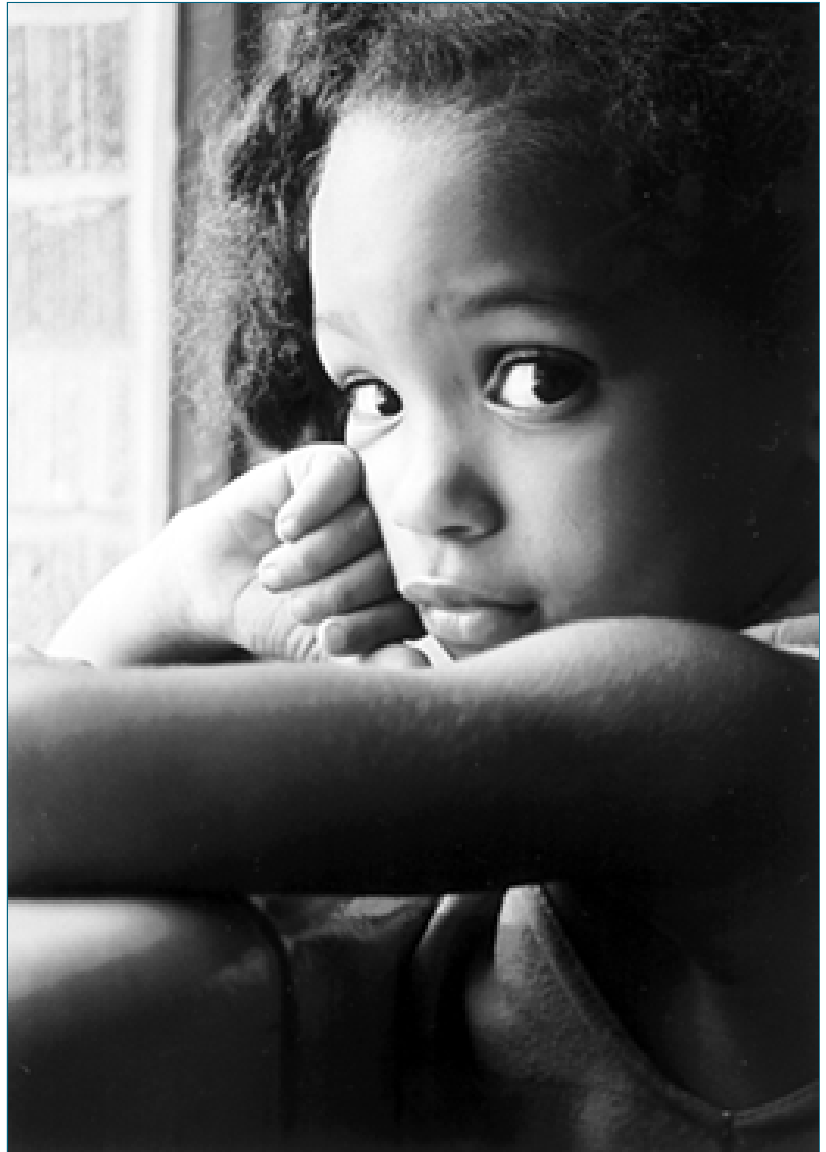




## Protective Services for Families and Children



## Protective Services for Families and Children

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he largest division in PRS is Protective Services for Families and Children (PSFC). Its goals include protecting children from abuse and neglect, promoting the integrity and stability of families, and providing permanent places to live for children who cannot safely remain with their own families.

The division provides a number of services including intake and investigation of reports of child abuse and neglect; services to families and children in their homes; placement of children in substitute care; development and maintenance of foster homes; adoption and post-adoption services; preparation for adult living (PAL) services; services to runaways and at-risk youth; gang activity prevention services; and operating the Texas Runaway Hotline. About

\$420.2 million was spent to protect and serve Texas children and families in fiscal year 1995.

During fiscal year 1995, staff completed many parts of the overall design of the major project of automation. This project, which began in 1993 and is called Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS), is being designed with the technical assistance of a consulting firm to support staff work in the field. New computers and software were installed to assist in case documentation, communication, appointment scheduling, and other office activities. Using the software, staff are now able to process electronically many of the forms that they were processing manually. In the future, the department plans to add additional software to further support management of the department's resources, help achieve the best possible results for the people being served, and provide staff with better information.



Child Abuse includes the following acts or omissions:

- ◆ mental or emotional injury to a child that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning;
- ◆ causing or permitting the child to be in a situation in which the child sustains a mental or emotional injury that results in an observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning;
- ◆ physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child, or the genuine threat of substantial harm from physical injury to the child, including an injury that is at variance with the history or explanation given and excluding an accident or reasonable discipline by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator that does not expose the child to a substantial risk of harm;
- ◆ failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent an action by another person that results in physical injury that results in substantial harm to the child;
- ◆ sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare;
- ◆ failure to make a reasonable effort to prevent sexual conduct harmful to a child;
- ◆ compelling or encouraging the child to engage in sexual conduct as defined by Section 43.01, Penal Code; or
- ◆ causing, permitting, encouraging, engaging in, or allowing the photographing, filming, or depicting of the child if the person knew or should have known that the resulting photograph, film, or depiction of the child is obscene (as defined by the Penal Code) or pornographic.

Child Neglect includes:

- ◆ the leaving of a child in a situation where the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of harm, without arranging for necessary care for the child, and a demonstration of an intent not to return by a parent, guardian, or managing or possessory conservator of the child; or
- ◆ the following acts or omissions:
  - placing the child in or failing to remove the child from a situation that a reasonable person would realize requires judgment or actions beyond the child's level of maturity, physical condition, or mental abilities and that results in bodily injury or a substantial risk of immediate harm to the child;
  - the failure to seek, obtain, or follow through with medical care for the child, with the failure resulting in or presenting a substantial risk of death, disfigurement, or bodily injury or with the failure resulting in an observable and material impairment to the growth, development, or functioning of the child;
  - the failure to provide the child with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services had been offered and refused; or
  - placing a child in or failing to remove the child from a situation in which the child would be exposed to a substantial risk of sexual conduct harmful to the child; or
  - the failure by the person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare to permit the child to return to the child's home without arranging for the necessary care for the child after the child has been absent from the home for any reason, including having been in residential care or having run away.

## Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services (CPS) is the oldest and largest of PSFC's programs. It began with the establishment of the Child Welfare Division, which was created by the Texas Legislature in 1931 as a program within the Texas Board of Control. In 1939, the Child Welfare Division was transferred to the newly created Texas Department of Public Welfare. During the next three decades, federal, state, and county participation in services to abused and neglected children increased gradually. When the Texas Family Code became effective January 1, 1974, citizens were mandated to report suspected child abuse to the department. Statutory definitions of abuse and neglect were enacted in 1987 by the Texas Legislature. Revisions to these definitions, as well as a complete reorganization of the Texas Family Code and Human Resources Code, were made in the legislative session of 1995.

## Intake, Investigation, and Risk Assessment

To ensure a more structured and consistent method for making decisions about the risk of abuse and neglect in families, the program implemented the Structured Model for Assessment of Risk in Texas (SMART) in fiscal year 1993. SMART is a service delivery system that gives staff a structured approach to assessing the risk of child abuse and neglect. The system is based on advances in casework practice and continuing research.

Under the SMART system, staff begin to assess the risk of abuse and neglect at intake by gathering information on risk-related areas that indicate how a family functions. Staff weigh such factors as whether abuse or neglect has already occurred, children's vulnerability, the parents' history, and the way parents view their children. If staff believe there is a reasonable likelihood that children will be abused or neglected in the foreseeable future, the report is assigned for investigation.

If a child is in immediate and serious jeopardy, staff try to work with the family to establish and implement a plan to ensure the child's immediate safety. If that is not possible, PRS petitions the court to remove the child from the home.

When a child is currently safe but at risk in the foreseeable future, staff may offer in-home services to help the family manage the factors that place the child at risk. If the investigation indicates that none of the children in the home currently face a significant risk of abuse or neglect, the investigation worker closes the investigation without further action.

During fiscal year 1995, CPS staff were involved in evaluating, monitoring, improving, and refining the SMART system. Statewide and regional work groups met quarterly to address issues and challenges identified with use of the system. Having met the challenge of implementing a comprehensive risk assessment system, the focus has been centered on assuring that risk concepts are fully incorporated in all stages of service delivery. Case readings were conducted to evaluate the degree of integration of the risk assessment system, and intake guidelines were developed to assist intake staff in evaluating those factors which indicate situations where CPS intervention is most clearly warranted.

The department is completing the final year of a three-year federal project funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to design, test, and implement refinements to the risk system. As a result of this project, staff piloted a decision-making tool which utilizes factors identified at intake and



investigation to predict, respectively, cases which are likely to be confirmed and are likely to be reported again. Continuing evaluation of this research data is expected to result in improved decision-making skills for staff at all levels. The goal of this project, as well as other CPS risk initiatives, is to enable the state to direct resources where they are needed the most, to those families and children who are at the greatest risk of abuse and neglect.

CPS believes children are at risk of abuse or neglect when there is a reasonable likelihood that they will be abused or neglected in the foreseeable future.

When reports of maltreatment are received, CPS staff assign them with a priority that determines how soon the case must be handled.

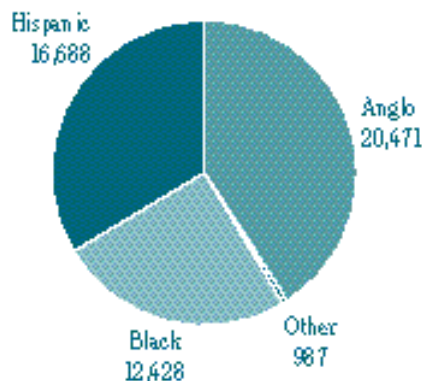
To establish time frames for investigations, CPS assigns each report of child abuse or neglect to one of two priority groups. CPS must initiate an investigation within 24 hours of receiving a Priority I report, and as soon as possible, but no

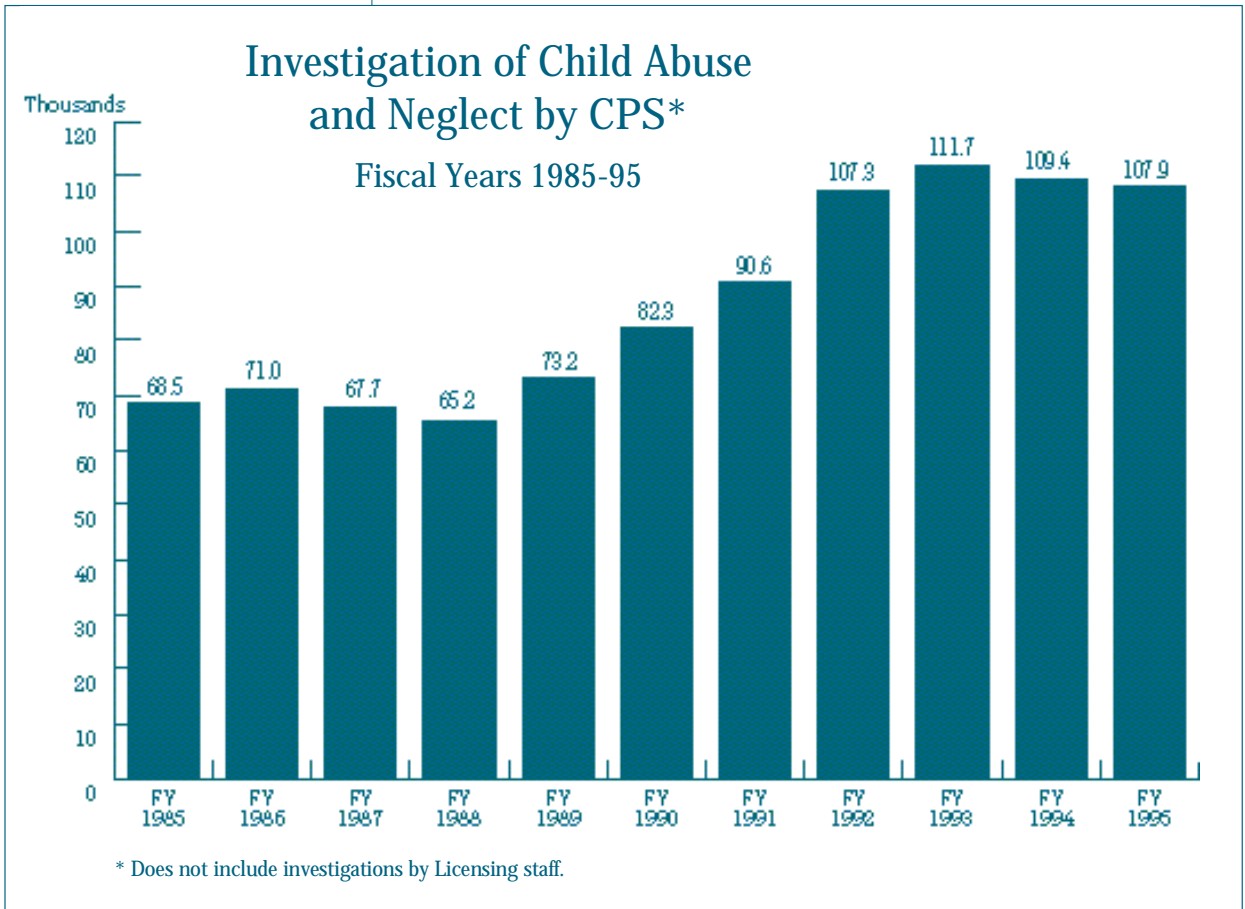
later than 10 days of receiving a Priority II report.

Priority I reports concern children who appear to face an immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in death or serious harm.

All reports of abuse or neglect that are not assigned to Priority I are assigned to Priority II.

### Ethnicity of Confirmed Child Abuse/Neglect Victims





## Family Preservation Services

When staff identify the need for continuing protective services and believe that children's safety can be maintained in their own homes, they develop service plans with the families with the goal of preventing further abuse or neglect. In a situation where children must be temporarily placed in foster care for their safety, the department also provides services to the parents that enable the children's return as soon as safety is ensured. In providing services, workers try to strengthen the families' abilities to meet the children's needs so the children can remain in or safely return to their own homes. More than 73 percent of the children removed return to their own homes.

Workers focus on factors contributing directly to the abuse or neglect. Often, the parents do not use appropriate and effective nonviolent discipline methods, have minimal knowledge of child development and appropriate expectations for children, and do not know how to handle family or individual crises or find available support. Some parents may have emotional disturbances and require more intensive services from medical or mental health professionals. Some may have health or financial difficulties, problems with drugs or alcohol, or other behaviors that prevent the children from being safe and properly cared for. Many of the families who have entered the CPS system are affected by more than one of these factors.

Both CPS staff and professionals from other disciplines participate in case planning with families. Where available, a variety of community resources may provide services for the family.

Once the safety and risk reduction plans are established, CPS staff provide and arrange for the planned services, continue to assess the family dynamics creating the risk, monitor the children's safety, and assess the effectiveness of the services and appropriateness of the plans. If changes in the families occur, staff establish new plans with the families. If children's safety appears to be unattainable in their homes, staff make recommendations about other options to the families and appropriate authorities.

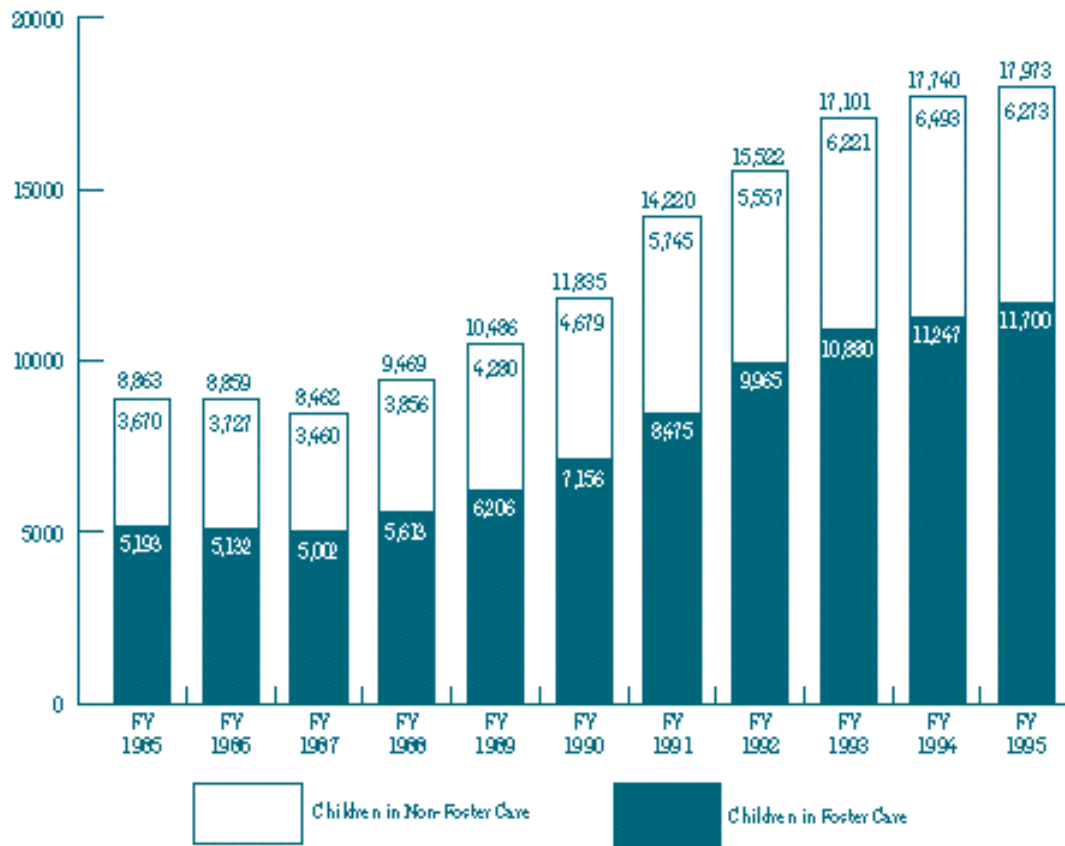
Families who are receiving these services may still have unmet needs when their cases are closed, but the safety of their children will be controlled and risk of abuse or neglect reduced. Staff will refer families to other appropriate resources to address their remaining unmet needs.

CPS provides intensive family preservation services to families who need intensive assistance to protect a child from abuse or neglect in the immediate or short-term future. Intensive family preservation services were available primarily in Houston, Dallas, Fort Worth, and San Antonio prior to 1990. In 1993, the program was implemented statewide in both rural and urban areas. CPS also provides a continuum of reunification support services to families whose children are returning home at the end of court-ordered placements in substitute care.





### Children in Legal Responsibility of PRS, Including Children in Foster Care Placement, at the End of Each Fiscal Year



To implement new Family Preservation/Family Support services, staff solicited comments on service capacity, service needs, target populations, and goals for the state’s family preservation and support services in 1994. State and community leaders gave their insights on how the services should be delivered. Staff have adopted “Texas Families: Together and Safe” as the name for the program. To address the identified needs, PRS established a program of grants for community agencies or organizations. Communities are able to use these grants to support service systems or service programs that serve families with children, emphasizing service to first-time parents, teen parents, parents with young children, and parents with children at high risk of abuse, neglect, developmental delay, emotional, school, or health problems. Out of 46 proposals received, eight were funded at or near their requested level. The grants were awarded to El Paso, Abilene, Rio Grande Valley, Dalhart, Dallas, Fort Worth, Brownwood, and Bryan. Services began in September 1994.

## Foster Care

The increasing number of abuse and neglect reports result in a corresponding increase in the number of children entering foster care.

Resources are available when there are problems in a family that do not meet the statutory definitions of child abuse and neglect but need attention. These include Parents Anonymous, Family Outreach, Communities in Schools, and other child abuse prevention programs serving families at risk of abuse and neglect.

Family Outreach is a community-based program that aids families in stress. Its main objective is to enlist volunteers in the prevention of child abuse and neglect and strengthening of family life. Casework managers, funded by the department, supervise the work of highly-trained volunteers who provide support, encouragement, and parenting information to troubled families. There were 33 Family Outreach centers in Texas at the end of fiscal year 1995.

When CPS staff determine that children are not safe with their families because of abuse or neglect, they work with the courts to obtain managing conservatorship of the children. This court authorization allows staff to remove children from their families and place them temporarily with others and work with the families to make their homes safe for the children's return. Children may be placed with relatives, in foster homes, or in child-care facilities during their stay in the foster care system.

The increasing number of abuse and neglect reports result in a corresponding increase in the number of children entering foster care. At the end of fiscal year 1994, the number of children in care was 11,247. The end of fiscal year 1995 found 11,700 children living in out-of-home placement because their families were unable to provide them with a safe environment.

When children initially enter the foster care system, their needs are evaluated to determine which resources can best support normal growth and development while they are awaiting resolution of their families' problems. Staff continually work with the private sector to encourage the development of assessment centers that can receive children on an emergency basis and start medical, psychological, and developmental assessments almost immediately. The goal of assessment centers is to reduce the number of times children are moved while in care.

The great majority of children can, with support and understanding, be helped to live with foster families in the community. These volunteers make caring for an extra child a part of their daily lives. Foster families assist in taking the children to appointments with professionals such as dentists, doctors, and psychologists. Additionally, foster children can have visits with their biological families that may also include participation by their foster parents. At the end of fiscal year 1995, there were 3,452 Texas foster families certified by PRS to care for abused and neglected children, including 32 families residing out-of-state. The overall availability of foster homes has grown, as has the foster parent retention rate in Texas.

Foster parents are called upon to deal with very difficult situations and children who may be experiencing intense grief due to being separated from their parents. Program staff continually work toward providing good support for foster parents. CPS staff and foster parents work together as a professional team so that children's needs are met. Efforts were made in fiscal year 1995 to improve communication among all members of the team and to assure that concerns of both foster parents and the agency are addressed. CPS now

CPS staff and foster parents work together as a professional team so that children's needs are met.

## Services to Children with Disabilities

## Permanency Planning

requires that foster parents be invited to administrative reviews (also known as permanency planning team meetings) on every child in care.

During fiscal year 1995, a federal grant provided funding to train both public and private residential treatment facility trainers on a parenting curriculum which enables foster and adoptive families to manage difficult behaviors of children in their care. The goal of the training is to smooth the transition to family home settings for children and youth who are leaving residential treatment. Entitled "Working with Abused Children: A Positive Approach to Discipline," the training will be given starting in the fall of 1995 and continuing through 1996. The training will be available to residential treatment staff, foster parents, and adoptive parents statewide.

For years, CPS staff have struggled to recruit and train sufficient volunteers to become foster families. The "Dare To Love" recruitment campaign began in June 1990 to recruit and retain specialized foster and adoptive families, focusing on children with disabilities and recruitment of multi-ethnic families. Through this campaign, staff have produced various advertisements, public service announcements, videos, brochures, posters, and other materials statewide to promote foster and adoptive care. The Texas Recruiters Coalition, which is made up of foster and adoptive parents and recruitment specialists from across the state, meets regularly to discuss innovative strategies for recruitment.

In an effort to provide children with appropriate levels of structure and supervision within the least restrictive environments, staff use a levels of care system. It defines what type of foster care each child needs and is eligible to receive. The billing rates and levels correspond to the child's behavioral and emotional problems, developmental disabilities, and the intensity of service needed.

**T**he Children with Disabilities Team, which is based at the department's state headquarters, was begun in 1993 to assist staff and caregivers in providing specialized services to children in substitute care who have disabilities. Children served are challenged in the areas of mental health, intellectual functioning, or physical ability, or have medical disabilities. The team helps field staff locate resources and services, such as placement in the child's least restrictive environment, so that each child's special needs are met. The Children with Disabilities staff also assist caregivers in acquiring in-home services such as medical equipment, respite care, and communication devices to help care for children who have been placed with them.

Regional Children with Disabilities Programs /Projects are located in several regions across the state to assist staff and caregivers in accessing services within their own communities. These programs provide direct services such as assessment, staff and caregiver training, linkage to local resources, and participation in permanency planning. A goal for the future is development of Children with Disabilities Projects in all regions across the state.

**A**fter assessing families and weighing the results of periodic court reviews, staff determine if it is possible to return children to their homes. When staff conclude that it isn't possible to return children in the near future, they make arrangements through the court system for children to grow up in a consistent, stable environment that will provide them with long-term nur-

During fiscal year 1995, PRS continued work on a federal grant that focuses on improving the placement process for children in PRS custody

## Adoption Services

turing relationships. The process of finding and developing such environments is part of permanency planning.

Permanency planning involves selecting goals and establishing plans of service to ensure that children have the most appropriate placements and don't linger in the system. Permanency planning also includes the legal steps taken on children's behalf while they are in care. In fiscal year 1995, intensive training was provided to staff on new permanency planning policy to assure staff were informed of the structure for decision-making when choosing a permanency plan. Follow up training will be provided in fiscal year 1996 to reinforce the skills and knowledge needed to implement effective permanency planning and achieve faster resolution of cases.

During fiscal year 1995, PRS continued work on a federal grant that focuses on improving the placement process for children in PRS custody who are waiting to be adopted. This three-year project, called Children Awaiting Permanent Placement (CAPP), focuses on children entering foster care, as well as those in foster care and free for adoption. Staff across the state and in residential treatment centers are coordinating efforts through the grant to establish more appropriate initial and permanent placements.

Staff are working toward changing policy and developing procedures and training to prepare foster parents to mentor and preserve birth families.

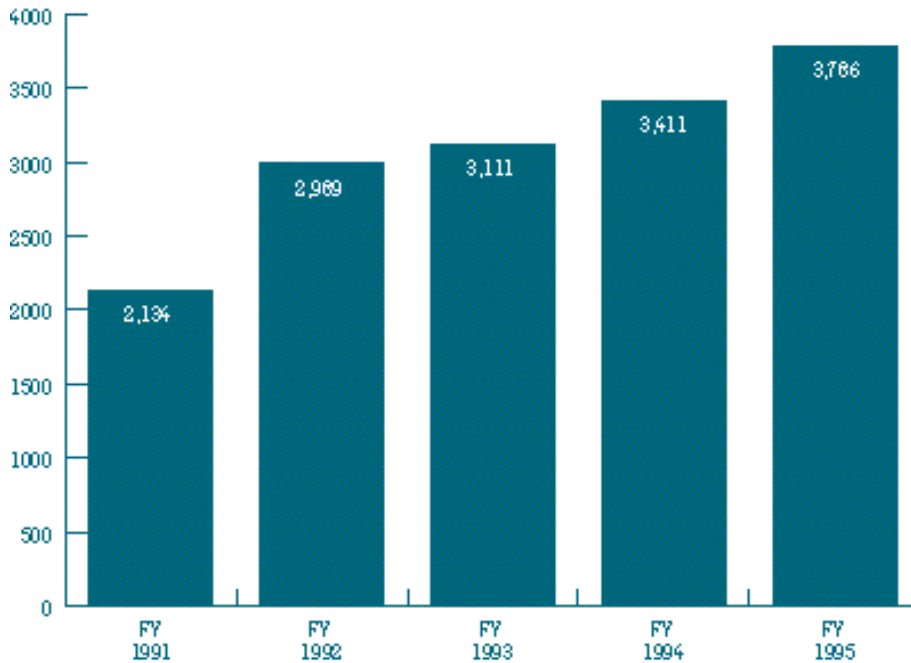
Permanency Planning for Positive Outcomes is another federally funded project which focuses on reducing the amount of time that children are in the care of the department. The objective of this project is to build systems which can address barriers keeping children from moving to a permanent placement and achieving legal case resolution as quickly as possible. Regional workgroups focus on identifying and resolving barriers such as court access and staff training.

The permanency plan for most children in PRS' managing conservatorship is for the children to return home and for the department's responsibility to be dismissed. But when a child cannot return home safely, adoption is the most frequently selected permanency plan. Once PRS determines that adoption is in the best interest of a child, staff ask the court to terminate the parental rights of the child's parents. When the child is legally freed for adoption, staff begin work towards placing the child with a permanent adoptive family.

Most of the children in PRS' conservatorship who are awaiting adoptive placements have special needs. They generally are school-age, are physically or mentally challenged, belong to racial minorities, or need to be placed together with their brothers or sisters. These children have a great need for acceptance and nurturing to help them grow and flourish. The PRS adoption program finds adoptive families for these children. During fiscal year 1995, the department placed 871 children in adoptive homes.

PRS encourages private adoption agencies to help the department place children into adoptive homes. As a result of a collaboration between PRS and the Texas Association of Licensed Children's Services (TALCS), in fiscal year 1995 the department expanded adoption services for children through open enrollment. By reformatting purchased adoption services in this manner, child-placing agencies are making their waiting families more generally available to children across the state. Services by child-placing agencies will include place-

### Clients Receiving Post-adoption Services



ment into approved agency homes and supervision of the placement through consummation. The goal of this mutual effort is to increase the number of adoptive families available for children and reduce the length of time children wait for adoptive homes.

To enhance adoption services for children who are waiting to be adopted, PRS has continued to make a special effort to recruit adoptive parents. Through the 'Dare to Love' campaign, recruitment activities are both general and specific to a child's identified special needs. Activities involve efforts such as

adoption booths and fairs at malls and other public facilities, public service announcements, news media campaigns, community task forces, recruitment of churches and private industry to help locate prospective adoptive families, and airport billboards.

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) brings together children and families who are willing to adopt them faster than ever before. Through a computerized network, TARE matches prospective adoptive families with children who are legally free for adoption - children in the managing conservatorship of PRS.

Children and approved adoptive families are registered in TARE by PRS staff, although approved families can also be registered through licensed child placing agencies. TARE staff first try to match children with approved parents statewide and then, if necessary, out of state. TARE produces a variety of recruitment publications; operates a toll-free Foster Care and Adoption Inquiry Line (1-800-233-3405); obtains and compiles demographic information about children and families listed in the exchange; and, if a family in Texas cannot be found, registers children in the National Adoption Exchange based in Philadelphia with information about prospective children and families. The monthly TARE listing is available to PRS adoption staff, adoption support groups, and private adoption agencies. TARE is distributed to about 550 agencies in Texas and other states. In fiscal year 1995, the TARE "Family Album" received national recognition for its written content.

PRS has a site on the Internet's World Wide Web which allows children available for adoption to be viewed by computer users around the country

PRS has a site on the Internet's World Wide Web which allows children available for adoption to be viewed by computer users around the country in hopes of helping children find adoptive homes. Also in fiscal year 1995, PRS began a computer-based pilot project to help place children awaiting adoption through a computer bulletin board (BBS). The project is part of the TARE. At any given time, TARE has about 250 children and more than 100 families registered. Access to the bulletin board is free of charge. The files are readable by a variety of graphics programs. Unlike the Internet, the BBS files must first be downloaded and then viewed.

PRS supports the Metropolitan One Church, One Child recruitment project in the Houston area, where there are a large number of African-American children waiting for adoption. African-American ministers involved in the project believe that if a family from each African-American church would adopt a child or sibling group, there would not be any African-American children waiting for permanent families.

Once recruited, prospective adoptive families attend a training program. The training gives staff and families the opportunity to explore their abilities to care for children who are waiting to be adopted. After adoptive parents complete the training, staff complete a home study of the parents. The study includes an assessment of the adoptive family's flexibility in all areas of life and their sensitivity, understanding, and ability to deal with the children's unique needs.

In response to a study of the department's adoption program, specialized training was provided in fiscal year 1995 to PRS adoption and foster home staff representatives and private child-placing agencies by the National Adoption Resource Center, a division of Spaulding for Children. The curriculum in special needs adoption guides staff in developing superior skills in family assessment and development. These representatives at the training will, in turn, train staff in their regions or staff of other private child-placing agencies. This effort will support the development of adoptive and foster families who are better able to meet the long term needs of children.

After completing the home study and approving families for adoption, adoption staff work with other CPS staff to identify children awaiting adoption who may benefit by a particular family's skills. When an adoptive family is selected for a child, CPS staff help the family understand the child's readiness for adoption and evaluate the family's ability to provide for the child's specific needs. The first step in this process involves providing the adoptive family with a copy of the child's case record, including a detailed Health, Social, Educational, and Genetic History (HSEGH) report.

Staff arrange a placement after several preplacement visits between the child and adoptive family and provide support services to help them develop their relationship. The adoption can be consummated after the child has been in the adoptive placement for six months.

During fiscal year 1995, 46.6 percent of the children placed into adoption were adopted by their foster parents. This saved the children an additional move and allowed adoption by a family intimately familiar with the child's background. As with new placements, foster-adoptive placements receive support from adoption services staff to prepare the child and foster family for the transition.



Placement in loving homes does not always heal the scars of abuse and parental separation.

Adoption assistance is available for eligible children to enable lower income families to adopt and otherwise help families provide for the adopted children's service needs. Adoption subsidy benefits include medical assistance and when needed, financial assistance. The subsidies are provided from either federal or state funds depending on a child's eligibility. For fiscal year 1995, the average monthly total of adoption subsidies provided was 5,446. Another resource to alleviate financial barriers associated with adopting children through the department is the nonrecurring adoption expenses benefit. PRS reimburses nonrecurring adoption expenses such as attorney's fees, court costs, and adoption study costs.

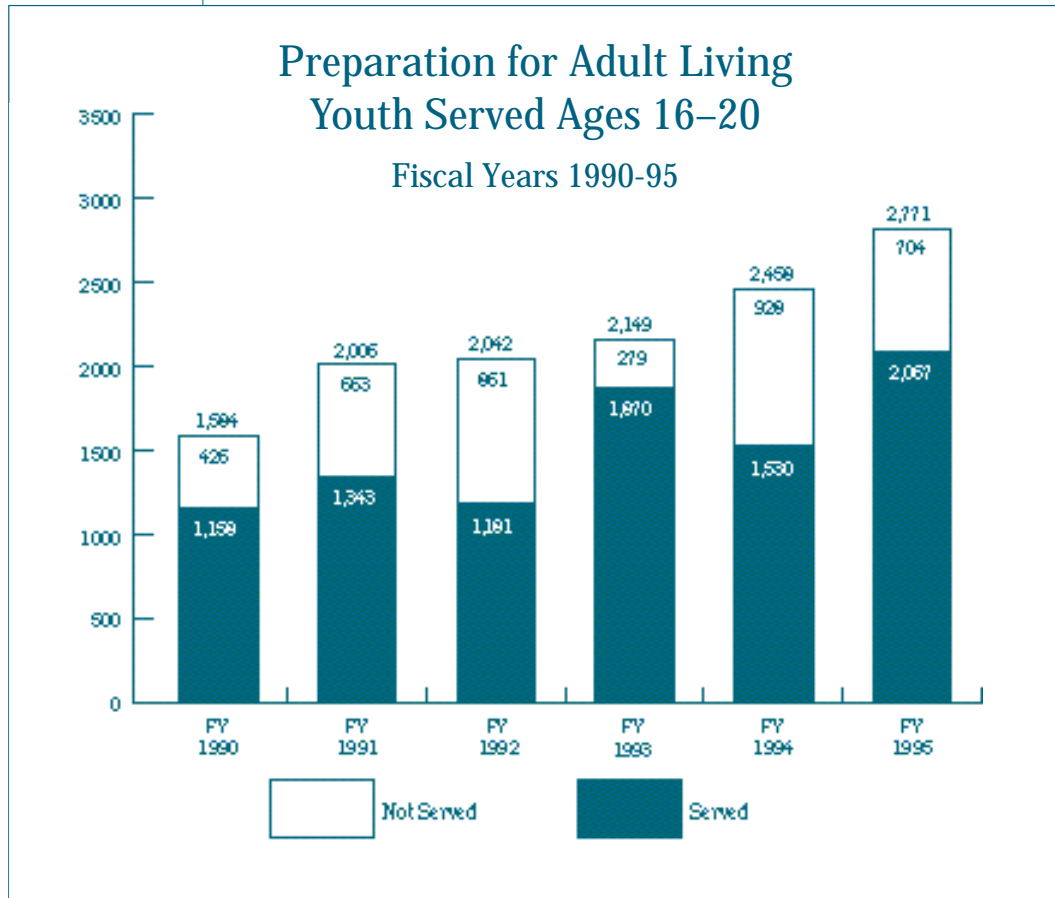
Adoption was once considered an exit service, with no further services needed after a child was placed with a suitable family. As the department gained more experience placing children, it became apparent that the need for services did not end with the adoption. Placement in loving homes does not always heal the scars of abuse and parental separation. Often, as children placed by the department grow older, their needs increase and the adoptive families have to turn to mental health professionals for help. The traumatic effects of abuse and neglect are so powerful and lasting that the children often require chronic treatment. To address the situation, the 71st Texas Legislature authorized PRS to provide post-adoption services to children and families whom the department was serving prior to adoption. The program was implemented in the spring of 1990 through the development of contracts with private child-placing and social service agencies. Services provided include case management, parent training and support groups, respite care, and therapeutic services. The purpose of the post-adoption service program is to help the adopted child and family adjust to the adoption, cope with any history of abuse in the child's background, and avoid permanent or long-term removal of children from their family's home. While inpatient/residential treatment is available through the program, it is limited to acute care situations. Post-adoption services were provided to 3,786 people during fiscal year 1995.

To ensure the protection of children and adoptive families when working across state lines, Texas abides by the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children. The compact promotes cooperation between the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands in foster and adoptive placements.

The Compact ensures that each interstate placement is in the best interest of the child, policies and applicable laws have been followed, the child's legal and financial responsibilities will continue to be met by the sending agencies or individuals, and the child actually relocates to the receiving state. During fiscal year 1995, 1,148 children were approved by Interstate Compact to be placed into Texas and 1,401 were approved for placement out of the state.

## Preparation for Adult Living

Be-coming an adult can be a frightening and challenging experience, and is compounded further for youths who have been raised by the state in the foster care system. Many of these youths will not be able to depend on their biological family for emotional and financial support while they are making the transition. PRS provides the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program to help such youths assume the responsibilities of adulthood.



PAL services include independent-living assessment and skills training; group and individual counseling; sex education; money management classes; vocational assessment and training; General Educational Development (GED) or college preparation courses; and other services aimed at preparing youths for responsible adulthood. Many of the regions now have Mentor programs, in which a youth is matched with an adult volunteer in the community. The PAL Mentor serves as a role model and helps to teach the young person skills needed for the transition to adult living. Efforts were made during this fiscal year to develop a Social Support Inventory, to be reviewed by youth and staff, to ensure that youth leave foster care with some type of social support. During fiscal year 1995, 2,326 youths, ages 14 through 20, participated in the PAL program.

The 73rd Legislature passed House Bill 1356, which exempts youths who are leaving foster care from having to pay tuition and most fees at state-supported universities, colleges, and vocational schools. This legislation opens doors of opportunity that these youths previously had little or no hope of entering. Each year since passage of this bill, a greater number of youth are taking advantage of the legislation.

In fiscal year 1995, the statewide Youth Leadership Committee, which is made up of youths in foster care who are ages 16 to 19, met several times. This group solicits input and ideas from youth in substitute care and works with department staff to improve services to this population.



## Gang Activity Prevention Program

The Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services funds the Gang Activity Prevention Demonstration Project in Baytown, Texas, which was developed in response to increased violence in the community. Former gang members and parents of former gang members serve as staff on the project. The program provides after-school activities including tutoring, cultural enhancement, and recreation to children ages 9 to 11. Fifty children from four elementary schools are targeted for services; however, over 200 children participate in the program on a regular basis. As of the end of fiscal year 1994, Baytown's two major African-American gangs disbanded. The Chief of Police credited the Gang Activity Prevention Program with this accomplishment.

## Services to Runaways and At-risk Youth

Commonly referred to as the STAR program, Services to Runaways and At-risk Youth makes services available to youth and families who would otherwise fall through the cracks. They are experiencing family conflict related to a youth running away, threatening to run away, or skipping school. The pressures resulting from these family conflicts often create the potential for violence. Unfortunately, the situation must escalate before CPS or juvenile probation will intervene.

Thirty two contractors across the state maintain 24-hour availability of services to provide crisis intervention and counseling services to youths and families in hopes of resolving conflicts so youths can remain with their families. Contractors have emergency residential care (shelter or emergency foster homes) available in the event that it is not advisable for youths to return home immediately. Follow-up counseling is made available to all youth and their families and a follow-up contact is made with the family 90 days after termination of services. The 74th Legislature passed legislation and appropriations to dramatically expand the STAR Program in fiscal year 1996.

## Texas Runaway Hotline

The Texas Runaway Hotline is a 24 hour toll-free hotline for runaways, at-risk youth, and their families. An experienced team of volunteers and staff headquartered in Austin provides an array of services aimed at reducing the number of runaway children living on the streets. These services include crisis intervention, information and referral, conference calls to parents, and a message relay service to families. Over the past year the number of statewide calls have increased by approximately 100 percent.

## Community Development and Volunteer Initiatives

The department continued with a number of projects and initiatives in fiscal year 1995 that involved community and volunteer participation in the CPS program. In the second year of the federally funded Community Partnerships Project, special emphasis was given to the development of new regional Adopt-A-Caseworker projects modeled after the Dallas County Rainbow Room Project. These projects depend on contributions from businesses and members of the community. Consultation with the Dallas Rainbow Room staff and board of directors throughout the year has resulted in cooperation and enthusiasm from regions that have signed on to replicate this type of project.

## Other Program Directions

Examples of statewide projects that address the prevention of child abuse and neglect include the annual Child Abuse Prevention Month campaign. In 1995, this project was extended beyond the child advocacy organizations and child welfare boards to include a statewide network of child care providers and civic organizations. An evaluation was added to the campaign to assess the impact of the different materials included in the prevention packet and to solicit input from groups as to the types of parent education and community project materials that would be most useful to them.

Volunteers who work directly and indirectly with CPS clients, including Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in some areas, are active throughout the state. They are attached to the regional offices through a variety of projects. These people contribute thousands of hours of volunteer service to the families and children served by CPS, as well as donation of valuable goods, services and in-kind contributions. In a time of belt-tightening in program dollars, CPS is more dependent than ever on the efforts of its community advocates.

Many of the department's legislative initiatives passed during the 74th legislative session. The passage of these laws will require policy changes, rules to be adopted, and in some cases, advisory committees to be appointed. In fiscal year 1996, members of an advisory committee on promoting adoption of minority children will be appointed. Staff will develop procedures for joint investigation of serious child abuse and neglect cases with law enforcement. Citizen Review Teams will be established in communities to provide community input on CPS investigation issues. Swift Adoption Teams will be created in efforts to place children more quickly in adoptive homes once parental rights have been terminated. An additional ground for termination of parental rights was added, which should help CPS to move children to permanency faster in individual situations. Greater efforts will be made to document and prevent domestic violence in families.

CPS staff know the system was closed far too long and that the old "only we know best" philosophy was not productive. In response, the agency is changing its way of delivering services. There are 18 Children's Advocacy Centers in operation around the state and 12 more are in the planning stage. These centers reduce the need for multiple interviews in investigations and make it easier for CPS and law enforcement to jointly investigate severe cases of abuse, including sexual abuse. Additionally, in some areas without Advocacy Centers, CPS staff are being co-housed with law enforcement. Child Death Review Teams have been implemented in 12 sites covering 56 percent of the state's population and 11 more are in the developmental stage. New legislation supports a statewide system of Child Death Review. CPS fully supports CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates) and its programs. PRS has funded, through the Children's Justice Act grant, start-up costs and training in CASA programs around the state. CPS is supportive of Communities in Schools and has staff stationed in those programs where caseloads allow. Community-based offices are next on the agenda. CPS continues to support prevention efforts targeting at-risk families, and is committed to strengthening and advocating for families.

The STAR Program will be serving a larger number of youth in efforts to reduce and prevent juvenile crime.

In fiscal year 1995, 21 community members were appointed to the PSFC Advisory Committee. The purpose of this committee is to advise PSFC and the PRS Board about program services, policies, and issues, and to facilitate communication with the general public. This group plans to continue the important work it began this year.

The STAR Program will be serving a larger number of youth in efforts to reduce and prevent juvenile crime. Beginning January 1, 1996, the program will begin serving youths as young as age 7 who have committed minor delinquent offenses. The Community Youth Development Grants Program will award funding to targeted communities with high incidence of juvenile crime. The purpose of the program is primary prevention of criminal activity of youth.

Staff continued a quality control process begun in fiscal year 1994 to ensure that the right clients are being served with the right services for the right amount of time. Staff worked on redesigning the case-reading process with a focus on outcomes for families. Currently staff are using information gained from prior studies to show the relationship between resources and outcomes so that resources can be better managed.

The Children's Protective Services Training Institute operates through a cooperative agreement between PRS and four graduate schools of social work in different metropolitan areas. In fiscal year 1995, the program implemented supervisor training, and further developed plans for certification of CPS supervisors and workers. Plans for the future include training within the regions on Worker Safety in the Delivery of Social Services.

The automation project (CAPS) will be field tested in fiscal year 1996. Clerical staff will be reduced and casework staff will be trained to do more of their own case documentation. The new system will allow caseworkers to access information more quickly and will provide greater accountability in service delivery.

PSFC staff worked with the PRS Office of the Ombudsman to coordinate responses and actions when complaints from clients were received. This has improved responsiveness to the individuals whose lives are affected by the department. □