



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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For the Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (PRS), the past year represents a period of considerable change. We have carried out initiatives that will bring long-term stability and improved services to the abused, neglected, and exploited populations we serve.

Child Protective Services

Probably the most sweeping change was in Child Protective Services (CPS) with the implementation of “permanency” legislation. It requires courts to order permanent living situations for children in the agency’s custody within 12 months of their removal from an abusive home, with a one-time, six-month extension for special circumstances. The agency has initiated numerous programs to speed the state’s adoption process, increase the availability of adoptive and foster parents, and streamline the processing of cases through the legal system. As a result, Fiscal Year 1998 adoptions rose 41.9 percent over last year. We are serving more children for less cost in our 24-hour care system and early data indicate children are spending less time in the state’s care before achieving permanent living arrangements. In addition, the agency has implemented a “cluster court” concept in which contiguous counties agree to support a common court to hear child abuse cases.

Other CPS initiatives include:

- ◆ A judicial web site that puts detailed information about children in our custody in the hands of judges with the click of a computer button.
- ◆ The completion of a comprehensive study of child deaths that identifies new “high risk” factors to be considered in the risk assessment process.
- ◆ Project Renew, a statewide effort to improve how we deliver services in an automated environment.
- ◆ Improved training in investigation skills that includes a collaboration between PRS and the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer’s Standards and Education (TCLEOSE).
- ◆ A project using laptop computers designed to test the potential for helping workers do their jobs more effectively.
- ◆ A collaborative effort between PRS and the provider community for cost effective purchasing of substitute care for children. Called “Permanency Achieved Through Coordinated Efforts” (PACE), it will allow providers to have greater input in casework decisions, which we hope will shorten the time children are in the state’s custody.
- ◆ The publication and distribution of a CPS Attorney’s Desk Reference and an accompanying CPS Legal Forms Manual and the development of an automated documents production capability.

Adult Protective Services

In our Adult Protective Services (APS) program, court-appointed guardianships increased as did the need to protect abused, neglected, and exploited people who are elderly or have disabilities. Additional resources and possible statutory changes will be needed to properly

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address guardianship and avoid further drain on our ability to provide in-home services. We have made great strides in mental health and mental retardation facility investigations through improved coordination with the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation (TxMHMR). For example, the Process Improvement Workgroup, a joint effort of PRS, TxMHMR, and Advocacy, Inc. developed and implemented a serious injury pilot to identify potential improvements in reporting and services to residents of MHMR facilities.

Child Care Licensing

Within Child Care Licensing (CCL), we have taken on a new philosophy for education and regulation designed to promote compliance. Listed Family Homes, a new category of regulated child care effective at the beginning of Fiscal Year 1998, includes people providing regular care in their homes for one to three children who are not related to them. The implementation of new minimum standards for day-care centers also went into effect at the beginning of Fiscal Year 1998. Other changes in CCL include:

- ◆ The issuance of a compliance guide to providers to assist them in knowing the requirements and how they will be enforced.
- ◆ The implementation of alternative accreditation so that organizations that comply with standards and inspection procedures that meet or exceed the state's minimum requirements may be qualified.
- ◆ The agency identified a need for a new automation system for CCL. A state auditor's report agreed with the agency's findings, citing a critical lack of management information that would allow proper oversight. Therefore, we are working on a proposal for developing a Child Care Licensing system.

Community Initiatives

In our Community Initiatives division, we increased prevention and early intervention services. These build on the success of the Services To At-Risk Youth (STAR) and Community Youth Development programs by providing services that will head off problems before they escalate into juvenile crime or abuse and neglect. Our intent is to build community-based programs that target limited resources at high-risk populations.

Abuse Hotline (1-800-252-5400)

Before PRS became an agency in 1992, incoming telephone calls regarding abuse, neglect, and exploitation of vulnerable Texans were handled by each region. Since then, the agency has begun its centralized hotline—also known as Statewide Intake—with plans to receive all calls there by the end of Fiscal Year 1999. During Fiscal Year 1998, the Abuse Hotline handled 540,106 calls. By the end of Fiscal Year 1998, all after-hour calls and all daytime calls from the Arlington (Dallas and Fort Worth), Austin, Edinburg, Houston, and San Antonio regions were switched to the hotline.

Collaborations

Two years ago, the Sunset Advisory Commission said that there needed to be a way to deal with cases of overlapping responsibility in cities along the Texas-Mexico border. In May 1998, PRS signed historic agreements with representatives from El Dessarollo Integral de la Familia (DIF), the agency responsible for investigating abuse and neglect in the states of Tamaulipas and Chihuahua, Mexico. The agreement provides standards for both agencies to

investigate allegations of abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults. Through the agreement, staff from both agencies will work together to provide services spanning the border.



Two other agreements with DIF will be signed by the end of 1998 that include the states of Coahuila and Nuevo Leon, Mexico.

PRS worked with the Center for Housing and Urban Development in the College of Architecture at Texas A&M University to improve outreach to Texans living in colonias along the Mexican border. The result is the

development of a system of *promotoras* or community liaisons, hired from within the communities, to conduct face-to-face communications to build rapport and trust. PRS is helping the

A&M colonias program by expanding the promotora network to six more border colonias from Brownsville to El Paso, and including Hidalgo and Webb counties.

Texas A&M worked with PRS in 1998 when its board of regents adopted a resolution supporting additional financial assistance to former foster care youth who attend universities in the

Texas A&M system. Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) youth are eligible for tuition waivers at state-supported colleges and universities. The University of Texas at Arlington, Texas A&M University at Commerce, and Southwest Texas State University provide additional financial support to former foster care youth.

During 1998, staff from our APS and CPS programs did further work with the Diversity Institute at the University of Texas at Austin's Center for Social Work Research. This effort is designed to advance better understanding and more effective working relationships among the varied ethnic groups that comprise our population.

In 1998, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Texas at Arlington, the University of Houston, and Our Lady of the Lake University helped PRS by expanding their training institute to include all of the agency's program areas. The center, managed by the University of Texas at Austin, has been renamed the Protective Services Training Institute. The goal of the institute is to advance the partnership between PRS and social work graduate and undergraduate programs.

Handling Complaints

We recognize that PRS can have a great impact in the lives of the people we serve. And when those people dispute our actions, they may contact our Ombudsman's Office at 1-800-720-7777. The Ombudsman's Office provides an impartial review of cases in which there has been a complaint. The review determines whether the agency's policies have been followed properly. If the Ombudsman's Office determines that corrective action is needed, PRS offers a variety of solutions such as administrative reviews, hearings, and mediation. During Fiscal Year 1998, the Ombudsman's Office received 1,042 complaints. Of that number, 6 percent or 63 resulted in valid findings.

Advances in Technology

CAPS: The main automated system at PRS the Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS) went through a number of changes and refinements in 1998. Developed to assist caseworkers in all aspects of protective services work — from recording and routing the initial report, to helping workers deliver services to identified clients — CAPS is evolving as staff learn more about the system's features and identify potential enhancements. Refinements implemented during 1998 helped increase caseworkers' ability to navigate through the system and allowed staff to share facility investigation information with the Texas Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation.

Year 2000: PRS is in an enviable position of having all of its agency mission critical automated systems newly implemented and designed to be Year 2000 compliant. PRS is verifying that its systems will continue to operate into the Year 2000 with no interruptions and is developing contingency plans that will help prepare for the unexpected. Staff from across the agency serve on a Year 2000 Taskforce whose goal is to ensure that PRS will be prepared to continue to protect those in our care and to carry out the agency mission into the 21st century.

ISAS: By the end of Fiscal Year 1998, PRS consolidated its financial and administrative systems under the Integrated Statewide Administrative System (ISAS) in partnership with the Comptroller of Public Accounts and the Texas Education Agency. The consolidation creates a single database that provides an integrated view of the agency's financial and administrative functions and allows for agencywide decision making and agency-to-agency data transfer.

USPS: In January 1998, PRS converted to a new payroll system, the Uniform Statewide Payroll/Personnel System (USPS) supported by

the Comptroller of Public Accounts. The new system allows the agency to enter all of its own payroll transactions, and to update and maintain USPS in accordance with the needs of the agency's staff and clients.

Internet: During 1998, the agency's Court Improvement Project funded the development of a secure, internet-based application, the Judicial Web Page, that contains information on the legal status of children in PRS care and provides case specific information to judges on PRS cases. This application earned the "Best Practices" award from *PC Week* and the "Excellence Award for Innovative Use of Technology" from the Texas Association of State Systems for Computing and Communications. In 1995, Texas became the first state to create a web page that identifies children available for adoption. In 1998, the site, known as the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange, added audio capabilities and grew to include as many as 500 children in any given month. The agency also increased its public web site by adding information on subjects such as historically-underutilized businesses, regional and local offices, searchable county-by-county statistics, and programs in our Community Initiatives division.

A Stronger Workforce

As the nature of our type of work involves significant and ongoing change, so must our workforce. In 1998, the agency took several steps to strengthen its staff and streamline its operations.

◆ Early in Fiscal Year 1998, our Human Resources department was centralized to Austin. The department was re-engineered to be divided into specialized areas, and functions such as time and leave accounting and records were brought to one location at our state headquarters. Human Resources also assisted the agency's



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management to develop a comprehensive drug and alcohol policy and took on the function of internal fraud investigation.

◆ PRS consolidated its business support functions into five administrative service centers serving 11 regions. This initiative enabled the agency to reduce the number of staff required to provide these services.

◆ Our Professional Development Division updated training for our abuse hotline staff to better prepare them for the centralized receipt of reports about suspected abuse and neglect. Professional Development also implemented a class to give new managers a nuts and bolts training to build their supervisory skills.

◆ The agency's workgroup on cultural diversity helped develop a respectful and supportive environment for discussion of culturally diverse issues

that impact the agency's clients and staff. In 1998, the group assisted with issues such as the formation of multi-cultural panels for hiring staff, recruitment of new minority staff, and development of diversity training for PRS staff.

Conclusion

In closing, we want to gratefully acknowledge the tremendous job done by our workers in the field and the staff who support them. The workers must shoulder demanding and stressful responsibilities. Yet they approach their jobs with the knowledge that they make a positive difference in peoples' lives. We are proud of the job they do and take satisfaction in their accomplishments. ■