



Child Protective Services

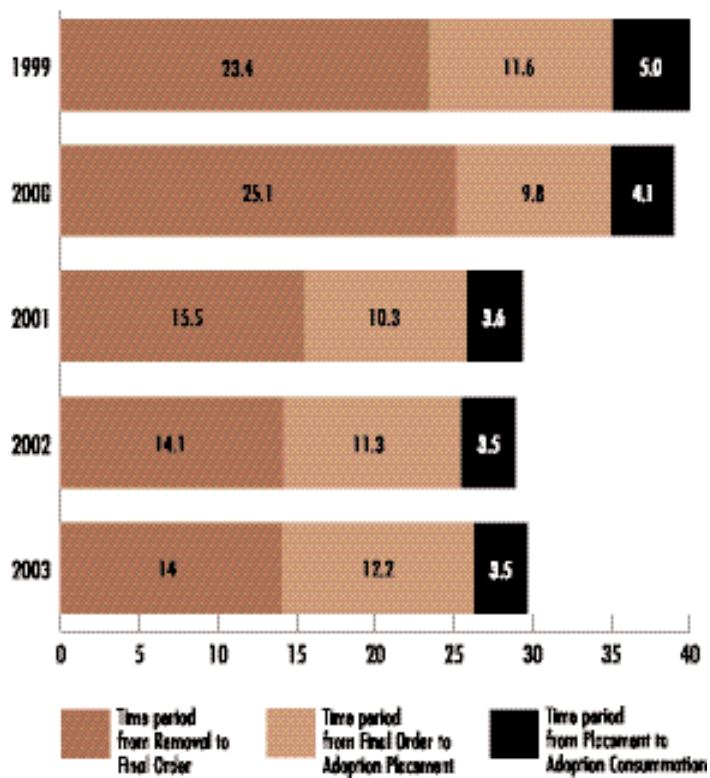
Responsibilities

- ◆ Conduct civil investigations of reported child abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Protect children from abuse and neglect.
- ◆ Promote the safety, integrity, and stability of families.
- ◆ Provide permanent placements for children who cannot safely remain with their own families.

Advances

- ◆ CPS and Adult Protective Services redesigned their computer-based reporting system for abuse and neglect to a web browser-based application that increases usability and expandability. (See Executive Summary.)
- ◆ During 2003, CPS hired 11 regional developmental disability and education specialists, who will help staff provide effective services to children with disabilities and improve educational outcomes for children in foster care.
- ◆ CPS began a new, collaborative effort with the support of the Casey Family Program to foster cooperation, collaboration, and communication between agency staff and families who come into the CPS system. This family group decision-making process seeks immediate and extended family members to work with CPS staff to help correct the problems that led to their children coming into the state's conservatorship. This approach has shown it can help decrease the number of children in care, increase involvement with extended families, and increase kinship care. During 2003, DFPS also worked with the Casey Family Program to improve services for youth transitioning to adulthood through public and private partnerships.
- ◆ CPS participated in the Texas Kinicare Task Force, a public/private collaboration to examine current laws and policies and determine what is needed to make family caregiving more effective.
- ◆ In 2003, CPS began a project that links mentors who provide support and career guidance with youth age 21 and younger who recently left the state's care. Called the E-Mentoring initiative, the project matched 48 young adults with E-Mentors set up through the Orphan Foundation of America.

Months Spent in State Care for Children Whose Adoptions Were Consummated



- ◆ In the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex, CPS was involved in establishing a resource center for children ages 14 to 18 who were in the process of aging out of the state's care. Known as the Transition Resource Access Center, this one-stop resource provides these youths with support programs in which they can learn to become independent and realize their full potential. The center is housed in a 6,300 square foot building donated for 10 years, rent-free, by the Meadows Foundation, which also provided financial resources to remodel the structure.
- ◆ In 2003, staff in Dallas County established a new program called Foster Friends that recruits and trains volunteers to assist caseworkers with transportation, visitation supervision, and clerical duties.

Responsiveness

◆ In September 2002, CPS submitted a plan to the federal Administration for Children and Families to improve outcomes related to safety, permanency, and well-being of children who come into the state's care. The plan, known as the Child and Family Service Review Program Improvement Plan, includes strategies for the agency to implement during the next two years and was written in response to a federal review of the agency. As part of the process, the agency also began conducting regional reviews in 2003, with an estimated completion date in Fiscal Year 2004.

◆ In 2002, Texas Health and Human Services Commission Children's Policy Council made suggestions for improvements to CPS. In 2003, CPS responded by developing a plan to implement the council's recommendations.

◆ CPS staff initiated a plan called CHILD (Congregations Helping In Love and Dedication), to recruit foster and adoptive parents in faith-based communities. Agency staff also worked with Judge Robin D. Sage, 307th Family District Court, Longview, to begin a recruitment effort for foster parents from the faith-based community. Under Senate Bill 1489, 78th Texas Legislature, Regular Session, CPS was directed to recruit foster parents from faith-based organizations.

◆ In 2003, the PRS Board adopted a rule so the agency could comply with federal regulations regarding the number of months children remain in the state's care and a funding methodology for finding permanent homes when appropriate. Prior to this, PRS had followed the terms of the permanency rider as set forth in Senate Bill 1, 77th Texas Legislature, Article II, Rider 2 (II-110).

Ongoing Initiatives

◆ CPS continued to expand its Collaborative Adoption Project, a federal grant to improve collaboration between the public and private sectors. During 2003, CPS established formal agreements with private adoption agencies in the Beaumont, El Paso, and Tyler regions.

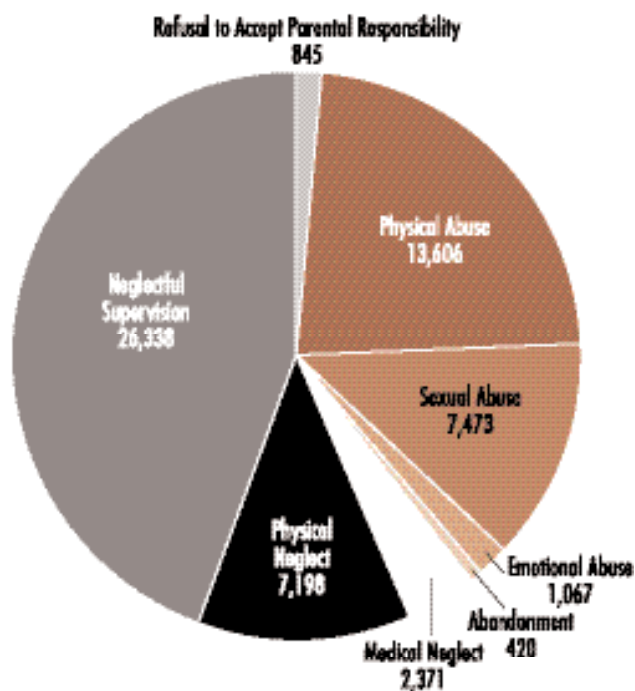
◆ CPS entered into an agreement with the Texas Commission on Alcohol and Drug Abuse to help treat youths in the state's care. Before the agreement, CPS contracted with adolescent residential treatment facilities to access similar services.

◆ In 2003, CPS began to revitalize a nationally recognized, team-oriented, parent-mentoring program called FAME (Family Advocate Model for Empowerment). The program, based in the Panhandle, pairs birth parents with foster parents to teach them the importance of creating stable homes for families and children. The resulting mentoring relationships not only help minimize the separation trauma children experience when they are placed in foster care, but also help when families are reunified.

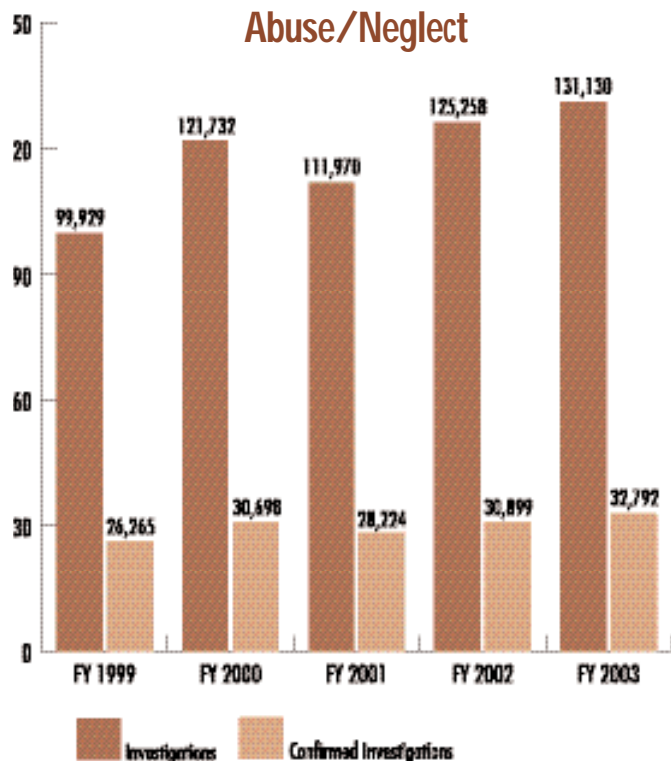
◆ An ongoing effort to reduce turnover of CPS caseworkers resulted in improved staff retention. In 2003, the turnover rate was 23.5 percent, down from 25.3 percent in 2002 and 27.9 percent in 2001.

◆ The rate of recidivism for abuse/neglect within 12 months declined to 8.6 percent in 2003 from 10 percent in 2002. This reduction in repeated cases of abuse and neglect can be attributed to the involvement of CPS Risk Directors, who now review and consult with caseworkers on each new investigation involving children age 3 and younger. Other contributing factors are a greater emphasis on risk factors found in investigations, and the overall decline in caseworker turnover.

Confirmed Victims of Abuse/Neglect by Type FY2003



Completed Investigations of Child Abuse/Neglect



What CPS Does

Intake

DFPS administers a toll-free, 24-hour statewide hotline for reporting suspected abuse or neglect of children, disabled persons, 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 meeting 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 regarding children. The agency received 185,732 reports of child abuse and neglect in 2003. During 2003, an increasing number of professionals took advantage of an option to report suspected abuse or neglect online using a secured web site. In 2003, close to 12,000 web-based reports of abuse or neglect were received through this Internet reporting option.

State law requires that anyone who believes that a child is being abused or neglected report the situation to the DFPS abuse hotline at 1-800-252-5400.



Every year, thousands of children enter the state's care due to abuse or neglect. Many are part of sibling groups, have special medical, physical, or developmental needs, or belong to ethnic minority groups. Most of these children are eventually reunited with their families, but are often placed in foster care until their birth families can be stabilized. As a result, there is a severe need across Texas for foster parents, especially those who can help reinforce the children's cultural identity.

After adopting and raising a child (whom they adopted through CPS), Juanita and Manuel Trujillo of Brownsville decided they had more love to share. "Although we already had an adult child who was married and raising his own children, my family decided we could foster," says Juanita (left). They began in 1994 with a sibling group of two girls and one boy and since then, they have fostered more than a dozen more children. "There are lots of children who need love," says Juanita. "They keep you on your toes. They bring you happiness."

Juanita says she enjoys the assistance her family receives from CPS and foster care worker Elizabeth Garza-Higgins (right). "The agency has been very supportive. Whenever I need her help, Elizabeth is there."

Investigations

When an intake is assigned, CPS workers interview children, parents, and others with 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. In 2003, CPS completed 131,130 investigations. Even if evidence of 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.

Family-Based Safety Services (FBSS)

When child safety can be reasonably assured, CPS 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 2003, an average of 9,484 families per month received in-home services.

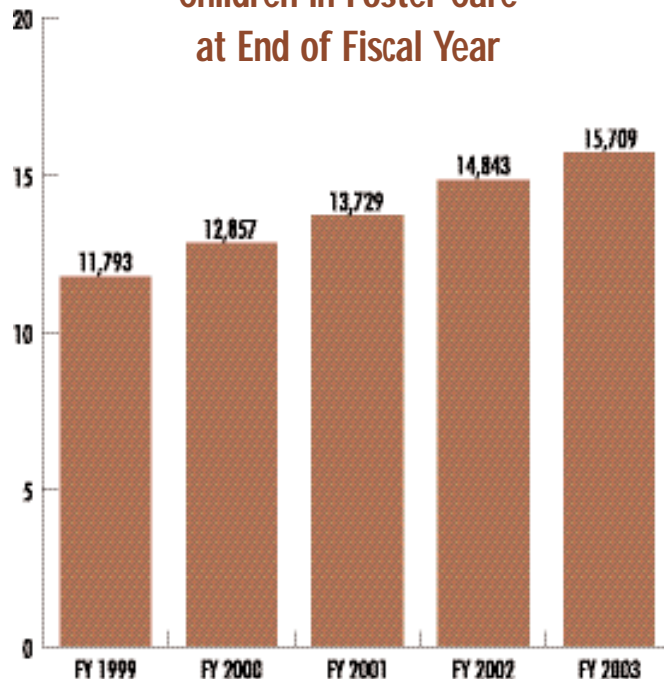
Foster Care

When it isn't safe for children to live with their own families, CPS petitions the court to provide for their safety. They may be placed temporarily with relatives, a verified foster family, or an emergency shelter. Certified foster families provide a safe, nurturing environment for most children in CPS care. Foster families receive reimbursements for 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 address in a foster care home. These children may be placed in specialized group homes, residential treatment centers, or other facilities.

Permanency Planning Teams

When children are removed from their home and placed in the state's custody, the CPS caseworker, the parents, and the children's temporary caregivers 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 with the input of the other professionals

Children in Foster Care at End of Fiscal Year



involved in the case. The goal is to ensure that children live in a stable, nurturing environment and do not remain 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.

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. DFPS completed 2,444 adoptions in 2003. DFPS contracts with licensed private child-placing agencies to increase the number of adoptive homes available to adopt foster children. At the end of 2003, there were 4,016 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 2003, 52.3 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

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during the foster care placement. CPS has made a concerted effort to “dually license” homes for both foster care and adoption services.

Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive Families

CPS actively recruits foster and adoptive families 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 programs currently in place in Fort Worth/Dallas, Beaumont, and Houston. In the San Antonio area, staff worked with Ujima Services for Children, a private agency promoting the adoption of African American children. In the agency’s Beaumont region, staff continued to work closely with Rev. W.C. Martin of the Bennett Chapel in Possum Trot, Texas to encourage adoption of African American children.

Texas Adoption Resource Exchange

The Texas Adoption Resource Exchange (TARE) provides information on children waiting for adoption. Photos, profiles, videos and inquiry forms are on the Internet at www.adoptchildren.org. TARE participates with national

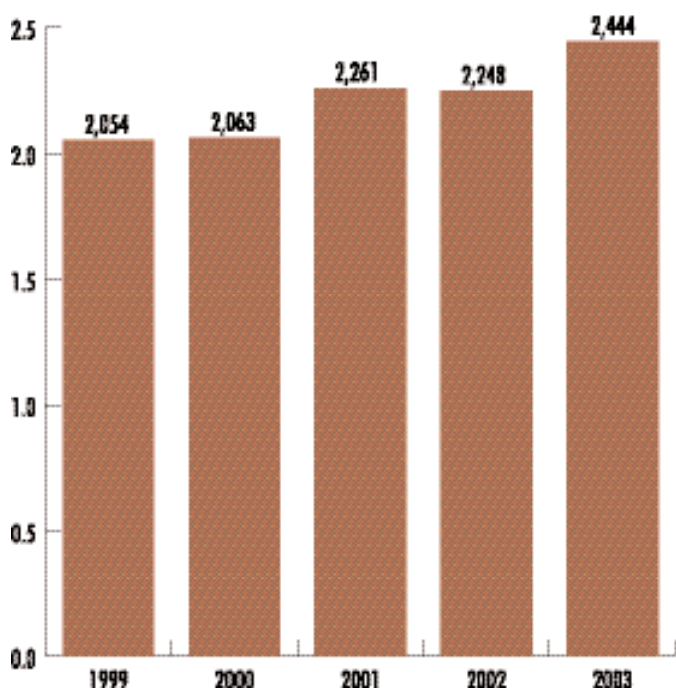


In recent years, juvenile courts, adoptive families, attorneys, and child welfare agencies across the country have begun to schedule clusters of hearings for finalizing adoptions to coincide with the month of November, which has been recognized since the 1970s as Adoption Awareness Month. The first National Adoption Day, held on Nov. 18, 2000, was created and coordinated by The Alliance for Children’s Rights and sponsored by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption and the Freddie Mac Foundation. In 2003, the Adoption Coalition of Texas, a partnership of five private Central Texas adoption agencies and Child Protective Services, held its Adoption Day recognition and celebration on November 20.

“When we first met Jacob and John, we fell in love,” said Sue Mayfield. (above). “At first, we decided to be foster parents. We didn’t know the scope of the whole thing and once they were placed with us, we weren’t sure where it would go. But in time, they warmed up and before long they started asking if we would adopt them.”

Mayfield said once she and her husband made the commitment to adopt, it was a little difficult to wait for Adoption Day to finalize things, but worth it. “We got a phone call about Adoption Day and decided we could wait. Child Protective Services and everyone worked together. They all wanted us to succeed. We weren’t stressed out and I would do it again in a minute.”

Completed Adoptions





adoption organizations during national recruitment campaigns and promotes children on TARE in other national web sites. TARE had more than 900 children registered in 2003.

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 approved adoptive home studies. The family's adoption preferences on children they are willing to parent are available to CPS adoption staff in a searchable database. More than 280 approved adoptive families were registered in the TFN in 2003.

Adoption Support Services

Adopted children who have suffered abuse or neglect often need help coping with the effects of abuse and the loss of their birth family. Each CPS region contracts with private agencies to provide post-adoption services to adopted children and their families, including casework, mental health, therapeutic services to children and families, parent training, support groups, and respite care for adoptive parents. Post-adoption services were provided to 1,592 children and families in 2003.

Preparation for Adult Living

The Preparation for Adult Living (PAL) program helps make the transition to adulthood successful 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 DFPS Board and other decision-makers to improve services to children and youth.

In 2003, 4,921 youths ages 16 through 20, participated in the PAL program. In addition, 663 youths ages 14 and 15 received PAL services. Through funds of the federal Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, CPS provided aftercare room-and-board assistance for 887 young adults and case management services for 1,361 young adults ages 18 through 21 who exited foster care.

Working With Partners

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 collaborative 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 for a network of medical professionals who evaluate cases of sexual abuse, and more recently, physical abuse;
- ◆ sponsors training for attorneys ad litem for children and an annual conference to train prosecutors across the state;
- ◆ provides funding for training physicians, nurses, and law enforcement personnel;
- ◆ started family group conferencing in Texas, a mechanism to address cultural differences, allow for more extended family involvement, and reduce lengthy court proceedings; and
- ◆ funds Texas Lawyers for Children, a statewide web-based resource for attorneys representing parties in CPS cases.

CJA is in its second year of funding a statewide multi-city training for law enforcement and investigators on severe physical abuse. This training will be modified for presentation to medical personnel in the coming year.

Beginning in March 2003, CPS staff in the agency's Houston region began a telelegal project that allowed them to testify in permanent managing conservatorship cases without traveling to the courthouse. On one day, about 40 cases were heard in less than 3 hours, thus saving travel and parking expenses for 40 staff, plus retrieval of at least 80 to 120 staff hours previously lost in travel and waiting in court.

Texas Court Improvement Project

The Texas Court Improvement Project (CIP) is a federal grant to the Texas Supreme Court to improve judicial proceedings in foster care and adoption cases. Through an interagency agreement, the grant is administered by DFPS. Texas Court



Since 1998, the agency has had a memorandum of understanding with DIF or *El Desarrollo Integral Familiar*, which is the equivalent protective services agency in Mexico. The official agreement, which grew out of a challenge issued by the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission in 1996, helps both agencies assist each other with day-to-day matters and provides standards for the agencies to investigate allegations of abuse and neglect of children and vulnerable adults.

"For example, an attorney with DIF called me recently and said he had a little boy who was an American citizen," says Sara Treviño (center) who serves as the official Child Protective Services liaison with DIF out of Brownsville. "We had given custody to the boy's grandfather in Matamoros because the boy's father was abusive. Now, the grandfather was too ill to continue providing care. Because the boy had no other relatives in Mexico, we ended up taking custody of the child and placed him with a family in Texas."

Amalia M. Navarro Brito (left) and Gonzalo González Treviño (right) of DIF say the memorandum of understanding is very beneficial. "There are a lot of families on each side of the border and the goal of both of our agencies is the same," says Brito. "We all benefit through our exchange of information. Gonzalez relates, "the biggest challenge we all face is the families themselves."

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Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) continues to expand with financial help from CIP. This funding also piloted 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 continues to work closely with the Office of Court Administration, which now has responsibility for the project.

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 DFPS attorneys to check on the status of any child abuse or neglect case filed in Texas;
- ◆ fund several court-driven local projects to recruit foster and adoptive homes; and
- ◆ fund the development of online training software and video conferencing pilot projects, allowing a child to testify from the security and comfort of a remote location. Currently, the CIP main focus is on judicial training on current issues in child abuse and neglect.

Child Fatality Review

Every year, thousands of Texas children die as a result of automobile accidents, accidental drowning, congenital birth defects, accidental shooting, and many other causes. Child Fatality Review Teams are multidisciplinary, multiethnic, multi-agency panels that review all child deaths regardless of how they occurred. 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 and public awareness initiatives. Child Fatality Review Teams have grown rapidly since their inception in 1992. Today there are 43 teams that cover 144 counties. Through CPS, DFPS provides technical assistance to the teams and is the state agency charged with maintaining the public information associated with the teams.

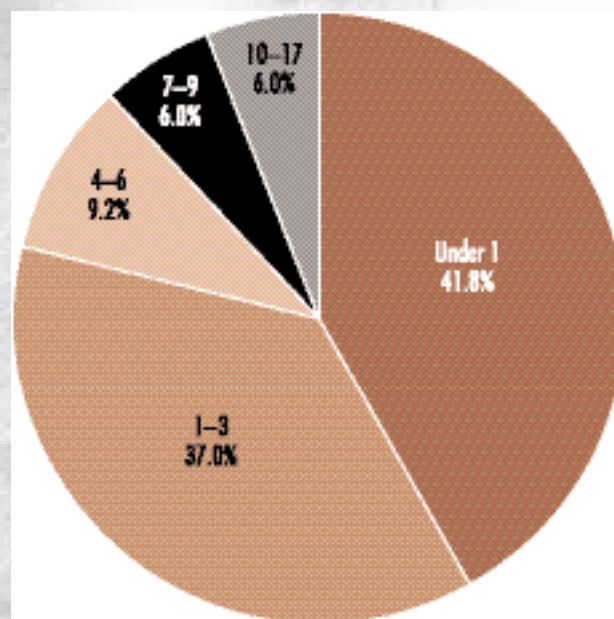
Abuse/Neglect Fatalities

CPS has developed both internal and external mechanisms to review child fatalities due to abuse/neglect. The deaths are reviewed by Citizen Review Teams, Child Fatality Review Teams, CPS Risk Directors, Regional CPS Child Death

Committees, and the state Child Safety Review Committee. While each entity reviews child deaths for unique purposes, a common goal is to help CPS and the larger community identify causes of child fatalities and develop strategies, programs, and training to reduce the rate of preventable child deaths and provide intervention services to families and children at risk.

In 2003, of the children who died due to abuse or neglect, 41.8 percent were less than one year old, and nearly 78.8 percent were age three or younger. Of 689 child deaths reported in 2003, CPS confirmed abuse/neglect as the cause of death for 184 children. ■

Age of Fatality Victims Due to Abuse/Neglect FY 2003



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The year 2003 marked the 10th anniversary of legislation exempting former foster youth from paying tuition and most fees at state-funded colleges, community colleges, universities, and vocational schools. In 1993-94—the program's first academic year—73 students received waivers. During the 2002-03 school year, the number was 692.

One of the more recent youths to benefit from the waiver is Marco Canas (right), a student at the University of Houston. "I first thought about attending the University of Houston back when I was in junior high school. After I entered foster care, I still thought about attending college because I knew a high school diploma would not be enough. When I turned 17, my CPS worker referred me to Sharon Snow in the Preparation for Adult Living or PAL program. She was and continues to be a lot of help. Today, I'm proud to be the first person in my birth family to go to college in this country," said Canas. The PAL program, which is administered by Child Protective Services, helps prepare youth leaving foster care with the skills and resources they need to be healthy, productive adults.

The University of Houston has gone beyond waiving PAL students' tuitions. Dr. Elwyn Lee (left), vice chancellor and vice president of student affairs at the University of Houston System, implemented supportive services to former foster youth as part of the university's Urban Experience Program. "You have to think outside the box to implement this kind of program. The former foster youths who come here are on their own and the university almost takes on a parental role. The purpose of the Urban Experience Program is to provide a supportive environment for all students with challenges—not only youth leaving foster care, but minorities, women, and people with disabilities."

The program, which is run by Robbie Evans, prepares students for entry into the workforce by combining educational opportunities with valuable internship opportunities, community service, tutoring, mentoring, career development, and, in some cases, on campus housing. "There are profound issues related to foster youth," said Evans. "Most students go home for the summer, but former foster youth don't have that kind of support. These youths need additional assistance so they can have a life beyond state care, otherwise it can be difficult to be a college student. I am so encouraged because these students to have the opportunity to go to college."