

Child Protective Services

Child Protective Services investigates reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, provides services to clients, promotes the stability of families, and ensures that children have a permanent placement when they are unable to return home safely.

The agency works with families to resolve problems that influence the safety and well-being of children. If necessary, PRS provides temporary out-of-home care when removal from the home is necessary. Each child placed into care has a permanency plan developed in conjunction with the parents and other parties in the case. These plans determine services needed to help the family work toward returning the child to the home, locating relatives to care for the child and other plans, such as adoption, that lead to a permanent and stable home for the child.

Improving Services to Children and Families

In January 1999, PRS unveiled a plan for improved prevention, intervention and permanency in child

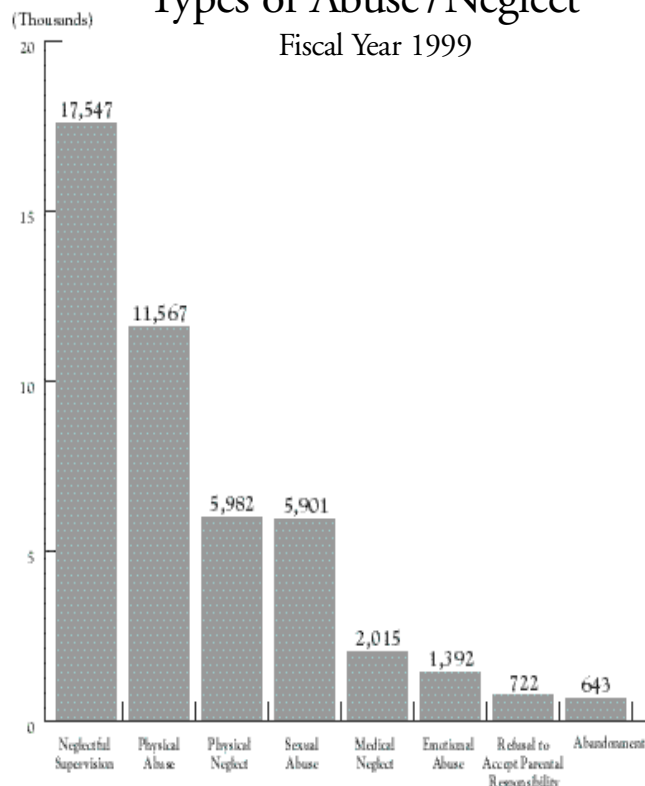
protective cases in Texas. Public officials, including some legislators and the governor's office, asked for specific ideas and cost estimates to consider after State District Judge Scott McCown submitted a petition supporting PRS' need for increased funding.

Reduced turnover

At the heart of the PRS plan is to develop a well-trained, experienced workforce. A stable workforce is vital to improved casework skills. One way to do this is to reduce the 34 percent turnover rate statewide for entry level caseworkers that existed in FY 1999. This rate is nearly twice the turnover rate for state employees during the same time period.

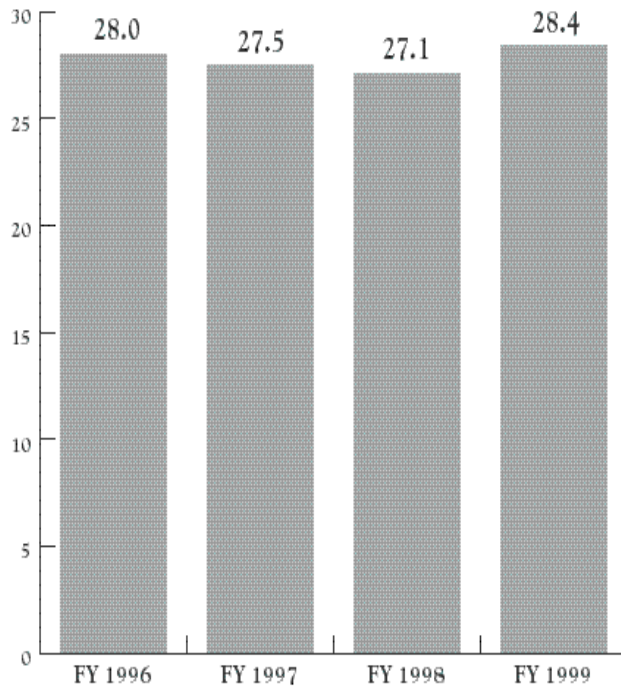
The plan proposed steps to increase worker salaries and achieve caseload reductions through the addition of staff. More supervisors would be necessary to ensure better oversight of case decisions and to give more direction and guidance to caseworkers. Additional

Types of Abuse / Neglect*
Fiscal Year 1999



*Note: Victims may have more than one type of abuse/neglect.

Average Caseload per Worker



program directors were requested to provide for improved evaluation of cases with special attention to the safety of children in high risk situations.

Advanced training

Another aspect of the PRS plan required protected time for staff to attend advanced training. Additional training courses focused on improving staff's knowledge and skills in assessing the dynamics of abuse and neglect, evaluating the impact of neglect on children's development from birth to age 3, identifying high risk factors within the family system and gaining improved casework practice skills.

Up-to-date tools

The plan recommended replacing outdated computers. New notebook computers would improve the speed at which automated transactions are

processed and allow investigation caseworkers greater flexibility in entering their documentation. In one test case, an employee saved more than an hour and a half per day on processing case documentation in the Child and Adult Protective System (CAPS). Time savings in this area provides additional time for caseworkers to spend with children and families. This portion of the plan also recommended improvements to CAPS for further ease of use.

Prevention concepts

The plan also outlined a number of prevention concepts, including further expansion of programs already supported by the Legislature. Those included the Healthy Families Program, Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPPY), and Crisis Child Care and Intervention. New programs would be developed for mentoring youth at risk for juvenile crime who are not currently receiving intervention services.

Provider resources

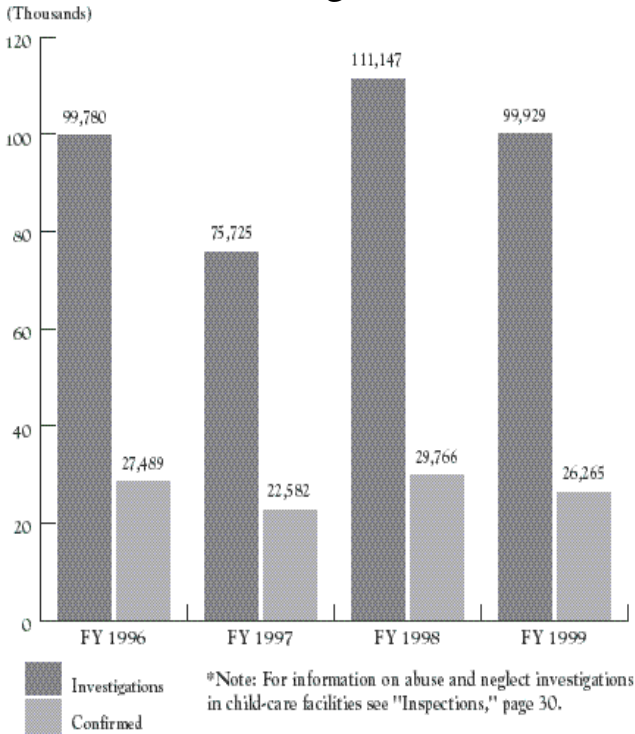
PRS has been re-evaluating foster care reimbursement rates, and the plan suggests some rate increases would be needed to ensure Texas foster care providers have adequate resources to achieve the best possible outcomes for children. The plan also would provide additional families and children with necessary purchased therapeutic and other services to help strengthen families and protect children. Also under the plan, more families would be served by adoption assistance.

The full text and statistical charts of the report are available on the PRS website. Go to the address www.tdprs.state.tx.us and click on "child protection," then "other child protection information," and then "Report—Strong families."

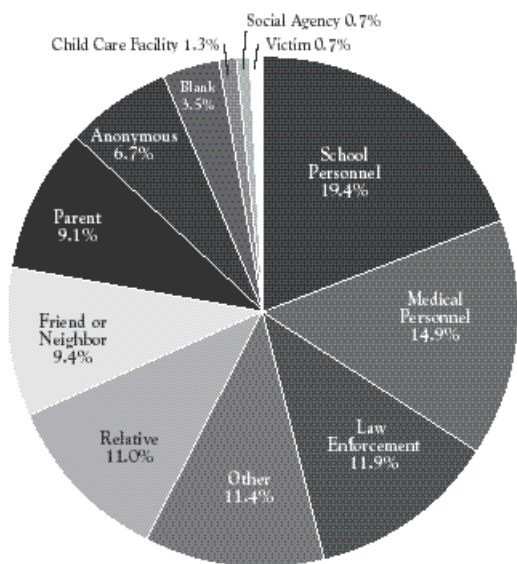
Intake

PRS administers a toll-free, 24-hour hotline for reporting suspected abuse at 1-800-252-5400. All reports that meet the statutory definitions of abuse and neglect are assigned a priority based on the level

Investigations of Child Abuse and Neglect *



Source of Reports of Child Abuse and Neglect Investigations Fiscal Year 1999



CHILD PROTECTIVE SERVICES



Dan Willbur interviews Robert Fierro at a job fair for investigative caseworkers with Child Protective Services in Harris County.

"You can't live in this life without caring for other people," said successful applicant Tanya Breaston, 41, who spent 10 years with a children's social service agency in Florida before moving here to be closer to her family. "Children are our future. If we don't do something about them, what is our future going to be?"

That is a question state lawmakers seemed to have had on their minds when they approved \$9 million in emergency funds to immediately create 220 caseworker jobs statewide — 43 of them in Harris County.

Kelley Johnson, a 22-year-old who graduated from college last year with a sociology degree, said she was trying for a CPS job because she wants to help children. "If they are not having a good life and I can help them, then that is what I would like to do," she said. "It is a challenging job, but I feel like I'm up to it."

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Profile of Confirmed Abuse Victims

| Age/Sex | Anglo | African American | Hispanic | Native American | Asian | Other | Total |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|---------------|-----------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| Under 1 | | | | | | | |
| Female | 709 | 603 | 639 | 9 | 4 | 37 | 2,001 |
| Male | 796 | 698 | 659 | 9 | 7 | 27 | 2,196 |
| Unknown | 5 | 11 | 11 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 30 |
| Total | 1,510 | 1,312 | 1,309 | 18 | 12 | 66 | 4,227 |
| 1-3 Years | | | | | | | |
| Female | 1,437 | 829 | 1,249 | 10 | 17 | 53 | 3,595 |
| Male | 1,570 | 1,006 | 1,432 | 8 | 25 | 47 | 4,088 |
| Unknown | 19 | 16 | 24 | 0 | 0 | 8 | 67 |
| Total | 3,026 | 1,851 | 2,705 | 18 | 42 | 108 | 7,750 |
| 4-6 Years | | | | | | | |
| Female | 1,548 | 1,006 | 1,363 | 10 | 32 | 48 | 4,007 |
| Male | 1,514 | 1,021 | 1,368 | 20 | 40 | 49 | 4,012 |
| Unknown | 14 | 10 | 15 | 0 | 0 | 5 | 44 |
| Total | 3,076 | 2,037 | 2,746 | 30 | 72 | 102 | 8,063 |
| 7-9 Years | | | | | | | |
| Female | 1,488 | 917 | 1,364 | 13 | 26 | 66 | 3,874 |
| Male | 1,377 | 937 | 1,193 | 7 | 29 | 60 | 3,603 |
| Unknown | 6 | 5 | 7 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 18 |
| Total | 2,871 | 1,859 | 2,564 | 20 | 55 | 126 | 7,495 |
| 10-12 Years | | | | | | | |
| Female | 1,280 | 684 | 1,100 | 8 | 17 | 40 | 3,129 |
| Male | 1,063 | 584 | 802 | 8 | 18 | 26 | 2,501 |
| Unknown | 2 | 1 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 15 |
| Total | 2,345 | 1,269 | 1,912 | 16 | 35 | 68 | 5,645 |
| 13-17 Years | | | | | | | |
| Female | 1,797 | 901 | 1,531 | 13 | 39 | 55 | 4,336 |
| Male | 945 | 433 | 543 | 3 | 9 | 27 | 1,960 |
| Unknown | 1 | 0 | 10 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 12 |
| Total | 2,743 | 1,334 | 2,084 | 16 | 48 | 83 | 6,308 |
| Total Victims | | | | | | | |
| Female | 8,259 | 4,940 | 7,246 | 63 | 135 | 299 | 20,942 |
| Male | 7,265 | 4,679 | 5,997 | 55 | 128 | 236 | 18,360 |
| Unknown | 47 | 43 | 77 | 0 | 1 | 18 | 186 |
| Grand Total | 15,571 | 9,662 | 13,320 | 118 | 264 | 553 | 39,488 |

of risk to the child, so that the most urgent cases receive immediate attention. Law enforcement agencies are also notified of reports. The agency received 161,299 reports of child abuse or neglect in 1999.

Investigations

CPS workers may interview the children, parents and others who have knowledge of the family to determine if child abuse or neglect has occurred and to assess the continued risk to the child. The agency recommends what civil court action to take, if any. If criminal conduct is involved, law enforcement investigates at the same time to determine if criminal charges should be filed.

In 1999, there were 39,488 confirmed victims out of 99,929 completed investigations of child abuse and neglect in Texas. Victims ranged in age from infants to teens, but young children were the most vulnerable. The number of confirmed victims declined from the previous year. This reduction was due primarily to a use of a higher standard of proof for confirming abuse and neglect.

Assessing Risk

During 1999, the agency developed and began implementing new procedures for assessing risk factors that may lead to abuse or neglect in children's homes. Using these procedures, workers began to focus on families as a whole instead of identifying characteristics of individual family members. For example, workers can now express their observations on a scale of concern, rather than only as "yes" or "no."

PRS incorporated the results of a five-year research study it conducted about Texas child deaths due to abuse or neglect into the new risk assessment procedures. Additionally, previous Texas research, U.S. and Canadian studies, and extensive field experience were taken into account. The new risk procedures were field tested with CPS staff in San Antonio and Houston. CPS staff began receiving training on the new procedures in July 1999 with completion scheduled for May 2000.

Initiatives for Child Safety

CPS is committed to improving the safety of children in the state. For two years CPS has done in-depth research into situations where children have been put at the ultimate risk — the loss of life. The goal is to find out what happened in cases of child death resulting from abuse or neglect so that CPS caseworkers can work with families to prevent these tragedies from occurring in the future. Texas incorporates a comprehensive approach in tracking and analyzing child fatalities resulting from abuse or neglect. The full text of *Initiatives to Enhance Safety for Texas Children* is available in the appendices section of this annual report.

PRS Pilots a Flexible Response System

A pilot project in San Antonio tested a flexible response system that routes more serious cases to investigation and less serious cases to an assessment process. Families who may be better served through a service provision model were placed in an assessment route. The focus on families who were assessed relied

more heavily upon the social work model of identifying and meeting the family's needs. Protection of the child is the ultimate aim for Child Protective Services and, through this pilot, it is anticipated that better ways of motivating families to alter patterns that may lead to child abuse and neglect will be identified.

Intervention In-home Services

PRS provides services to reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect of children in the home. Sometimes, children may continue to live at home while the agency works with families. In other cases, it is necessary to find a safe place for children to live, such as with relatives or in foster care.

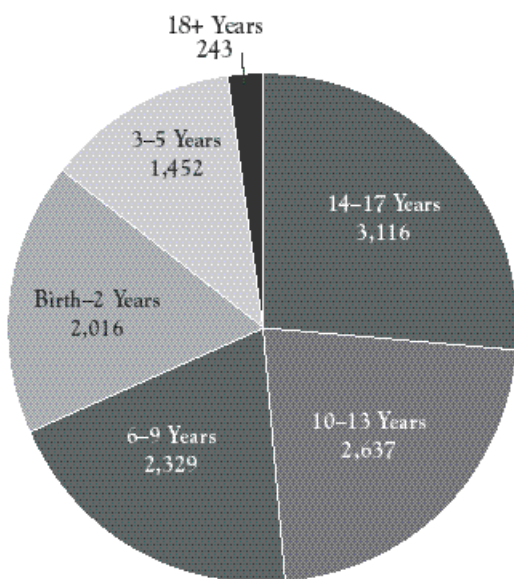
During 1999, the agency renamed its intervention efforts "family-based safety services" because, from a philosophical standpoint, staff look at safety first. In 1999, on average 8,114 families received such in-home services per month. Others received services while the children were in care outside the home.

Foster Care

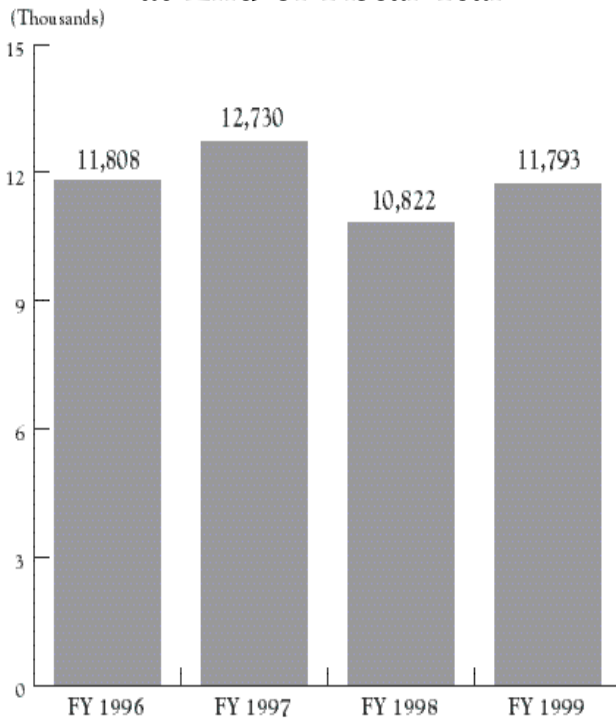
When a child is in the state's custody, a special team of staff and other professionals involved in the case meets regularly to address the factors that caused abuse or neglect. They also review the progress made in the case. The plan may require the parents to find stable housing and participate in parent training classes, counseling, drug and alcohol abuse treatment, or other services. The goal of these meetings is to ensure that children do not linger in foster care and that they live in a stable, nurturing environment. The meetings help all parties concerned to determine a permanent solution for a child — or what is known as a "permanency plan." Whether the plan is for a child to return home or be adopted, the team works to avoid unnecessary delays in the process. Many children are successfully reunited with their families.

When it isn't safe for children to live with their own families, the agency finds another place for them. They may be placed temporarily with relatives, a foster family, in an emergency shelter or in an assessment center. Foster families are volunteers who provide a

Age of Children in Foster Care at end of Fiscal Year 1999



Children in Foster Care at End of Fiscal Year



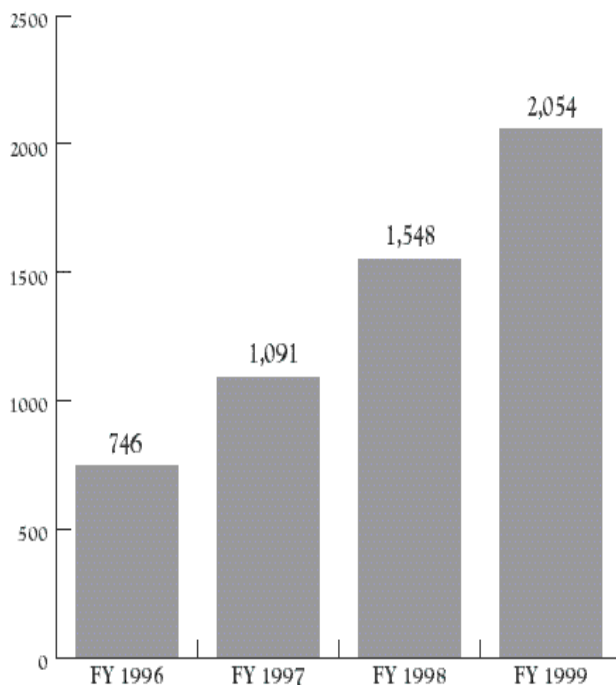
place for children to live while they are in PRS care. They are reimbursed for a portion of the costs of caring for children. At the end of 1999, there were 11,793 children in foster care.

Some children have special medical needs or other disabilities that would be difficult to care for in a family home. These children may be placed in group homes, residential treatment centers or other facilities. The agency contracts with providers offering a wide variety of programs designed to meet the special needs of children.

New Ways to Serve Children in State Care

In September 1998, PRS began to test a new program to provide substitute care services to abandoned, abused and neglected children. The program — Permanency Achieved through Coordinated Efforts (PACE) — is serviced by contract with the Lena Pope Home Inc. The non-profit contractor coordinates foster care services with PRS and its network of providers. All other child care providers for Project PACE subcontract with Lena Pope Home Inc. but do not have a contract with PRS. Services in PACE include responsibility for placing a child in a safe environment within four hours of notification, assessment services, some family services, therapy for the child and daily casework services. The program covers a 10-county area of North Texas. Project PACE prepares children for return to their families, for adoption or for independent living. Project PACE will continue its implementation and evaluation in 2000.

Completed Adoptions



Permanency initiatives report

The 75th Texas Legislature made changes to the Texas Family Code to try to limit the time children spend in foster care. More children have achieved a living arrangement intended to be permanent since the implementation of the Texas permanency planning initiative. This initiative was designed to place children in permanent living arrangements within one year of coming into state custody. In most cases, permanency is achieved before the one-

year timeline. Most notable, adoptions have increased as a result of the permanency initiative. Although the number and speed of adoptions has increased, the percentage of adoptions has remained constant. This is because the number of children in state custody has increased as more children have needed placement outside of their homes. The percentage of children returning to their homes decreased and the number of children in long-term foster care increased correspondingly. The permanency initiative has allowed CPS to move more children through the system faster, putting them in a permanent and safe place sooner.

Adoption

When it is not possible for a child to return home, the court may terminate the parents' rights, freeing the child for adoption. The number of completed adoptions increased from 1,548 in 1998 to 2,054 in 1999, which is an increase of 32.7 percent. PRS also contracts with licensed private child placing agencies to place foster children available for adoption. Other collaborative efforts with private agencies are underway to increase use of their adoption resources.

At the end of fiscal year 1999, there were 2,402 children in the agency's custody who were free for adoption. PRS is involved in a number of activities to recruit foster and adoptive families and improve adoption services. Recruiters in each region promote public awareness and coordinate specific efforts to find families for children waiting for adoption.

Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

One of the agency's statewide efforts is the Texas Adoption Resource Exchange or TARE. The exchange distributes a photo listing of available children. The listing is also available online at www.adoptchildren.org. The TARE website is also accessible on the PRS home page, www.tdprs.state.tx.us. The agency works with national



Dan and Betty Johnson have provided a home for about 30 foster children and now have five, including David R.

"David is a kid who the community looks up to, so it's quite an honor to have him in our home," Mr. Johnson said.

David said foster parents help in ways most people couldn't understand. "It's a whole lot different when you know that someone cares about you, is willing to sacrifice their own personal time, give you a part of their lives, and treat you as an individual."

The Johnsons want their foster children to know that they don't have to leave as soon as they turn 18. "David will be a part of our lives for a long time," said Mr. Johnson.

adoption organizations in print and on the Internet to help place children. In 1999, TARE grew to include as many as 700 children in any given month and helped place children in Texas, as well as out of state. Texas became the first state to post to its website video clips of children waiting for adoption. In 1999, TARE was involved in more than 300 consummated adoptions.

One Church, One Child

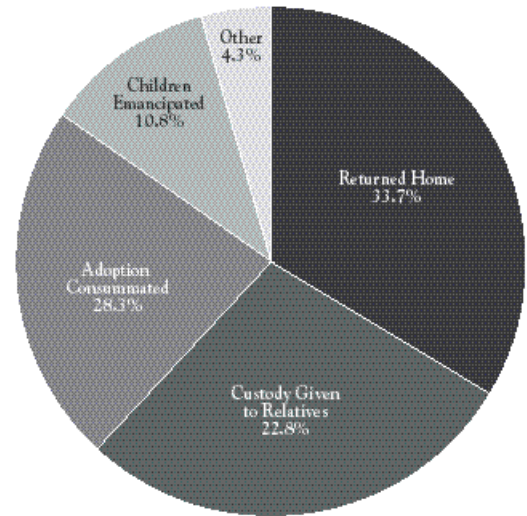
One Church, One Child is designed to increase recruitment of minority families. It seeks to find at least one family from each participating congregation to adopt a child or sibling group. The program is currently in place in Fort Worth/Dallas, Beaumont and Houston.

Foster/Adopt Permanency Option

Many foster parents may decide over time to adopt children in their care if the children's plans become adoption. Adoptive parents also become foster parents to accept placement of children not yet legally free for adoption. Thus, over the last few years PRS has made a

Status of Children No Longer in PRS Legal Responsibility

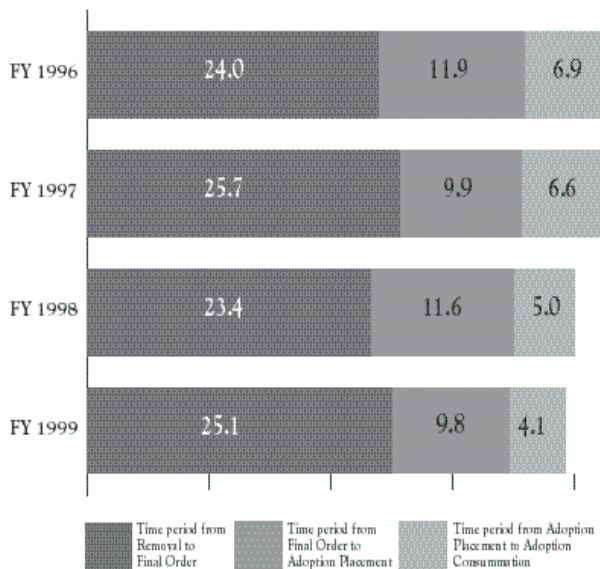
Fiscal Year 1999



concerted effort to move toward dual-licensed homes. A dual licensed home is one that is willing to provide both foster and adoptive services. Recent national studies show that there is a greater chance for a successful adoption in these situations because an attachment has already developed between parents and children. During 1999, 52 percent of adoptions were by foster parents.

Months Spent in State Care for Children Whose Adoptions were Consummated

Fiscal Year 1999



Note: Final Order is equivalent to Termination of Parental Rights.

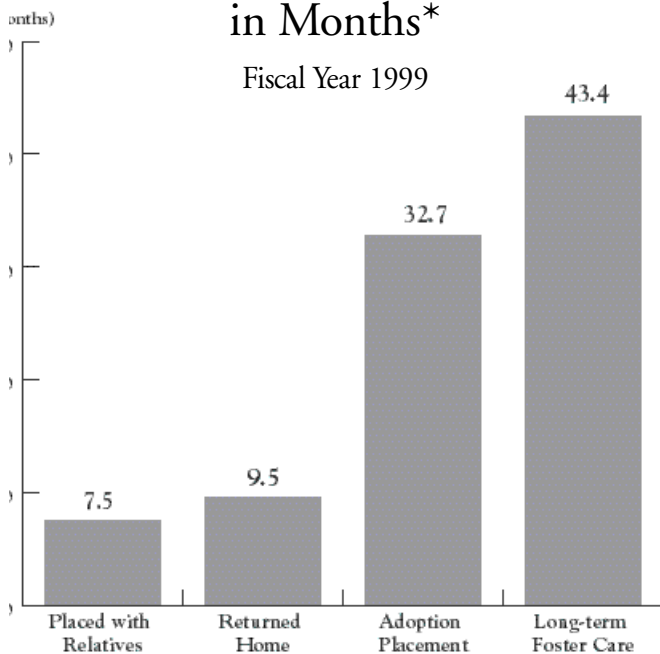
Federal Approval Gives Texas Flexibility to Improve Adoptions

PRS received approval from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on a proposal the agency hopes will strengthen efforts to put more children into permanent homes. This demonstration project, being piloted in the Houston region, gives Texas the flexibility to use Title IV-E funds for the assessment of prospective adoptive families and children awaiting adoption. The project is now well into the planning stage that will continue through fiscal year 2000.

PRS believes that a more comprehensive assessment

of children and families would reduce the disruption and dissolution rate of PRS adoptions, decrease the average length of time children spend in foster care prior to adoptive placement, increase satisfaction among children and families, and increase the number of children leaving foster care for placements with adoptive families. Prospective adoptive and foster/adopt families interested in special-needs children will be assessed as they move through the training and approval process. For all families, this component of the demonstration

Average Length of Time to Permanent Placement in Months*



These cases closed in fiscal year 1999 and achieved permanency.

project is designed to increase the pool of available adoptive families in the region. Special-needs children who are in the conservatorship of PRS and were removed from their homes in the Houston area will participate in the project. Their plan must be adoption and termination of parental rights must have occurred or be set to occur within five months of the assessment date. Children will be assessed regarding their readiness for adoption and considering the services needed to support the placement.



"I believe it's not right for a child to grow up without parents if there are parents out there in need of a child," said Vivian Malveaux, who along with his wife Kathleen adopted five children.

Before coming to the Malveauxs' home, one child was in a therapeutic foster home and had serious behavior problems. The Malveauxs knew they could make a difference in this child's life, and now that child is an "A" student with numerous academic awards.

"Adopt the child because of the child's needs, not your own," said Mr. Malveaux. "Each child has a different personality. In order for you to deal effectively with that child, you have to insert yourself in their world."

Although the Malveauxs have five adopted and three foster children waiting for adoption, they aren't through giving. They are making room in their five-bedroom home for as many as 10 or 12 children. "As long as we have the space, we have the love," said Mr. Malveaux.

Post-Adoption Services

Children who have suffered abuse or neglect often continue to need help coping with the effects even after adoption. PRS contracts with nine agencies to provide casework, mental health and therapeutic services to children and families. Those agencies also provide parent training, support groups and respite care for adoptive parents. In 1999, post-adoption services were provided to 1,057 children and families.

Preparing Youth for Adulthood

Making the transition to adulthood can be difficult for any child, but for children who grow up in the state's care, it can be especially frightening. Through the Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, the agency provides services that prepare youths in foster care for the adult world. Services include independent living assessment, time-limited financial help for the transition period and training in such areas as money management, job skills, educational planning and interpersonal skills. During 1999, 2,822 youths, ages 16 to 20, participated in the PAL program.

A Texas law passed in 1993 exempts former foster children from having to pay tuition and most fees at state-supported universities, colleges and vocational schools. Some colleges such as Texas A&M at Commerce, University of Texas at Arlington, Western Texas College and Southwest Texas State University have expanded the benefits to include residential housing scholarships. In 1999, 339 former foster care youth used the waiver to access higher education.

OTHER CPS-RELATED PROGRAMS

Advocacy Centers

In many communities, interviews and examinations of children in abuse and neglect cases may be conducted at a Children's Advocacy Center. The centers provide a non-threatening, child-friendly setting where professionals from Child Protective Services, law enforcement, the prosecutor's office and others work together. The 76th Texas Legislature transferred the coordination of advocacy centers from PRS to the Office of Attorney General, effective Sept. 1, 1999.

Children's Justice Act and Court Improvement Project

The Children's Justice Act (CJA) is a federal grant to the State of Texas to improve the ways in which child abuse and neglect cases are investigated and prosecuted. CJA funds a court-based mediation project that provides an alternative to litigation for resolving CPS cases. Through mediation, the agency hopes to reduce the time that children stay in foster care, resolve conflicts without court hearings, produce cost savings and work toward better results for children and families. During 1999, the 13 mediation projects across the state have resolved old cases and helped the agency meet the 12-month permanency statute.

CJA also funds a tele-medicine project that is building a network of medical professionals who evaluate cases of child sexual abuse. Through tele-medicine software, network members can exchange pictures electronically to obtain a second opinion, either validating medical findings needed to prosecute cases or determining that sexual abuse did not occur.

The CJA annual conference for child abuse professionals trains about 150 people every year. CJA provides funds to local bar associations to train attorneys ad litem for children.

The Court Improvement Project (CIP), directed by the Texas Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care with administrative support from PRS, is an effort to make court improvements in child protection cases. The Task Force on Foster Care recommended using associate and visiting judges in rural areas to address crowded dockets and provide specialized judicial staff without the creation of additional district courts. Two pilot projects testing these "cluster" courts proved successful. Therefore in 1999, CIP funded three additional such courts, covering 12 counties. These cluster court projects have eliminated backlog and brought consistency in the handling of CPS court cases. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$1 million for eight additional cluster courts throughout the state.

CIP also funds or assists in funding several projects that deal with judicial training, as it relates to child abuse and neglect cases. In 1999, through the Texas Center for the Judiciary, CIP sponsored the attendance of 32 judges to the National Conference of Juvenile and Family Court Judges' Annual Conference. CIP has also funded a training conference for cluster court judges and court coordinators, and sponsored a site visit to the Model Children's Court in El Paso for several judges, prosecutors and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) staff. The Court Improvement Project also funds the maintenance of the Judicial Web Page, a tool for judges and PRS attorneys that allows them to check on the status of any child abuse or neglect case filed in Texas.

Child Fatality Review Teams

The Child Fatality Review Team project brings together law enforcement, prosecutors, medical examiners, justices of the peace, health-care professionals, CPS, mental health professionals, educators, child advocates and others. Its goal is to develop an understanding of the causes of child fatalities and identify measures to reduce the number of preventable deaths. Child Fatality Review Teams review all child deaths regardless of the cause, whether they are the result of vehicular accidents, drowning, fire, suffocation, firearms, homicides or suicides. The project is administered by PRS, the Texas Department of Health and the Children's Trust Fund. During 1999, teams were expanded to cover 133 counties in the state.

Citizen Review Teams

Citizen Review Teams in every region evaluate CPS cases, reviewing the actions taken and the decisions made. Established by the Legislature in 1995, the teams consist of at least five private citizens who are also parents. They meet at least once a quarter and have an opportunity to speak with staff and ask questions about any aspect of a CPS case, including the final conclusion. Team members make recommendations to improve the agency's policies and procedures in future CPS cases.



Standing beside the ropes course at Greene Family Camp, 18-year-old Idie points out the platform where last year she fell backward into the arms of other foster youths. "I was like, 'Are you for real?' It was something I never thought I'd do," Idie said. "But they caught me and I was like, 'Wow.'" It's an exercise in trust made all the harder for youths who have been abused or neglected.

Idie participated in a week-long camp for foster youths called PEAKS. The camp is sponsored by PRS's Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program, which addresses the daily details of independent life — how to manage money and jobs, how to deal with housing and transportation.

"I came with the attitude of 'Oh, this is not going to be fun,'" Idie said. "Actually, I learned a lot about myself. I learned how to trust people. It's just emotional at the end of the week."

*—Excerpted with permission of the Waco Tribune-Herald.
Story by Marla Pierson. Photo by Duane Laverty.*