatives that provide proactive outreach and assistance to families at risk of child maltreatment. From 2018 to 2023, State of Hope grew rapidly, recruiting over 400 organizations into the ecosystem. These system partners receive referrals from DFCS and other community stakeholders to provide services and supports to families in need, including food, clothing, counseling, transportation, childcare, language assistance and legal advice.

**Objective 2.3: Monitor performance of Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.**

- **Benchmark:** The CAT teams will serve a minimum of 60 targeted individuals each year.

In FY24, the Division received state funding to develop Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams. CAT teams are a behavioral healthcare resource for youth and intended to be an alternative to out-of-home placement for youth with a behavioral health condition, including substance abuse. During the initial program term, children will be referred to the CAT team program by DFCS staff, specifically child welfare intake staff, when a child or

family is referred to DFCS for either investigation into a possible complaint or when a connection is made to family support services. This approach allows for DFCS to intervene and provide services to a child prior to their case escalating to the point of removal or placement in Out of Home Care (OHC) or a psychiatric residential treatment facility (PRTF). Upon successful completion, the youth's family will have the skills and support systems needed to maintain improvements made throughout the process.

**Objective 2.4: Monitor performance of the Family First evidence-based programs to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.**

- **Benchmark:** The Family First programs will serve at least 50 youth annually in each of the programs.

Family First in Georgia collected data about the target population in Georgia, conducted focus groups with caregivers and youth, and received input from the Prevention Services workgroup and stakeholders. Along with updates from the Title IV-E Clearinghouse, the Division selected two evidence-based programs – Multisystemic Therapy and Functional Family Therapy – for the prevention plan. The programs were launched in November 2023 in four counties.

The Family First program provides Functional Family Therapy (FFT) in Cherokee and DeKalb counties for a target population of youth aged 11-18 with conduct disorder, violent acting-out, and substance abuse. FFT is an intensive family intervention program, with one-hour weekly sessions over 3-4 months. Family First also provides Multisystem Family Therapy (MFT) in Chatham and Richmond counties for a target population of youth aged 12-17 with serious emotional/behavioral needs and their families. MFT is an intensive family and community-based treatment for juvenile offenders with possible substance abuse issues, with at least one weekly home visit for an average of four months. These services are currently available for families receiving Family Preservation.

**Benchmark Measures of Progress:**

Goal 2: Increase Front-End Supports for Families		
Objective	Performance Improvement Targets	Status Update

<b>Objective 2.1:</b>  Partner with Unite Us to develop a proactive outreach and referral system for families to access needed supports.	100 families served monthly	
<i>Source: DHS Office of Information Technology</i>		
<b>Objective 2.2:</b>  Leverage the State of Hope initiative to address basic safety net services including education, trauma awareness, quality care giving, and economic self-sufficiency for vulnerable youth and families with a human-centered approach.	25 organizations funded annually	
<i>Source: DHS Office of External Partnerships</i>		
<b>Objective 2.3:</b>  Monitor performance of Community Action Treatment (CAT) teams to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.	60 targeted individuals annually	
<i>Source: DFCS Care Coordination Treatment Unit</i>		
<b>Objective 2.4:</b>  Monitor performance of the Family First evidence-based programs to determine success at preventing entry into foster care for youth with complex needs.	50 youth served in each program site annually	
<i>Source: DFCS Family First Program</i>		

Building the state's community-based safety net for prevention and early intervention services may also impact the numbers of children served in child welfare and in foster care. The [DHS Data Dashboard](#) outcomes will be monitored to analyze the impact of these prevention efforts. The impact of expanded front-end prevention efforts should result in an overall decrease in family support services and children served in child welfare (particularly in foster care) throughout the CFSP reporting period. While there is a myriad of economic and societal factors that can lead to a family's involvement in the child welfare system, the availability and accessibility of services has been identified as a critical need by Georgia's parents and youth with lived experience.

Data Indicators	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027
All children served in Child Welfare	134,484	132,199				
Intake Calls Received	124,696	126,156				
Family Support Services Started	23,627	22,229				
Children in Foster Care	10,710	10,670				

Source: DHS Data Dashboard. Data are reported for a state fiscal year (July 1 – June 30).

### Goal 3: Improve Information Technology and Data Sharing Tools

The Division has implemented several technology modernization tools to ease administrative burdens on staff and improve outcomes for children and families.

The Division receives ongoing support from the state Legislature, the [Georgia Data Analytics Center](#) (GDAC), and the DHS Office of Information Technology (OIT) Modernization Project Management Office. Georgia Code §49-5-24 supports interagency efforts to gather comprehensive data and to actively share and disseminate data among those agencies responsible for making informed decisions regarding the treatment, care, security, and protection of children within the state. HB 1013 (2022) updated the Code Section to require state agencies to develop and implement a workable statewide system by October 2024 for sharing data relating to the care and protection of children. The General Assembly determined that such data sharing and integration can serve the best interests of the child and the family, contribute to higher levels of effectiveness in service delivery, provide greater efficiency and productivity, and assist in the protection of children. Specifically, such data sharing and integration can reduce redundant data entry, expedite data sharing between agencies, provide for more timely service delivery, ensure more accurate and up-to-date information, assist in the development of a seamless system of services, and contribute to better performance and greater accountability by all involved parties. Agencies listed in HB 1013 include DFCS, Department of Early Care and Learning, Department of Community Health, Department of Public Health, Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities, Department of Juvenile Justice, Department of Education, and the Georgia Crime Information Center.

In short, improved data sharing technology tools will result in improved safety, permanency, and well-being. The 2025-2029 CFSP will serve as a vehicle to evaluate the success of these data sharing initiatives and technology tools in protecting children.

CFSP Goal 3 is also referenced in Safety Outcome 2, Permanency Outcomes 1 and 2, Well-Being Outcome 1, and Georgia's CFSR PIP to increase the timeliness and quality of case management activities and achieve positive permanency outcomes.

### **Objective 3.1: Modularization of case record management system (Georgia SHINES) to improve staff efficiencies in data entry**

- **Benchmark:** Launch the SHINES updates and mobile application in 2025

The Department of Human Services Office of Technology is currently working to modularize the Georgia SHINES system. The modularization project will streamline and simplify the case record management system, moving away from the inadequate modularization and high code complexity of the current system. The functionality of Georgia SHINES is currently tied to one complex monolithic application structure. The goal is to develop microservice application and scalability to all functions. The technology changes will not change the business areas, services, or interface, but will make the user experience simpler and lead to better synchronization with the program areas (i.e., Investigation, Foster Care, Family Preservation, Adoption). The case management application will also have offline capabilities through a user's mobile device when a case manager is in the field or an area that does not have access to the internet. Daily tasks that can be completed offline will include uploading files and photos, completing case plans and assessments, and entering case data. The offline data will sync directly to the system when the user is online.

Current / Planned Activities: 2024 activities will include design and development efforts: Initiate (risk governance model), Discover (identify opportunities for improving existing interfaces and partner system, align with technology), Develop and Test (build data migration, support comprehensive functional testing and security / performance testing). 2025 activities will include testing, training, and launch efforts: Readiness and Deploy (train the trainer, early and frequent communication), mobile app development, and data migration. 2026-29 efforts will include user experience feedback enhancements as needed: Support (monitor and resolve issue, assess training effectiveness).

Implementation Supports: Subject matter experts in SHINES, design architects and designers (Tech team), DHS project management office team, DHS business team, Elixir project team, Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), Comms, Training. Daily and weekly cadence with stakeholders to review and discuss progress.

### **Objective 3.2: Leverage Educational Data and Technology to Increase the percentage of children in foster care that graduate from high school**

- **Benchmark:** 50% of youth in foster care will graduate from high school in 2029

Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC) serves as the youth advisory board for DFCS and as one of the CAPTA Citizen Review Panels. GPAC members have identified “educational achievement” as a priority area for the CFSP. GPAC wants DFCS, court partners, and other stakeholders to provide more support and resources to youth to help them graduate high school and pursue post-secondary education. [Information Memorandum 23-09](#) describes expectations for states to coordinate with schools and educational agencies to provide educational stability for children in foster care. The following tools will be leveraged to support educational stability and academic success.

Implementation Supports include the Statewide Longitudinal Data System (SLDS) data sharing agreement. The Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit has had a data sharing agreement with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) since 2018. Case managers can obtain education records by going to Georgia SHINES and connecting directly to the [GaDOE SLDS](#). This allows DFCS staff to retrieve historical data that includes attendance, grades, and schools attended while in Georgia. It also identifies if a youth has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). The Division is currently working to revise and update the data sharing agreement and protocols with GaDOE to begin receiving real-time education records instead of the historical data. GaDOE was recently awarded a four-year grant to upgrade their SLDS system, which would integrate new information that can be shared between agencies. After completion of the first phase of upgrades in FY25, DFCS will have real time education information from SLDS automatically uploaded into Georgia SHINES.

SLDS also supports DFCS and schools in the development of Trauma-Informed Education Support (TIES) plans. TIES were implemented after passage of HB 855 (2020) that required schools to conduct an immediate and deliberate assessment of newly enrolled foster care students (or a current student who is new to foster care) to determine whether exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have an adverse impact on the student’s educational performance, including both academics and classroom behavior. The student’s TIES plan address needs and risk factors, strengths and protective factors, known or suspected triggers, and grade level proficiency. Services must be identified for the youth, including academic and/or behavioral supports, for in-school and out-of-school. The student’s TIES Team reviews progress and monitors outcomes regularly to ensure they can be successful in the school environment.



Foster students are retained at three times the rate of the general student population. National research shows that children in foster are at a higher risk of dropping out of school. As policy, practices, and advocacy develops throughout the state of Georgia, solid partnerships between local schools and DFCS will assist in improving positive outcomes for students in foster care. [[gadoe.org](https://gadoe.org) FY20 Foster Care Annual Report] Staff will leverage the SLDS to develop IEPs and TIES plans, evaluate annual student progress through standardized test scores, and ensure the identified youth are receiving timely and appropriate educational services (CFSR Item 16). These collaborations should result in increased academic performance, grade level achievements, and graduation rates among youth in foster care.

### **Objective 3.3: Leverage Caregiver Data and Technology to improve parent engagement and caregiver connections**

- **Benchmark:** Increase performance in Permanency Outcome 2 to 48% by 2029

The Georgia Parent Advisory Council (PAC) serves as the parent liaison group for DFCS, to help expand meaningful partnerships between parents and staff throughout child welfare. The purpose of PAC is to advise the Division on changes to child welfare services and systems, particularly prevention programming. The PAC is designed to ensure there are parent voices included in shaping programs, services, and strategies that result in better outcomes for children and families. PAC requested that the CFSP include strategies to improve the ease of caregiver communication, and to improve communication between case managers, foster parents, and biological families.

As part of the agency's technology modernization effort, the Division launched CommuniCare statewide in January 2024. CommuniCare is a set of interconnected web portals specifically designed to support and enhance child welfare programs. It serves three primary user groups – Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), foster parents, and parents – and seamlessly integrates with Georgia SHINES to ensure efficient and secure data management and communication. CommuniCare was launched in DFCS regions 2 and 5 in October 2023. CommuniCare features include chat capabilities, multi-channel notifications, mobile friendly access, secure data management, child data and case documentation access, document upload and sharing, calendar sharing, and appointment creation.

Parents can stay informed about their child(ren) while in foster care through the CommuniCare portal, while also accessing calendar appointments for court hearings, family team meetings, and the child's medical/dental appointments. CASA, foster parents, and kin caregivers who are approved as foster caregivers can access provider notes from

assessments and therapists, school and medical records, and calendar appointments. All users can use the portal to chat in real-time with the child’s case manager to ask questions or request assistance. Increased usage of the CommuniCare portal throughout the CFSP reporting period will ensure timely notification of hearings to caregivers and enable parents and caregivers to attend the child’s medical appointments and educational support meetings. CommuniCare will also improve communication among all parties and ensure case managers can respond quickly to any concerns.

Staff will leverage the CommuniCare portal to stabilize foster placements before a disruption, help parents remain involved in the case planning process (CFSR Item 20), and ensure caregivers are notified timely of upcoming hearings (CFSR Item 24).

Implementation Supports include the Office of Information Technology (OIT) Project Management team to provide frequent system training to staff and approved users, and data updates to staff and agency leaders on CommuniCare system usage. OIT will support Division leadership in tracking and monitoring various aggregate data points, including usage by unique role, region, county, specific activity (e.g., document upload), and other metrics.

Goal 3: Improve Information Technology and Data Sharing Tools		
Objective	Performance Improvement Targets	Annual Status Update
Objective 3.1: Modularization of case record management system – Georgia SHINES	2024: Design and Development	
	2025: Testing, Training, and Launch	
	2026 - 2029: User Experience Feedback, Enhancements as Needed	
Source: DHS, Office of Information Technology		
Objective 3.2: Increase the percentage of children in foster care that graduate from high school (Well-Being Outcome 2)	Baseline 2023: 45.3%	
	2024: 46%	
	2025: 47%	
	2026: 48%	
	2027: 49%	
	2028: 50%	
Source: Georgia Department of Education Foster Care Education Program Annual Report		
Objective 3.3: Leverage Caregiver Data and Technology to improve parent engagement and caregiver connections	Permanency Outcome 2 baseline in 2024: 38%	
	2025: 40%	
	2026: 42%	
	2027: 44%	
	2028: 46%	

	2029: 48%	
<i>Source: DFCS Quality Assurance Unit</i>		

### Implementation Supports, Collaboration, and Evaluation Tools

SB 401 (2024) amends Georgia code section 15-11-64 to require each juvenile court to collect data on all cases in which a child alleged or adjudicated to be a dependent child is placed in foster care. Twenty-one unique data elements shall be collected and electronically submitted in a form and format specified by the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) and incorporated into the Georgia Juvenile Data Exchange no less than once per week. On or before April 2025 and annually thereafter, the AOC shall electronically submit the de-identified data collected, together with a comprehensive, aggregated permanency report, to members of the state Legislature. These annual data reports will be reviewed to determine how the state is achieving its permanency goals

The Learning Management System offers the following professional development courses for staff to gain knowledge and understanding of the Division's technology and data sharing tools:

1. OCP-0114 ARGO Placement Portal Search Tool
  - This training will teach users how to utilize the new Argo Placement search tool. The Argo Placement search tool is a SHINES add-on, utilizing the ARGO portal, to help users find placements for youth in State's custody.
2. OCP-907 Communicare Portal Training
  - This training will teach users how to utilize the Communicare portal. Georgia Communicare is a set of interconnected web portals specifically designed to support and enhance child welfare programs. It serves three primary user groups – CASAs, foster parents, and parents.

Fifty-six percent of the CPS workforce is younger than 40 years old, for whom technology is an ingrained and integral way of life. These individuals are accustomed to seamless technology and expect efficiencies within all technology tools. When staff have access to efficient technology tools, they can spend more time on quality casework and family engagement. These technology enhancements should result in improvement across several CFSR outcome measures: timely referrals for assessments and services (CFSR Safety Outcome 2); parent engagement and preserving the continuity of family connections (CFSR Permanency Outcome 2); improved access to educational records in real-time, and early collaboration with school personnel when a child enters foster care or changes placements (CFSR Well-Being Outcome 2).

## Services

### Title IV-B, subpart 1: Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program

Georgia's title IV-B (1) funding is used for child welfare services statewide, including:

1. **Child Protective Services:** CPS utilizes an Investigation when an Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) indicates a present danger situation, an impending danger safety threat, or the reported maltreatment allegations fall into specific categories requiring the assignment of the report to investigation. During the investigation, families are engaged using DFCS' Practice Model as informed by Solution-Based Casework (SBC). By using SBC, the case manager can follow a conceptual map for family-centered practice from assessment through case closure.
2. **CPS Intake Communication Center (CICC):** DHS developed a centralized system for receiving reports of abuse and neglect in 2013. The Statewide Child Protective Services Intake Communications Center (CICC) is responsible for receiving reports of abuse for children under the age of 18 that are residing in Georgia. CICC receives reports 24 hours a day, seven days a week, of known or suspected instances of child abuse and neglect, including reports of physical or mental injury, sexual abuse or exploitation or negligent treatment or maltreatment of a child under circumstances that indicate that the child's health or welfare is threatened.
3. **Family Preservation Services:** Family Preservation Services (FPS) is described by the Family Preservation and Support Services Act of 1993 (PL 103-66) as a continuum of family-focused services for at-risk children and families. Services include activities designed to assist families in crisis, often where a child is at risk of being placed in out-of-home care because of abuse and/or neglect. Support services include preventive activities, typically provided by community-based organizations designed to improve the nurturing of children and to strengthen and enhance the stability of families. Families are referred to the Office of Family Independence when financial concerns threaten safety and stability. OFI provides SNAP, TANF, and Medicaid supports to eligible Georgians. Families with substance exposed infants are engaged to develop a Plan of Safe Care, and (if eligible) referred to a MIECHV home visiting provider.
4. **Prevention and Community Support (PCS):** The Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) works within the Division and in partnership with community-based organizations to reduce child abuse and neglect. Using state and federal funding streams, PCS supports the use of evidence-based and

evidence-informed practices and programs to improve outcomes for children and families. PCS also functions as the Children's Trust Fund entity for the state of Georgia.

5. Family Support Services: DFCS has a two-track differential response system to address reports of known or suspected child abuse and neglect, Investigations and Family Support Services (FSS). FSS is an alternative child protective services (CPS) response for providing protection to children by engaging the family to build consensus around the everyday life situations which may interfere with the family's ability to nurture and protect their child(ren). The family's participation in FSS is not voluntary as there are allegations of maltreatment. FSS are designed to ensure child safety and prevent future involvement in the child welfare system using formal and informal services to strengthen and support families. The FSS track is utilized when the Initial Safety Assessment (ISA) does not indicate a present danger situation or impending danger safety threat. An assessment of child safety and family functioning is required just as it is during an Investigation. However, there is no formal finding of substantiated or unsubstantiated concerning the allegations of abuse or neglect.
6. Caregiver Recruitment and Retention: The Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit (CRRU) diligently recruits and retains foster and adoptive parents through ongoing recruitment and retention efforts which include: the development of a statewide coordinated recruitment and retention plan; the development and implementation of regional foster and adoptive parent recruitment and retention plans; the use of child-specific recruitment efforts to assist in the recruitment of foster and adoptive parents; the use of targeted efforts to recruit caregivers who are able to meet the needs of a specific group/category of children (e.g., medically fragile, teens, siblings); the use of targeted efforts to recruit sufficient placement resources in each local school district so children entering care are able to remain in the same school they were attending prior to removal; and the use of regional and state data to communicate the recruitment needs and the results of recruitment and retention efforts.
7. Adoptions: Adoption is a specialized field that focuses on finding safe and permanent families for children when permanent, legal separation from their family is necessary. Adoption is a social and legal process designed to establish a new legal family giving children the same rights and benefits of those who are born into a family. Adoption practice provides sound planning for children who have a permanency goal of adoption and children who are in the permanent custody of DFCS. An integral part of adoption services is working with birth parents as they

decide whether adoption is in the best interest of the parent and child through a voluntary or non-voluntary Termination of Parental Rights (TPR).

### Services for Children Adopted from Other Countries

The [Georgia Center for Resources and Support \(GCRS\)](#) continues to be available to all adoptive families residing in Georgia, including those who have adopted internationally. The center offers a number of resources and supports, including live and on-demand classes for adoptive and foster parents, therapeutic adoption clinicians, and a lending library of books, articles, and DVD resources for adoptive and foster families. Regional Resource Advisors are available throughout Georgia to assist adoptive families by providing advice, support, and training. The center is also staffed with families who have adopted and are able to provide support as a family with lived experience.

There are no current tracking mechanisms or data to identify the number of Georgia families have adopted internationally. Families who have adopted internationally are eligible for other contract post-adoption services provided by the Division with a waiver.

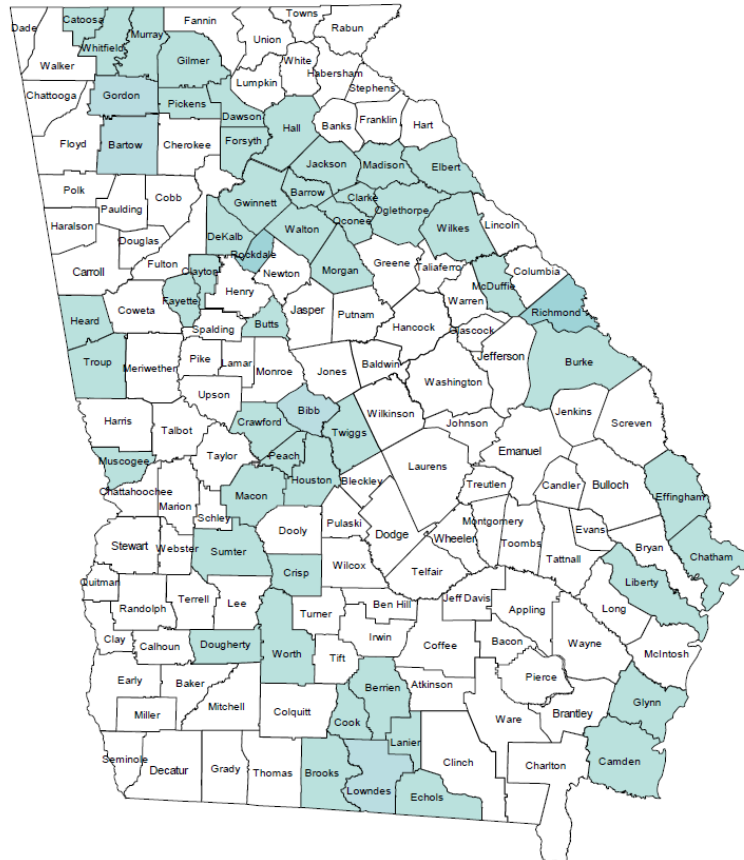
### Services for Children Under the Age of Five

The Division provides funding support through CAPTA, CBCAP, and PSSF to provide evidence-based home visiting programs which serve families with children birth to five years of age. These programs also collaborate with the Department of Public Health (DPH) Home Visiting programs that provides Healthy Families and Parents as Teachers with funding support from the federal Maternal Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) grant. The curricula provide families who are pregnant and/or parenting with children under the age of five with services and supports that focus on linking pregnant women with prenatal care, promoting strong child/parent attachment, and coaching parents on learning activities that foster the child's development and support the parents' role as their child's first and most important teacher. Home visitors for these programs conduct regular screenings to help parents identify possible health and developmental issues. Each of the home visiting programs are required to conduct Ages and Stages Questionnaires (ASQ) and monitor the child's development, making referrals to Babies Can't Wait when appropriate. To address their developmental needs, children under the age of four in CPS cases are required to be referred to the Department of Public Health (DPH), Babies Can't Wait program.

## Statewide

### Evidence-Based Home Visiting Program Counties Served

As of October 1, 2023



Source: DFCS Prevention and Community Support Section. Sites include the following models: Early Head Start, Home Visiting, Healthy Families America, Nurse Family Partnership, and Parents and Teachers

**Babies Can't Wait (BCW)** is the early intervention program through DPH that offers an array of services and support for infants and toddlers (birth to age three) with special needs. BCW serves a crucial role in completing assessments of infants and young children and offers recommendations and services to ensure the child is on target in the best way that is appropriate for their age and current medical condition. The Division works closely with DPH to ensure that the proper assessments and referrals are completed in a timely manner for children. The Division also collaborates with **Children's Medical Services (CMS)** to support children with special health care needs.

The Division also funds a screening and referral program called First Steps Georgia. This program, funded with support from CAPTA and CBCAP, offers screenings to pregnant

mothers or parents with children birth to five years and links families to appropriate programs/services/resources. The screening tool asks the family to establish any risk factors, such as history of domestic violence or child welfare involvement, lack of healthcare or insurance, substance misuse or mental health issues. The screener will offer referrals, as appropriate. In the case of parents who need no referrals, they are offered the Find Help Georgia online resource and some information about child development, safe sleep, and other pertinent universal parenting information.

A Plan of Safe Care (POSC) is completed for all infants affected by prenatal substance exposure or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, even where there is not a specific allegation of maltreatment. The POSC may be completed by the DFCS case manager when there is an allegation of maltreatment that requires an investigation. The POSC may also be completed by the mother's health care provider during the prenatal period or immediately after birth. The Division is expanding funding for providers to accept referrals of substance-affected infants with no maltreatment alleged, for the development and monitoring of the POSC for the infant and family.

The DFCS Office of Provider Management (OPM) ensures that placement providers that provide care for foster children under the age of five are meeting the safety, permanency and well-being needs of the children served. In addition to FTMs that are initiated upon entry to foster care to identify a permanency goal, and permanency case consults at 6, 8, and 12 months, Georgia is also implementing Infant-Toddler Courts to focus on comprehensive supports for at-risk families with infants and toddlers, promote successful reunification, and feature enhanced attention to unmet mental health needs of parents whenever necessary. Providers are required to report and document the services that are being provided to children; this information is used to calculate performance measures for each provider. OPM also conducts safety reviews, annual comprehensive reviews, and performance-based placement reviews to ensure that providers are meeting their contractual obligations and providing quality services to the children. OPM has also identified the need for more caregivers to support sibling groups, which often includes children under the age of five. OPM is working with CPA providers on their recruitment and retention plans to ensure that they are recruiting caregivers who can meet the needs of this population.

### [Efforts to Track and Prevent Child Maltreatment Deaths](#)

The Division joined the [National Partnership for Child Safety \(NPCS\)](#) in 2018, a member-owned quality improvement collaborative aimed to reduce child maltreatment fatalities. Through this engagement, DFCS continues to advance and sustain a non-punitive, systemic critical incident review process to learn from child fatalities and serious injuries. As part of the Division's fatality review process, and in collaboration with a team from



Georgia's Office of the Child Advocate, the Child Death, and Serious Injury (CDSI) Review Team completed 81 critical incident/child fatality reviews in CY2023.

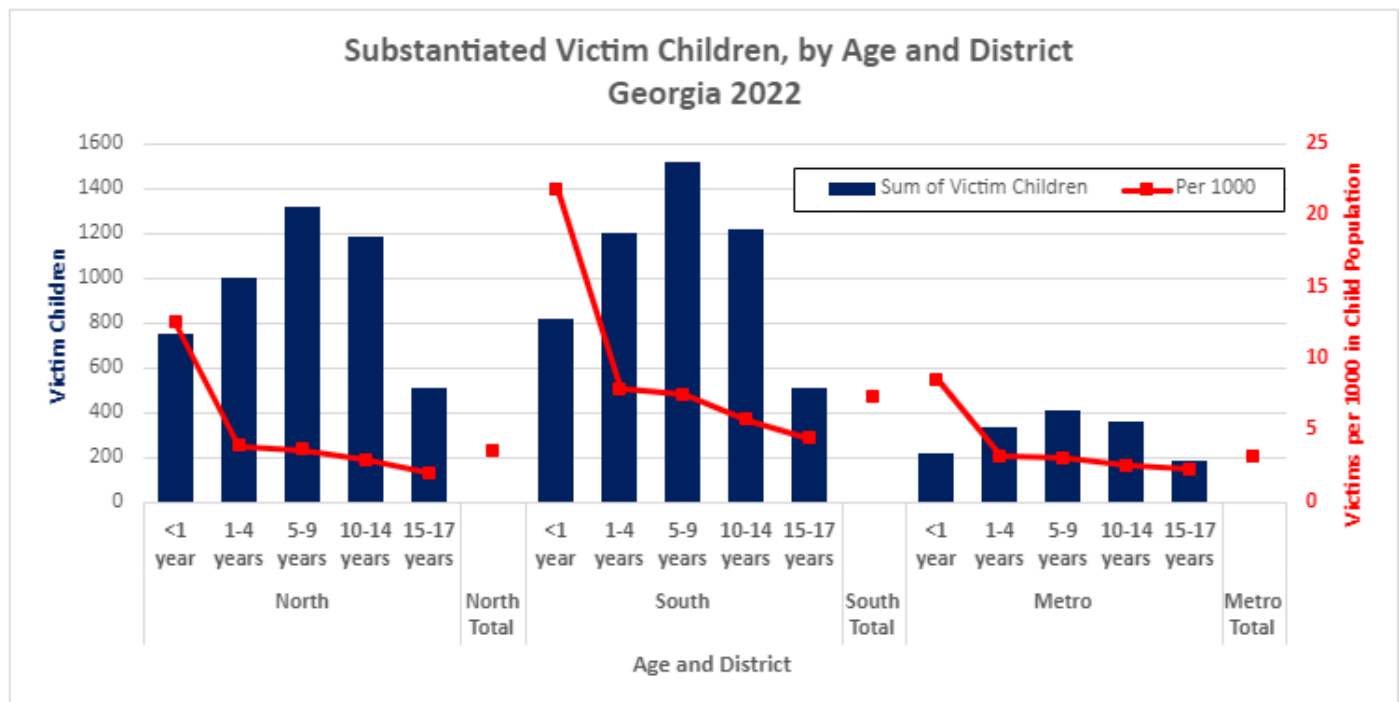
This process involved completing thorough case record reviews and individually debriefing over 300 DFCS staff members plus relevant external stakeholders. Reviewers identify improvement opportunities, or key learnings. Improvement opportunities are defined as case-level actions or inactions relevant to the outcome, case, or an industry standard. In essence, they highlight the gap between what families needed and what families received during the Division's involvement. As improvement opportunities are identified, systemic factors contributing to the improvement opportunities are evaluated and described through the Safe Systems Improvement Tool (SSIT). Findings are scored according to their proximity and relation to the outcome. Data elements are aggregated for the purposes of identifying program and practice improvements at a systems level. The SSIT is a nationally recognized tool used to structure critical incident reviews and standardize their findings.

In advocacy of Georgia's families and DFCS direct service professionals, these reviews provide a candid glimpse of the work and how system improvements could foster better supports and help DFCS professionals serve families.

The Division also supports the statewide plan to prevent child maltreatment fatalities through the [Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Plan \(CANPP\)](#). This effort was initiated in 2019 with a convening of child-serving agencies and organizations. Entities were tasked with identifying a representative champion to participate in strategic planning. Over the course of the next year, over 30 meetings were held across the state which included more than 635 individuals representing state and local government leaders, providers of human services, educators, civic and business leaders, parents, caregivers and members of faith-based organizations. Additionally, two surveys soliciting input from providers and parents/caregivers were distributed and completed by nearly 800 Georgians. The surveys and planning sessions yielded six strategic objectives and 50 strategies for preventing child maltreatment and maltreatment-related fatalities in Georgia. A state plan incorporating the input from this diverse group was developed and in mid- 2020 was approved by state leadership. The Georgia Essentials for Childhood Steering Committee has been charged with overseeing the implementation of the CANPP, monitoring progress toward the plan's goals, assisting in the development of regional plans, and reviewing progress toward the plan on an annual basis. In FY23, the Division collaborated with the Department of Early Care and Learning (DECAL), the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD), and the Georgia Early Education Alliance for Ready Students (GEEARS) to promote the inclusion of infant/early childhood mental health in the [Mental Health Parity Act](#) passed in 2022. The group also completed a crosswalk between the new legislation and the CANPP strategies. This work is ongoing.

## Populations at Greatest Risk for Maltreatment

Younger children, particularly those less than 12 months of age, have the highest risk of substantiated maltreatment. The below chart demonstrates the substantiations by the child's age and district of residence. While the Metro District reports lower overall numbers of substantiations, the South District reports higher rates compared to the North and Metro Districts.



SOURCE: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

Females were slightly more likely than males to be substantiated victims of maltreatment. Data from Georgia SHINES reports 5,887 substantiated female victims and 5,611 substantiated male victims in CY2022.

During the report period, there were 114 child maltreatment-related deaths, and 85% of victim children were age five or younger. Younger children less than 12 months of age represent the group with the highest risk of maltreatment-related deaths. With an estimated child population in Georgia of 2,518,550, the rate of death from maltreatment is 4.53 per 100,000.

**Maltreatment Related Deaths (FFY2022)**

Child's Age at Death	Number of Deaths	Percent
0	57	50.00%
1	15	13.16%
2	5	4.39%
3	6	5.26%
4	10	8.77%
5	5	4.39%
6	4	3.51%
7	1	0.88%
8	2	1.75%
9	1	0.88%
10	1	0.88%
12	2	1.75%
13	1	0.88%
14	2	1.75%
16	1	0.88%
17	1	0.88%
Grand Total	114	100.00%

SOURCE: DFCS Data Unit, Georgia SHINES

To ensure programs and services are appropriately targeted to those at risk of maltreatment related deaths, the Division shares these data with the CAPTA Panel members, DFCS field leadership, program directors, and regional C3 Coordinators (who in turn provide data-related trainings and supports as needed to frontline staff). The data sharing effort is to assist in targeting programs and services to those populations. The Prevention and Community Support Section (PCS) and the Well-Being Section (which includes the Educational Programming, Assessment and Consultation (EPAC) Unit, the Wellness Programming, Assessment and Consultation (WPAC) Unit, and the Early Childhood Collaboration Unit (ECCU) also utilize these data to develop targeted programs and services.

#### Title IV-B, subpart 2: MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)

The strength of PSSF in Georgia is that all PSSF providers are community-based and are acutely aware of the challenges, needs, and strengths of their communities and families. All service providers wishing to obtain PSSF funding must meet the following criteria:

1. Eligibility: State, County or City Governments; other Public Entities, including institutions of higher education;

2. Non-profits: must have a 5011(3) status with the IRS and be registered and in active compliance status for the year in which grant funds are sought with the Georgia Secretary of State's Office.
3. Faith-based and community organizations that meet eligibility requirements are eligible to receive awards. Individuals, sole proprietors, foreign entities and for-profit organizations are not eligible to compete for, or receive, awards made under this announcement.

The funding opportunity announcement solicits proposals for services to improve the safety, permanency and wellbeing of children, youth, and their families through coordinated, community-based service delivery. These services must be designed to build service capacity between state and local child welfare agencies and community-based family service agencies to ensure that children who are at risk for child welfare intervention have access to comprehensive, high-quality prevention and early intervention, preservation, reunification or adoption promotion and post-permanency services. Additional information on the PSSF funding and supported programs can be found at [pssfnet.com](http://pssfnet.com).

PSSF services are determined by an annual community needs assessment and Departmental priorities. In the most recent needs assessment findings, there were 103 respondents from all 14 DFCS regions and the state office. 40% of respondents represented the North District (regions 1-5), 30% from the South District (regions 6-12), and 11% from the Metro District (regions 13-14). Behavioral health priority program areas requested by respondents were behavior management for children/youth (35%), therapeutic services for children/youth (29%), therapeutic services for parents/caregivers (16%), and crisis intervention (13%). Skill development priority program areas ranked by respondents were evidence-based parent education (87%), life skills (69%), evidence-based home visitation for families with children age 0-5 (41%), job skills (33%), and youth tutoring (24%). The needs assessment also identified mentoring for caregivers and youth, support groups for parents/caregiver and youth, and transportation as additional needs in their communities. If these critical services were sufficiently available and accessible in the county/region, respondents felt these priority programs would reduce the risk of children being removed from their homes.

Family support services for 2025-2029 will address prevention and risk reduction of child maltreatment by promoting well-being of the entire family. Families will be identified as eligible if they are not currently known to DFCS, were screened out, referred for services, or had an unsubstantiated investigation. PSSF grantees will address home visiting, healthy relationships and co-parenting, prevention and early intervention, and services for homeless youth. PSSF will also provide funding assistance to safety net programs awarded for a State of Hope grant.

Family preservation services for 2025-2029 will address the prevention of repeated maltreatment and preserving families. Families will be identified by a previous DFCS involvement – family preservation or foster care – or relatives who are caring for children who are not their own. PSSF grantees will address placement prevention, crisis intervention, post-placement aftercare to support reintegration of children into their communities, and substance abuse treatment/recovery support to prevent relapse.

Family reunification services for 2025-2029 will promote and sustain permanency for children and their families to prevent repeated maltreatment. Eligible families have children currently removed from their care and are in foster care or another temporary placement. PSSF grantees will provide supervised family visitation and parent reunification services to assist caregivers in addressing the behaviors that resulted in the placement of their children into foster care and help prepare for the children's return to the home.

Adoption promotion and post-permanency support services for 2025-2029 will promote and sustain permanency and community connections for children and families. Eligible families have children exiting foster or relative care to adoption or guardianship, and youth who are transitioning to adulthood and may not achieve adoption by age 18. PSSF grantees will provide adoption promotion services to prevent disruption/dissolution and emancipation services to help youth establish meaningful adult connections.

All families and children in Georgia are eligible for PSSF supports.

## Chafee

### I. Program Overview & Design

The Georgia Department of Human Services, Division of Family and Children Services is the agency that administers the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIP). The grant funds provided through the CFCIP support a variety of services with the objectives of preparing youth and young adults ages 14-21 for successful transitions to adulthood while assisting them with developing permanent connections to caring and committed adults. The Chafee funded programs have been based on the principles of positive youth development and address each of the five purpose areas of the legislation:

- Help youth transition from dependency to self-sufficiency.
- Help youth receive education, training, and services necessary to obtain employment.

- Help youth prepare for, enter, and succeed in post-secondary training and educational institutions.
- Provide personal and emotional support to youth through mentors and the promotion of interactions with dedicated adults.
- Provide financial, housing, counseling, employment, education, and other appropriate support services to former foster care youth ages 18-20.

The Georgia Resilient, Youth-Centers, Stable, and Empowered (GARYSE) program is Georgia's Independent Living Program for eligible (age and developmentally appropriate) youth who are preparing and transitioning into a stable adulthood. Through this program, opportunities and services are provided through appropriate referral resources provided by public-private partnerships and community partners to ensure youth are stable, connected, educated, healthy, employed, housed, and safe.

## II. Program Eligibility

The Chafee program serves approximately 3,000 youth and young adults ages 14-25 who are in various stages of transition statewide. Specific funding for services and programs is for youth aged 14 and older who have been in Georgia's foster care system for a minimum of six non-consecutive months. Youth are not denied eligibility for benefits if they otherwise meet the eligibility criteria but are temporarily living out of state. The Division will cooperate in any federal national evaluations of the effects of the programs in achieving the purposes of Chafee.

## III. Program Service Delivery Across the State

The administration of the Chafee program is governed by DFCS policy and is the same across the state. Each region within the state of Georgia is assigned a Chafee Independent Living Program Specialist (ILS). This position provides direct support to Chafee eligible youth/youth adults and help ensure program continuity across the state in transition planning/meetings, eligibility determinations, and resource access and connections. Because Georgia is comprised of both rural and metropolitan areas with varying unique needs, ILS work to provide custom support based on the needs of their region as identified through data trends and stakeholder engagement. This approach helps to ensure fair and equitable treatment of all Chafee eligible youth statewide.

For LGBTQ+ youth across the state, there are multiple services and supports available to assist with counseling, therapies, medical care, and housing. Monthly support groups are hosted by MAAC and All 1 Family. Regional leaders encourage youth to attend the group. For caregivers of LGBTQ+ youth, many regions have a PFLAG chapter which provides a safe space and education on how to be an ally. Several regions have LGBTQ+

affirming health services, including therapists, counseling, and PreP availability at the local health department. Safe housing options for older youth and young adults is available through Chris 180, the Rainbow Program, and [Lost-n-Found Youth](#), which is a 24/7 resource providing services to LGBTQ+ youth experiencing homelessness. Staff are provided with LGBTQ+ resources (books and authors) that can be shared with youth. Staff also receive resources and guidance for responding when youth may be mistreated due to their sexual orientation, gender identity or expression (SOGIE). Schools and after-school programs are also creating community safe spaces for youth – including high school gay-straight alliances and Youth Pride.

Support for LGBTQIAA2S+ youth will continue to be prioritized by developing relationships with community partners serving this population, educating partners and caregivers on Chafee resources, and supporting staff by ensuring learning opportunities and practice guidance materials are made available for staff working with LGBTQIAA2S Chafee eligible youth. These materials will include information regarding healthcare and housing as these two areas can be instrumental in the health and wellbeing of LGBTQIAA2S youth and young adults. Through youth transition meetings and other engagement opportunities with young people, the GARYSE team will highlight the importance of supportive connections for LGBTQIAA2S youth and when possible, connect them with supportive adults in their community. Trainings on sexuality and gender identity will continue to be offered to those working with current and former foster youth. Our intent is that these individuals will be well prepared to engage youth in this population with dignity and respect.

Additionally, GARYSE will continue to support the agency's Caregiver Recruitment and Retention Unit in their specialized recruiting of homes that are knowledgeable and welcoming to LGBTQIAA2S youth in care.

#### IV. Serving Youth of Various Ages and Stages

Services for youth served by Chafee are targeted based on the youth's age. Extended Foster Care (EFC) is an optional service for young adults who emancipated while in foster care and elected to remain up to their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. GARYSE assists youth and young adults' transition to self-sufficiency by providing a myriad of services. This includes providing financial and life-skills workshops services through collaborations with the Multi-Agency Alliance for Children (MAAC) and Carrie Steel-Pitts Home. These collaborations provide Chafee eligible youth with opportunities to learn valuable life skills designed to assist them in being self-sufficient when they decide to leave foster care at 18 or age out at 21. Additionally, youth ages 14-17 participate in the annual Teens R for Me conference to acquire additional skills, support, networking, and mentorship.

Youth ages 14-17 receive annual credit reports. GARYSE has two Credit Reporters Specialist that are assigned to regions across the state of Georgia. These team members provide individual support to youth and provide workshops to youth, DFCS staff, and caregivers.

For youth ages 14-20, GARYSE can provide fiscal support for youth to participate in activities that foster normalcy and independence. These include high school junior and senior expenses; tutoring reimbursements; summer or night school fees; personal computer/printer for educational purposes; driver's education, license, or State ID; summer enrichment camp; extracurricular activities; college entrance exams and application fees; college and career coaching; financial literacy and savings match

Young adults ages 18-22 are eligible to receive Transitional Living Supportive Services. These services assist in the development of daily living skills and supports the youth's transition from foster care to self-sufficiency. Additionally, youth in this age group may qualify for Emergency Financial Assistance for up to 90 days in order to stabilize living conditions and/or personal circumstances.

## V. Chafee Program Goals

The GA RYSE program staff have developed several initiatives designed to deliver and strengthen the programs to achieve the purposes of the Chafee program over the next five years. These initiatives were developed after ongoing consultation with staff, stakeholders, and current and former foster youth. Georgia's CFSR PIP is not completed at this time, but the Chafee goals will be aligned. The youth board met for their annual planning retreat in August 2023 and held several meetings throughout FY2024 to have additional discussion and strategic planning. The selected initiatives ensure the child welfare system prioritizes positive youth development in its Chafee program, by focusing on youth resilience, social connections, knowledge of adolescent development, concrete support in times of need, and cognitive and social-emotional competence.

1. Coordinate with the Georgia Peers Advocating for Change (GPAC) youth advisory board to examine experiences and outcomes for youth in foster care.
  - GPAC meets monthly with youth boards from EmpowerMent and Amerigroup (collectively called Ubuntu) and their adult supporters to provide input on the Chafee initiatives and other youth-related events, share opportunities for youth engagement and feedback, and coordinate youth participation in events. GPAC is consulted when a new child welfare policy is considered or developed, and when staff trainings are developed or amended.
  - In 2024, GPAC agreed to serve as one of the state's CAPTA Citizen Review Panels, providing robust youth voice and lived experience to the panels' efforts



and opportunities for the youth to receive financial support for panel-related events. This will also improve alignment between the state's CAPTA Plan and Chafee goals. CAPTA funding will be used to support the youth board's annual retreat and strategic planning meetings.

- Youth identified several areas of opportunity for additional supports: employment, education, and housing. The Division and its partners will explore strategies throughout the CFSP reporting period to make improvements in those areas.
  - GPAC recommended that the agency prioritize youth educational achievement, which is included as CFSP Goal 3.2.
2. Expand NYTD data-sharing to include regional stakeholder meetings, judicial stakeholder meetings, kin and foster parent support groups, CAPTA Panels, regional directors and supervisors, the Parent Advisory Council, and the DHS Board.
- The GARYSE program staff will work with GPAC to develop a NYTD infographic to share with staff and at the annual regional stakeholder meetings (attendees often include staff, service providers, members of the Georgia Tribes, court partners, and child advocates). Stakeholders will be encouraged to review the NYTD data, explore areas of opportunity, and consider strategies and solutions for improved outcomes.
  - The GARYSE Program Director is engaging the Independent Living Specialists when cases involving an ILP youth are reviewed by the CQI/Quality Assurance Unit. This collaboration supports over-the-shoulder CQI training for Chafee staff.
3. Develop a Course Catalog of available trainings, including NYTD data.
- GA RYSE will provide regular Chafee-related training opportunities for DFCS staff. Chafee trainings were provided by the Independent Living Specialists (ILS) in the region but paused during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2024, the GA-RYSE program staff are assessing the regions to determine the specific needs of the staff. The Unit will also respond to training requests as needed (for example: "how to work with complex youth") when a program area or region identifies an immediate need. The team will provide a Train-the-Trainer course for ILS to ensure consistency in training content and delivery statewide.
  - Stakeholder training is also provided annually during the "adult day" of the Teens R 4 ME conference, and other child welfare conferences and summits scheduled throughout the year.
  - Chafee-related trainings will support efforts to strengthen the workforce (CFSP Goal 1) and ensure staff are knowledgeable of the specific service needs of older youth, leading to improved well-being outcomes for older youth and teens (CFSP items 12B, 16, 17, and 18)

#### 4. Update DFCS Chafee policies

- GARYSE will partner with the DFCS Policy and Regulations Unit to review and update all existing Chafee-related policies. Additionally, a new chapter within the Agency's policy manual will be created for Extended Foster Care.
- An extensive training plan will be created to train all staff on the new and updated policies.

The GARYSE program provides information on its website for former foster youth to access Chafee services, including Medicaid. Questions can be submitted directly through a link on the site that contacts the state Department of Human Services or the Department of Public Health. Youth can apply for Medicaid through the Gateway portal, or with the assistance of their ILS. The website also provides information on other programs for youth: rights of youth in foster care, housing support, education, health matters, match savings, emergency assistance, credit report assistance, and life skills training.

#### VI. Chafee Coordination with other Agencies

The Division partners with public and private agencies to develop and increase supports for youth in foster care to achieve independence.

#### Housing

During the 2020-2024 CFSP period, Georgia enhanced the Scattered Site Independent Living placement options for youth and young adults in extended foster care. The scattered site structure works with RBWO ILP providers to support young adults to achieve independent living over the course of the placement. Youth focus groups, surveys, and panel discussions led to the scattered site placement changes. The new changes included the implementation of a readiness assessment for potentially eligible youth, a tiered structure for scattered placements with milestones to be achieved before matriculating to the next tier, and an action plan for youth who were not deemed ready for such placement at the time of the assessment. Young people must sign the Scattered Site Placement Youth Readiness Assessment and it must be approved prior to being referred to an ILP provider. This assessment replaces the Universal Application for ILP placement consideration.

The GARYSE Chafee Program Director collaborated with the Division's Office of Provider Management (OPM) to train private agency placement providers, Division staff, foster parents, judicial partners, and other community stakeholders on the new requirements for independent living scattered site placements for youth in extended foster care, which became effective in August 2021. Fourteen trainings were offered to staff and private agency placement providers, including CPAs, CCIs, and independent living scattered site placement providers.

The Division continues to collaborate with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and independent housing authorities throughout the state to ensure young adults in need of housing and housing supports who had experienced foster care and who were in foster care have access to the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers initiative of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Over the course of this plan cycle, the agency will prioritize the following:

- Connect with housing authorities whom data supports currently have FUP and/or FYI vouchers available individually and collectively as a group to share successes and solutions to challenges that can be implemented across the state.
- Engage local housing authorities in discussions on the best method to refer eligible young adults to each individual housing authority. The goal is to create a streamlined referral process at the Division state office to disseminate referrals to individual housing authorities across the state.
- Explore community partnerships that are able to provide support services as defined in the legislation. In collaboration with the local housing authority, the Division will work with those community partners to develop a memorandum of understanding to ensure the services are available for young adults for the duration of receiving a housing voucher.
- Establish an MOU with the Georgia Department of Community Affairs and individual housing authorities throughout the state to formalize our partnerships and ensure seamless and equitable service delivery statewide.

## Health

During the 2020-2024 CFSP period, the GA-RYSE ILP developed a [health insurance website](#) to provide information for young adults currently or formerly in foster care to access Medicaid. The site provides instructions to determine eligibility and contact DFCS for guidance. Amerigroup meets quarterly with DFCS and the Department of Community Health to discuss updated policies and practices that impact health care for foster youth, including system barriers for former foster youth to access health coverage.

## Employment

The United Way of Greater Atlanta has partnered with DFCS and local businesses to develop [Career Ready ATL](#), a youth-centered workforce development initiative that creates and funds apprenticeship programs aligned to high-demand occupations. These apprenticeships can provide a pathway to a “living wage” career with opportunities for growth and economic mobility. The program targets youth of color, current and former foster youth (age 16-24), young parents, and youth disconnected from school or workforce in the Greater Atlanta region. Youth are prepared with paid, hands-on work

experience alongside coursework to grow talent in all fields, not only trades. The program intends to influence the creation of 4,000 high-quality youth apprenticeship opportunities by 2027.

Initial convenings with former foster youth were held in 2021-22. Youth were invited to share their experiences in career placement and readiness, to better design the program and meet their specific needs. The Division, the Youth Advisory Board, and MAAC/EmpowerMENT continue to engage with United Way to ensure current and former foster youth are prioritized for these opportunities.

## Education

Every youth has an Educational Advocate that assists with school needs to ensure they can graduate high school or complete their GED requirements. Young adults who are placed in scattered site housing are assigned life coaches with each placement. While in the placement, youth work with the life coach on daily living skills, such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, money management, and job readiness.

During the 2020-2024 CFSP period, the Division supported several legislative bills intended to support academic readiness and achievement for foster youth. House Bill 855 (2020) determines eligibility criteria for students in foster care to receive special education and related services and calls for the immediate and deliberate assessment of foster children newly enrolled in a school receiving state funds to determine if exposure to trauma has had or is likely to have adverse impact on educational performance—academic or behavioral. Senate Bill 107 (2021) provides for in-state tuition for youth who are from homeless situations and to provide for the waiver of tuition and all fees, including customary rooming and board fees, for qualifying foster and adopted individuals, at units of the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia, subject to certain exceptions.

The Division partners with the Fanning Institute of the University of Georgia to provide Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) for youth and young adults. This collaboration has yielded service improvements for youth seeking post-secondary education, including projects to serve students more effectively through the school's Designated Point of Contact (DPOC), and training materials to better educate youth and young adults about available ETV supports.

## Education and Training Vouchers (ETV)

The state makes available federal ETV funds to young currently residing in Georgia who were formerly in foster care in another state and subsequently choose to re-engage with post-secondary education and apply for ETV. The ETV process includes technology

enhancements that allow students to manage ETV requests independently after having their program eligibility confirmed. Youth can easily determine their ETV eligibility through the “Am I Eligible” feature on the website without having to make a call or send an email. Payments are made through direct deposit to schools, which allows for quicker payments being made and more efficiency in moving funding to schools on behalf of students.

The J.W. Fanning Institute at the University of Georgia established Embark Georgia in 2012 so that Georgia students who have experienced foster care and/or homelessness will have ample support to pursue a postsecondary degree. Embark Georgia established a Designated Point of Contact (DPOC) at every institution within the University System of Georgia and the Technical College System of Georgia (53 campuses statewide). Georgia is the first state to do this for youth experiencing foster care as well as youth experiencing homelessness. Seventeen Georgia campuses have developed campus-based support programs to further serve students and help them stay on track to graduate. Each campus program is unique, and Embark Georgia brings together DPOCs to share best-practices based on successful programs on their home campuses and from other states, as well as through the national initiative Fostering Academic Achievement Nationwide (FAAN). Embark Georgia utilizes three primary strategies to serve the statewide network: building and enhancing relationships, information sharing, and building capacity. The Embark Georgia Leadership conference is held every 18 months as a means of building relationships and sharing information among the key stakeholders who may support students who have experienced foster care. Enhancing communication among professionals working with this group of students is critical to increasing the number of students who receive ETV support and improving their outcomes.

Throughout the 2025-2029 CFSP reporting period, the Division will continue to partner with the Fanning Institute to operate the ETV program and deliver educational assistance to youth. Fanning will also support the state in ensuring that the total amount of educational assistance to a youth under Chafee and any other federal assistance program does not exceed the total cost of attendance, and to avoid duplication of benefits under Chafee and any other federal or federally assisted benefit program. Students are also eligible for financial support through the state’s [Fostering Success Act](#), a tax credit program passed in 2022 (HB 424) that funds wraparound services for foster youth under the age of 26 who have not been adopted or reunited with family. Youth will need to have achieved a high school diploma or GED, or be in the process of obtaining one, with plans to apply to and enroll in a Georgia public post-secondary school or other approved trade/vocational program. The program can help youth navigate the school enrollment process for trade, tech and 4-year public college programs and help with other needs like housing, transportation, food, clothing, medical/dental, counseling, and mentoring.

### Consultation with Tribes

Georgia does not have any federally recognized tribes. Georgia consults with tribes who have members in the state. DFCS continues to collaborate with the Georgia tribes. A designated member of the Policy and Regulations Unit (PRU) continues to serve as the DFCS State Office ICWA liaison. The Liaison works closely with the Georgia Tribes, led by Marian McCormick and Royce McCrory (Lower Muscogee Creek), Paul Brannen and Harley McGahee (Cherokee of Georgia Tribal Council), and Glenn Jones and Rhonda Bennet (Georgia Tribe of Eastern Cherokee). Tribal leaders are invited to attend or present at the state APSR joint planning and regional stakeholder meetings. These opportunities are also used to consult on CFSP priorities, goals, and strategies. In 2024, the Division scheduled a CFSP stakeholder interview session for the Georgia Tribes to share their experiences receiving services from and partnering with the child welfare agency; unfortunately, several tribal leaders were not able to attend.

The Liaison regularly participates in meetings of the [Georgia Council on American Indian Concerns](#). The Council is chaired by Nealie McCormick, of the Lower Muscogee Creek tribe. The meetings provide a forum for the agency to inform the tribes on available DFCS programs and services to support continued collaboration and participation. Meetings are scheduled monthly via Zoom or in-person at various locations around the state. The Liaison routinely shares draft child welfare policy with tribal leaders to gather their input prior to publication and ensures Council members know the website to review current and previous CFSPs and APSRs. The Liaison will continue to consult and coordinate with the tribal leaders on the state's plan and performance throughout the 2025-2029 CFSP reporting period.

Copies of the CFSP and subsequent APSRs will be shared with Georgia's tribes for review and feedback.

In 2023, the Court Improvement Program identified a Child Welfare Law Specialist (CWLS) attorney to serve as an ICWA Liaison for the courts, and to partner with the DFCS Liaison to improve awareness of ICWA among case managers, judges, and attorneys. The Liaisons attend state and national meetings that advance tribal interests and increase awareness of ICWA, including the National Indian Child Welfare Association meeting for state ICWA representatives. This work is ongoing.

### ICWA

Georgia has no federally recognized tribes, but efforts to comply with ICWA are ongoing.

Training - The agency continues to require annual ICWA training for all child welfare staff. The training addresses topics like establishing a child's eligibility, notification of the tribe, active efforts to prevent breakup of the Indian family, and expert witnesses. The training

includes knowledge checks throughout and requires a passing score on a final to ensure comprehension. The Division's ICWA Liaison is supporting CIP to develop ICWA training for attorneys and judges.

**Compliance** - The Liaison continues to monitor Georgia's ICWA compliance through semi-annual regional reports and Georgia SHINES data reports.

**Technical Assistance** - The Liaison continues to provide technical assistance on a case-by-case basis to DFCS staff.

### **Data**

Case managers ask each family during initial interviews if they are of Native American heritage. If responses to those questions indicate that the child is or could be a member or eligible for membership in a federally recognized tribe, they begin efforts to determine eligibility. Documentation of tribal eligibility is reported in Georgia SHINES. The Data Unit provides regular updates to the Liaison on the number of children identified as eligible for membership in a federally recognized tribe, and how the requirements of ICWA were met for each case, as documented in Georgia SHINES. The Liaison works with the county and regional leaders to ensure ICWA requirements are met for each case where tribal membership is confirmed.

### **Jurisdiction**

Georgia Tribes do not provide child welfare services. DFCS is responsible for child welfare services for all children in Georgia.

### **Chafee Consultation with Tribes**

Georgia does not have any federally recognized tribes. State-recognized Georgia Tribes do not provide Chafee/ETV services. DFCS is responsible for child welfare services for all children in Georgia. All Chafee-eligible youth receive services through the program.