



Child Protective Services (CPS)

# Child Protective Services

## Responsibilities

- ◆ Investigate reports of suspected child abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Protect children involved in abuse/neglect investigations and act in their best interest.
- ◆ Educate and provide services to children and families in their home to promote the safety, integrity and stability of the family.
- ◆ Develop a permanency plan in conjunction with parents and other parties in the case for each child placed in temporary out-of-home care so the family can work toward the return of their child.
- ◆ Ensure that all children who cannot stay in their homes have substitute care until they can be safely returned to their homes or another permanent placement, such as an adoptive home.

## Advances

### Risk Assessment

The simplified and streamlined risk assessment process continues to be a valuable and important tool to guide staff in their decisions about children's safety at critical points in investigations, placement of children with relatives, prior to children being reunified with the family, and prior to case closure.

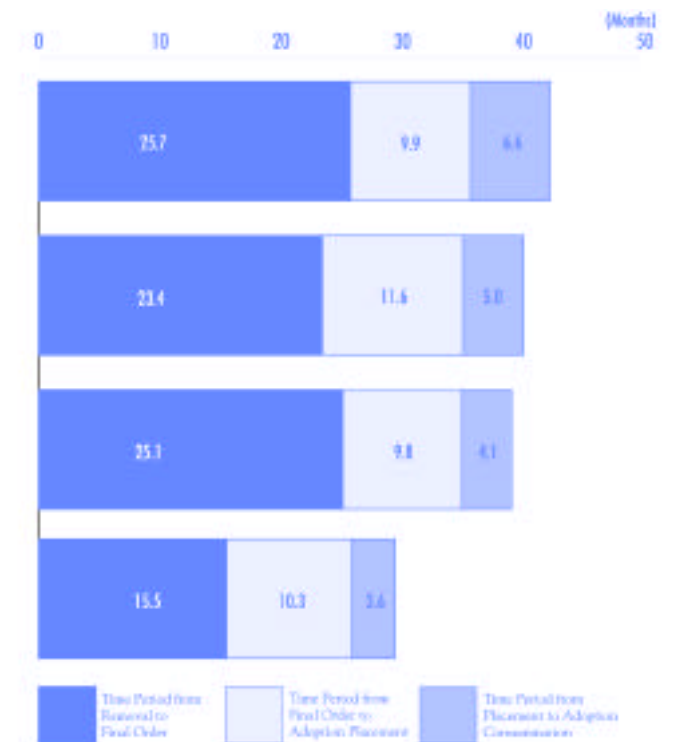
### Improved Permanency Efforts

Within one year of entering state custody, most children are placed in a permanent living situation. During the past few years, PRS has reduced the time needed to achieve permanency. CPS maintained the shortened permanency period this year despite an increase in the number of children removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect.

### Staff Retention

PRS implemented several initiatives to increase staff retention. One area focuses on management supports that include more on-the-job training for new staff; a telework pilot program; a statewide employee recognition and leadership development program; and streamlined documentation for casework. Additionally, with

## Months Spent in State Care for Children Whose Adoptions Were Consummated



appropriations from the Legislature, the automated Child and Adult Protection System (CAPS) is being modified to speed caseworkers through documentation and improve services to children.

Another effort to reduce turnover is to lower the caseworker-to-supervisor ratio and caseload volume. This initiative enables supervisors to provide more effective quality assurance. At the end of 2001, the caseworker-to-supervisor ratio was 6.2 workers for each supervisor, just short of the 6-to-1 benchmark. The targeted CPS caseload for the biennium is 21.1 cases per caseworker. The average caseload was 27 per caseworker at the end of 2001.

Although PRS has successfully recruited new caseworkers, retention of current CPS caseworkers continues to be an issue. The turnover rate for CPS caseworkers in 2001 was 27.9 percent. The 77th Legislature provided an across-the-board pay increase for state employees and an additional increase for specialized caseworkers. An additional 137 caseworker and related staff positions were



funded for the next biennium. The Legislature recognized the increased safety challenges that accompany work in child welfare and appropriated funds for cell phones for CPS staff. The Legislature also made appropriations for more laptop computers to expand the telework pilot program.

## Adopt 2000

Adopt 2000 is a Houston collaborative effort designed to increase the number of adoptive families for CPS children. In 2001, Adopt 2000 placed 412 Houston-area, special-needs children with adoptive families. Adopt 2000 was awarded the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Adoption Excellence Award for special needs and public awareness.

## Collaborative Adoption Project

On March 1, 2001, PRS implemented the Collaborative Adoption Project that includes co-housing private agency staff in PRS offices. The project began in the Arlington, Houston and San Antonio regions during the first year and will expand statewide during the second year. The goals are to increase collaboration between public and private agencies and increase the number of CPS children placed with private agency families. The project will also reduce the number of children waiting for adoption and the number of children designated as hard to place. The three-year project is funded through a federal adoption opportunities grant from the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## Foster Care Respite Services

To help families manage the additional stresses of being a foster home, PRS developed and implemented a respite care program for child-placing agency foster parents. During the last year, PRS has made it easier for CPS foster parents to access the support service. PRS continues to encourage its CPS foster families to access up to 10 days of respite care each year.

## Children with Disabilities Project

Two nurses from the Children with Disabilities Project in Lubbock provide health related information and resources to children in CPS care, CPS staff, as well as birth and foster parents. Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act funds make this pilot project possible. A similar program in Edinburg continues to provide these services through regional funds. In response to recent state legislation, CPS is developing placements for children in family settings if they can appropriately be moved from institutions.

## New Foster Care Rate

The 77th Legislature provided funding for a 5 percent increase in foster care reimbursement rates over the biennium. The PRS Board sets rates and allocates available funding depending on the needs and age of children for which care is provided.

## Child Welfare Demonstration Project

PRS and its contractor, DePelchin Children's Center, implemented the Title IV-E Adoption Demonstration Project on July 1, 2001. The contractor is training PRS staff to use the Texas Summary Adoption Assessment Scale instrument to comprehensively assess children and families in the adoption process. PRS believes that the enhanced assessments will decrease the average length of time that children spend in foster care prior to adoptive placement, increase the number of children who leave foster care for adoptive placement, increase satisfaction among adoptive children and families, and reduce the disruption and dissolution rate of PRS adoptions.

## Parent Collaboration Group

Initiated in July 2001, the Parent Collaboration Group is made up of parents who receive or have received CPS services. There is a parent representative from each

region, with co-facilitation by a parent and a CPS program specialist from the CPS quality assurance division. The goals are to identify service gaps to families and children, identify what services are working and should continue, identify areas of policy that need improvement, identify how parents can be instrumental to improved caseworker skills in relating to parents and provide an avenue for parents to make recommendations for change in CPS.

## Work in Progress

### Child and Family Service Review

CPS, with support from other divisions within PRS, is preparing for the federal Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), in February 2002. This review is designed to assess how well states are achieving safety, permanency and general well-being for the children and families they serve.

The statewide assessment and on-site review encompass the two phases of the CFSR. During the statewide assessment phase, a variety of CPS stakeholders analyzed trends and patterns of data that impact child welfare. The on-site review actively seeks input about CPS outcomes from community members, foster and adoptive parents, service providers, children and families, and a variety of CPS stakeholders through interviews and focus groups. The perspectives of children and families are particularly important as casework practice is thoroughly reviewed. CPS' quality assurance division, in preparation for the review, simulated the review process across the state.

## Adoption Technology

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) is significantly enhancing its Web site—[www.adoptchildren.org](http://www.adoptchildren.org). Approved adoptive families are now able to search a database by their adoption preferences. This allows all children an equal opportunity to be seen even if they have been registered for a long time. Using the database, PRS adoption staff can register, edit and remove children's profiles from the TARE database. When available, picture and video files are attached as well. This method replaces the previous manual system of receiving mailed or e-mailed registrations.

## Special-Needs Placement Pilot

A pilot project with two residential treatment facilities began this year to assist in the placement, stability, appropriate treatment and supervision for children in state care who have exceptional needs and are normally served in psychiatric hospitals. Meadow Pines in Longview and Daystar Residential Inc. in Manville are the two sites for this pilot.

## Strength Through External Partnerships (STEP)

STEP is a large-scale, multiyear project that seeks to expand collaboration with external partners, create a more holistic child protection system, and improve the services to children and families. It began in May 2000 with a meeting of the strategic planning committee. Five subcommittees were formed to develop recommendations by August 2001. Final recommendations will be presented to the PRS Board in January 2002.

## Certification for Workers and Supervisors

CPS encourages professional development through a certification program for workers and supervisors. Every two years, certified workers and supervisors must re-certify to ensure they have the most up-to-date training and professional development. In 2001, more workers became certified than ever before with 944 certifications and 341 advanced certifications. Sixty-nine more supervisors became certified, making the vast majority of supervisors certified.

## Cluster Courts

In 2001, the Court Improvement Project, under the direction of the Supreme Court Task Force on Foster Care, increased the number of Cluster Courts in Texas from five to nine, with two additional projects ready to be approved by the regional presiding judges. These nine specialized courts, which hear only CPS cases, covered about 30 percent of Texas' 254 counties.

## Significant Legislation

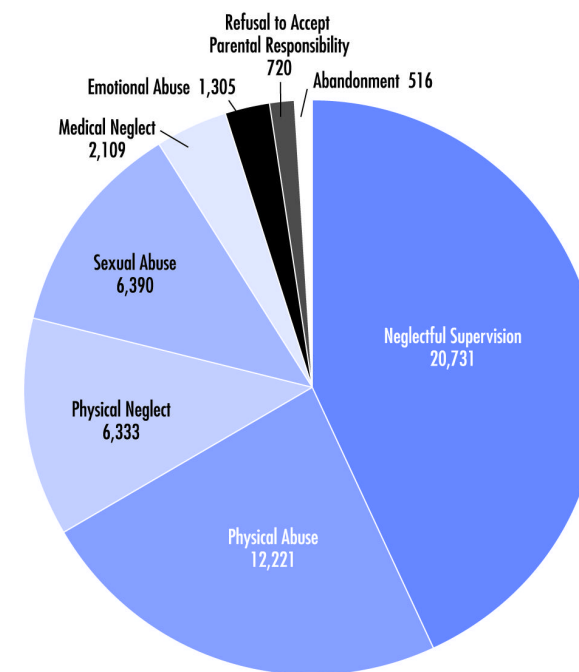
The 77th Session of the Texas Legislature enacted a number of bills of interest to CPS, including the following:

- ◆ HB 2249 compels a court to schedule a final hearing and render a decision in CPS cases prior to the legal deadline for a CPS case to be dismissed under permanency laws. The bill also allows a court to terminate a non-responding father's parental rights prior to a final hearing in a CPS case.
- ◆ SB 53 expands CPS' ability to request criminal background checks on people in foster and adoptive homes or facilities, in an alleged victim's home, or in relatives' homes of a child going through the adoption process.
- ◆ HB 360 expands the definition of sexual abuse to include "indecent with a child," which covers exposing oneself to a child without touching the child.
- ◆ HB 706 expands the "abandoned baby" law to include children 60 days and younger who may be left in designated safe places without the parent fearing criminal prosecution. The law designates additional places, such as hospitals and child-placing agencies, where a baby may be left.
- ◆ SB 51 provides continued Medicaid coverage for children who age out of foster care if they meet income and resource guidelines.
- ◆ SB 367 allows CPS to develop resources to enable children who can be appropriately moved from institutions into family settings.
- ◆ Various other bills streamline CPS court requirements, including legal identification of the father and compelling parents to disclose relatives for possible placement.
- ◆ The appropriations bill:
  - Provided an across-the board pay increase for state employees and an additional increase for specialized caseworkers
  - Recognized the increased safety challenges for CPS employees and appropriated funds to reimburse the business use of personal cell phones
  - Provided funds for additional laptop computers for the expansion of the telework pilot program
  - Approved funds for an increase in foster care rates

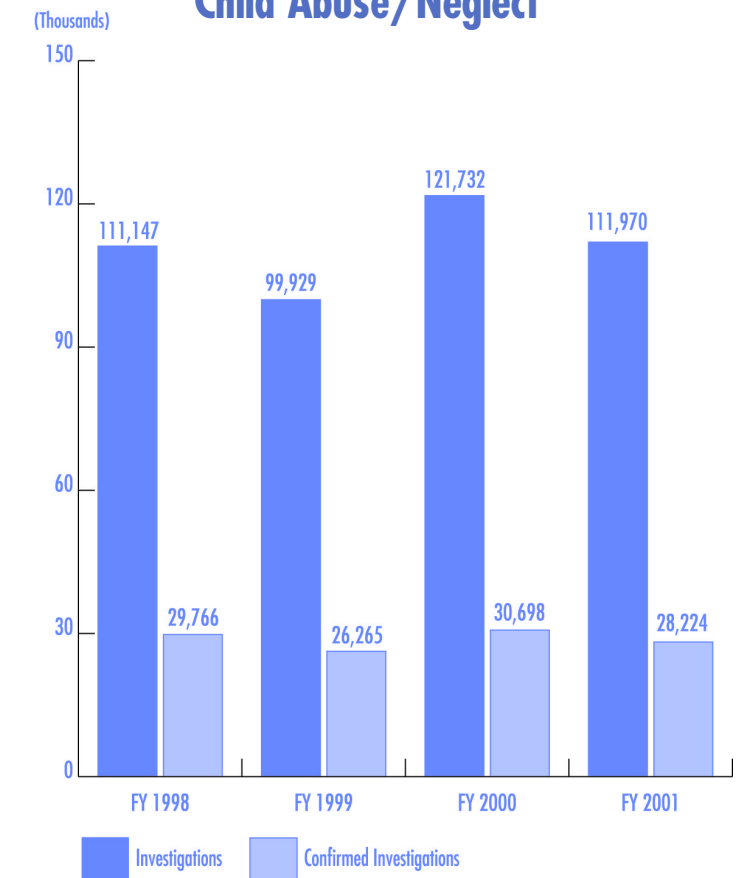
## What CPS Does Intake

PRS administers a toll-free, 24-hour, statewide hotline for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children or the elderly at 1-800-252-5400. Anyone needing to report abuse or neglect in English or Spanish can reach a professional intake worker. All reports that meet the statutory definitions of abuse and neglect are assigned a priority based on the level of risk to the alleged victim. Law enforcement agencies are also notified of reports. The agency received 171,768 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2001. PRS assigned 142,910 of these for investigation. The statewide call center has served as an international model for social services reporting.

## Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect by Type FY 2001



## Completed Investigations of Child Abuse/Neglect



## Investigations

When an intake is assigned, CPS workers interview children, parents and others who have knowledge of the family. These interviews help determine if child abuse or neglect has occurred and assess the risk of further harm to the child. If criminal conduct is involved, law enforcement may investigate at the same time to determine if criminal charges will be filed. CPS confirmed 25.2 percent of all investigations in 2001. Even if evidence abuse or neglect is not found, caseworkers may refer families to services in the community, such as individual or family therapy; parenting classes; or programs offering financial assistance for utilities, rent and child care.



### Child Safety

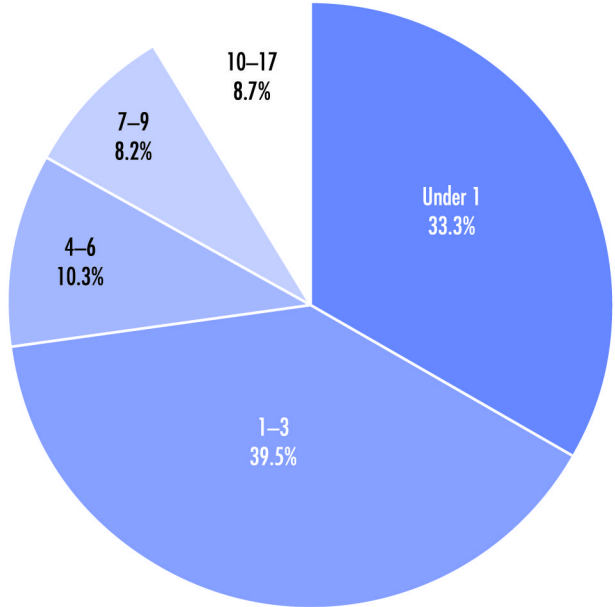
PRS designates at least one person per region to serve as a safety coordinator known as a risk director. The regional risk directors focus on risk factors related to child abuse and neglect investigations. They monitor cases that involve multiple referrals, and they participate in the decisions on high-risk cases.

The most serious cases CPS investigates are those in which a child dies. CPS uses the information gathered during evaluations of these cases to improve the safety of Texas children by more effectively identifying and addressing risk factors, needed services and family capabilities in all investigations.

Children at the highest risk of abuse and neglect are young children, regardless of their gender or ethnicity. In 2001, of the 195 children who died due to abuse or neglect, one-third were under the age of 1, nearly 73 percent were 3 or younger.

Because young children need constant care and do not attend school, they are less likely to interact with a broad array of people who could help.

### Age of Child Fatality Victim FY 2001



### Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS)

When child safety can be reasonably assured, PRS provides in-home services to help stabilize the family and reduce the risk of future abuse or neglect. Services provided include family counseling, crisis intervention, parenting classes, substance abuse treatment and child care.

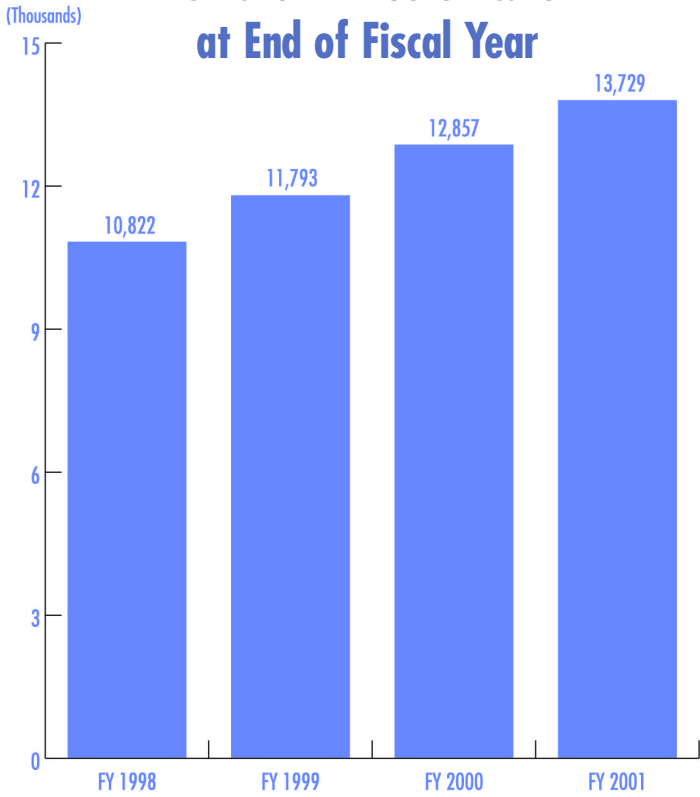
Most children served through FBSS continue to live at home while the agency works with their families. In other cases, children may live elsewhere temporarily, usually with relatives or family friends, until the home becomes safe enough for them to return. In 2001, an average of 8,960 families per month received in-home services.

### Foster Care

When it isn't safe for children to live with their own families, PRS petitions the court to provide for their safety. They may be placed temporarily with relatives, a verified foster family, an emergency shelter or an assessment center. Verified foster families provide a safe, nurturing environment for children while they live out of their home. Foster families are reimbursed for a portion of the cost of caring for children. CPS is required to arrange

all medical, dental and therapeutic services needed by the child. Some children have special emotional needs or other disabilities that can be difficult to care for in a foster family home. These children may be placed in specialized group homes, residential treatment centers or other facilities.

### Children in Foster Care at End of Fiscal Year



### Permanency Planning Teams

When children are removed from their home and placed in the state's custody, a special team of professionals involved in the case work together to develop a written case plan and address the factors that caused abuse or neglect. They also review the progress made in the case plan on a regular basis. The goal is to ensure children live in a stable, nurturing environment and do not linger in foster care. This coordination helps all parties concerned to determine a permanent solution for the 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.



Sergio and Rosa Mejia, with daughter Sylvia, are the Family Service Association's adoptive/foster family of the year.

### Family builds a house of love

photo by Gloria Ferniz  
article by Jeanie Tavitas-Williams  
excerpted from the *San Antonio Express-News*

A tattered ceramic plaque just outside the modest four-bedroom home of Rosa and Sergio Mejia reads: "Love is kindness." You could say it's the household's motto.

Inside the tidy home lives a family of nine. Two parents shepherd the lives of a daughter in college, two adopted children in elementary school and four foster children who face a host of mental and physical challenges. There's a loving sort of chaos in the Southside residence.

"I want to give (my kids) a better life than the one I had," says Rosa, who fostered her younger brother and was a foster child herself. "I believe I went through what I went through for a reason — to be a good foster mother."

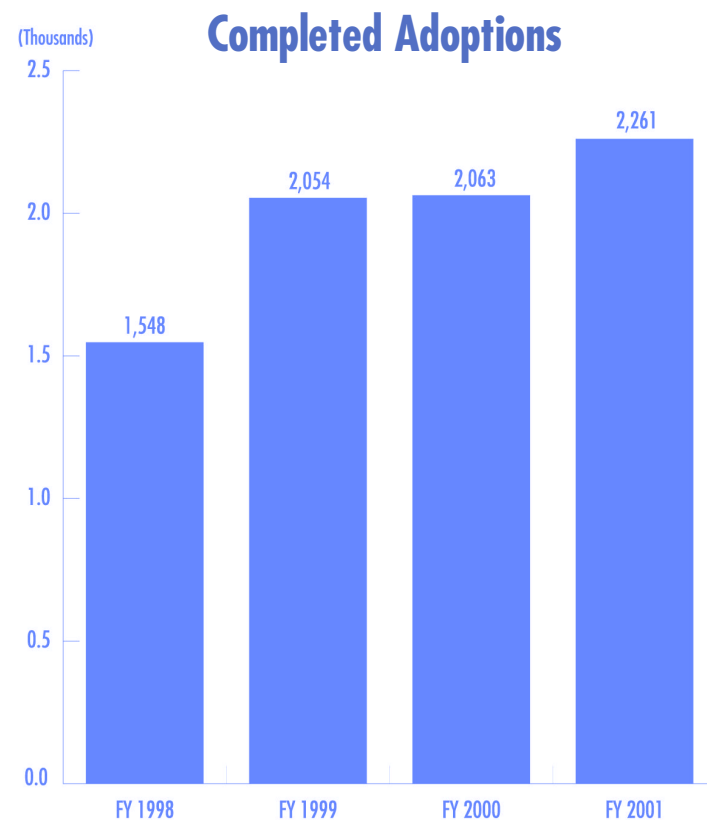
In addition to running his own body shop business, Sergio makes breakfast (with homemade flour tortillas) and drops off the couple's 21-year-old daughter, Sylvia, at Paula Alto College. His duties also include bathing the babies and changing crib sheets.

"Sometimes I have to work 10-, 12- or 14-hours days," says Sergio. "But if she (Rosa) needs me to watch the children while she goes to another appointment, I come home."

Looking out for the little ones doesn't stop with Sergio and Rosa. Sylvia baby-sits on weekends to allow her parents some time for themselves.

## Adoption

When it is not possible for a child to return home, the court may terminate the parents' rights and legally free the child for adoption. The number of completed adoptions in 2001 increased by 9.6 percent over last year. PRS contracts with licensed private child-placing agencies to increase the number of adoptive homes available to adopt foster children. At the end of 2001, there were 3,475 children in the agency's custody waiting for adoption.



## Dual-Licensed Homes

The number of foster parents who adopt children placed in their homes continues to increase. In 2001, 50.6 percent of adoptions were by foster parents. National studies indicate greater opportunities for successful adoptions in these situations because children and their new parents form a bond during the foster care placement. PRS has made a concerted effort to license homes for both foster care and adoption services. These homes are known as dual-licensed homes.

## Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families

PRS actively recruits foster and adoptive families and individuals through national, state and regional campaigns. Examples include the statewide Foster Care Month in May, Adoption Awareness Month in November and the One Church, One Child program currently in place in Fort Worth/Dallas, Beaumont and Houston. Our partnership with faith-based organizations has helped PRS find numerous adoptive homes for children.

## Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) provides information on children waiting for adoption primarily with photos, profiles, videos and inquiry forms on the Internet at [www.adoptchildren.org](http://www.adoptchildren.org). TARE participates with national adoption organizations during national recruitment campaigns and promotes children on TARE in other national Web sites. TARE had approximately 800 children registered and more than 1,000 adoption inquiries per month in 2001.

The TARE Family Network (TFN) is another service offered through TARE. TFN is a listing of adoptive families and individuals across the United States who have an approved adoptive home study. The family's adoption preferences on children they are willing to parent are available to PRS adoption staff in a searchable database. More than 200 approved adoptive families were registered in the TFN in 2001.

## Adoption Support Services

Children who have suffered abuse or neglect often need help coping with the effects of abuse and the loss of their birth family even after adoption. Each PRS region contracts with private agencies to provide services to adopted children and their new families, including case-work, mental health, therapeutic services to children and families, parent training, support groups and respite care for adoptive parents. Post-adoption services were provided to 1,521 children and families in 2001. PRS provided an average of 12,246 adoption subsidies per month in 2001.



Marcresha, 4, and her brother Jahodge, 1, were adopted by Billy Johnson (right) and his wife. Attorney Misty Burns (center) talks with Marcresha's great-aunt, Joyce Johnson (left).

## New families created on National Adoption Day

photo by Brad Loper  
story by Lisa Hebert  
excerpted from the *Dallas Morning News*

The scene Friday could have been mistaken for a school hallway on the first day of classes, a new and exciting beginning for apprehensive youngsters.

Dozens of children were dressed in their best attire. Some clutched adults nervously. Others ran around in circles.

The man in the black robe, though, gave it away.

The gathering was actually outside state District Judge Hal Gaither's courtroom. But it did represent a new and exciting beginning – for the children and the adults. On this morning what local court officials called "National Adoption Day," 31 families were at the Henry Wade Juvenile Justice Center to officially adopt 54 children who had been in their care for months.

Target: Kids in Court, a collaboration of government agencies that works with private and public child-placement agencies, sponsored the adoption day. The project is designed to speed up the backlog of local and state adoptions.

The day was especially exciting for Susan Etheridge, program administrator for Child Protective Services. All the children adopted came out of the CPS system.

"We are seeing a rise in abuse and neglect cases, which is causing an increase in the number of children looking for homes," Ms. Etheridge said. "This is a joyous occasion."



## Preparation for Adult Living

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program helps make the transition to adulthood less problematic for youth in foster care. PAL services include independent living assessment; time-limited financial help; and training in such areas as money management, job skills, educational planning and interpersonal skills. A statewide youth leadership committee meets quarterly to review policies and practices and submits recommendations to the PRS Board each year.

In 2001, 3,684 youths, ages 16 through 20, participated in the PAL program. Another 608 youths ages 14 and 15 participated in the program. Through funds of the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, PRS provided room-and-board assistance for young adults

ages 18 through 21 who exited foster care. Texas passed legislation that provides for Medicaid health coverage for these young adults.

## Children's Justice Act

The mission of the Children's Justice Act (CJA) is to improve the investigation and prosecution of child abuse and neglect cases. CJA funds court-based mediation of CPS cases in eight projects throughout the state. Mediation reduces trauma to the child victim; provides an alternative to often lengthy, hostile and costly litigation; provides better outcomes for children and families; and achieves prompt permanency for children. CJA also funds a telemedicine project that is building a network of medical professionals who evaluate cases of

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sexual abuse. CJA sponsors training for attorneys ad litem for children and an annual conference to train prosecutors across the state. CJA funds two family group conferencing projects—a mechanism to address cultural differences, allow for more extended family involvement and reduce lengthy court proceedings. In 2001 CJA began funding several innovative local projects, including Texas Lawyers for Children, a resource for attorneys representing parties in CPS cases.

## Texas Court Improvement Project

The Texas Court Improvement Project (CIP) is a federal grant to the Texas Supreme Court administered by PRS to improve judicial proceedings in foster care and adoption cases. Texas Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) continues to expand with financial help from CIP. This funding also pilots projects known as "Cluster Courts," where a traveling judge hears only CPS cases for a cluster of counties. The Texas Legislature appropriated \$4 million for the coming biennium for 16 such courts throughout the state. CIP also helps fund several judicial trainings and training tools on child abuse and neglect. CIP monies maintain the Judicial Web Page, a tool for judges and PRS attorneys to check on the status of any child abuse or neglect case filed in Texas. CIP funds the development of online training software and video conferencing pilot projects, allowing a child to testify from the security and comfort of a Children's Crisis Care Center.

## Child Fatality Review Teams

Child Fatality Review Teams are multidisciplinary, multi-ethnic, multi-agency panels that review all child deaths regardless of the cause. The goal of the review team is to decrease preventable child deaths. Members include law enforcement, prosecutors, medical examiners, justices of the peace, health-care professionals, educators and child advocates. These teams are uniquely qualified to understand what no single agency or group working alone can: how and why children are dying in their community. From their findings, review teams help develop prevention initiatives. Child Fatality Review Teams have grown rapidly since their inception in 1992. Today there are 41 teams that cover 140 counties. PRS provides teams with technical assistance and is the state agency charged with housing the public information associated with the teams.



## PAL helps UT student prosper

photo by Chrissy Ragan  
article by Shamilso Maswoswe  
excerpted from *The Daily Texan*

**P**roducts of an unstable family, Michelle O'Donnell and her siblings were forced to leave their parents to find new ones. With the help of foster care, however, they were able to rebuild their lives.

O'Donnell ultimately overcame her difficult circumstances with the help of Preparation for Adult Living (PAL). She is now a flourishing undeclared liberal arts freshman at the University of Texas at Austin. She is an active member of several student organizations, performs on a dance team, volunteers every week at an emergency shelter for teens and is about to move into her very first apartment.

PAL is a state-sponsored program to transition foster children into adulthood by a series of life-skills classes and training. The participants are taught tasks ranging from money management, how to fill out tax forms, the keys to successful interviews and how to bargain shop. Participants are not only given \$1,300 upon completion of the program, but are also entitled to tuition waivers allowing them to attend the public university of their choice.

After O'Donnell graduated from the program, she began working at Child Protective Services as the PAL youth specialist. O'Donnell acts as a liaison between the participants and staff members by giving the youth perspective on policy and program development, writing articles for their newsletter and speaking at conventions.