



2025

**ANNUAL PROGRESS and
SERVICES REPORT**

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Governor, State of Mississippi
Tate Reeves

Commissioner, Mississippi Department of Child
Protection Services
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I. Organizational Structure

Executive Summary

The mission of MDCPS is to *protect children, support families, and encourage lasting family connections*. This mission is driven by a vision that Mississippi's children will grow up in strong families, safe from harm and supported through partnerships that promote family stability and permanency.

State Agency Administering the Programs

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services (MDCPS) is Mississippi's lead child welfare agency, responsible for administering programs under Title IV-B and Title IV-E of the Social Security Act. Mississippi law assigns MDCPS responsibility for "[t]he programs and services [formerly] provided by the Office of Family and Children's Services of the Department of Human Services."¹ This statutory authority includes primary responsibility for protective services for children, foster care, adoption, interstate compact, and licensure.²

MDCPS is led by a commissioner who is appointed by the Governor, and who exercises complete and exclusive operational control of the Department's functions. MDCPS's executive leadership team includes a Commissioner, Principal Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff, Deputy Commissioner of Well-Being, Permanency, & Safety, Deputy Commissioner of Administration, Chief Legal Counsel, Inspector General, Deputy Administrator of Human Capital, Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports, Director of External Affairs, and Chief Information Officer. Andrea A. Sanders serves as commissioner. A chart of the agency's structure is located under Attachment A.

¹ *Id.*

² Miss. Code Ann. 43-1-51.

³ Miss. Code Ann. 43-26-1.

PREDOMINANT AREAS OF MDCPS

Commissioner: The MDCPS Commissioner leads the almost 1,600-member state child welfare agency in its mission to protect Mississippi's most vulnerable children. As a member of the State of Mississippi Governor's Cabinet, the Commissioner acts as a liaison with both legislative and governmental partners and stakeholders to align agency initiatives with state-wide human service efforts. The Commissioner coordinates agency efforts to build both public and private partnerships and strengthen community resources for children and families of Mississippi.

The Commissioner leads the agency's Executive Leadership Team in working diligently to identify and address challenges in the child welfare system and striving to reach better safety, permanency, and well-being outcomes for children and families.

Principal Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff: The MDCPS Principal Deputy Commissioner (Chief of Staff) reports directly to the Commissioner, monitoring and coordinating the efforts of the Executive Leadership Team to ensure that agency unit initiatives and efforts are aligned with the overall mission of protecting Mississippi's children.

The Chief of Staff internally supports the Commissioner's efforts to build both public and private partnerships and strengthen community resources for children and families of Mississippi. The Chief of Staff assists the agency and unit leaders in strategic planning and collaborative challenge resolution to maximize the efficiency and effectiveness of the agency. The Chief of Staff focuses on building processes and administering programs to help move the agency to a higher level of service for those children and families served by MDCPS.

Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports: The Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Support reports directly to the Chief of Staff and leads MDCPS' efforts related to areas of training, Centralized Intake, foster care licensure, congregate care licensure, and support related to the establishment and maintenance of the private provider network as well as a statewide Director of Centralized Intake and Assessment.

Clinical Support Operations: The Director of Operations for Clinical Support works directly with the Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Support to assist in the logistics and operational activities for all Clinical Support services. This includes execution of project management, special projects, and research of new programs and initiatives to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity in clinical support operations. The primary goal is ensuring enhancement of clinical support processes, and overall compliance with agency and federal mandates while improving service delivery and progress toward the goals and mission of the agency.

Centralized Intake and Assessment: The Director of Centralized Intake and Assessment is an additional area of Service Area supervision that reports directly to the Deputy Commissioner of

Clinical Support. This office and the staff associated with its efforts oversee and manage operations of the Mississippi Centralized Intake and Assessment Center and staff dedicated to implementing these responsibilities at the intake and reporting level.

The center is centralized at the state office and has the responsibility of receiving, screening, and entering all communications of child abuse and neglect into the automated child welfare information system for secondary review, screening, and assignment utilizing an established Structured Decision-Making model. Staff working at the intake center also have the responsibility for initial notifications to the Human Trafficking Task Force for intakes regarding such allegations.

The Office of Clinical Support also manages the Education Services Unit which provides guidance and support to ensure the educational needs of children in foster care are addressed timely and appropriately. The Director of Permanency Support Services leads MDCPS' Independent Living (IL) program. Additionally, there is a division director who manages MDCPS' efforts regarding state and federal compliance for Victims of Trafficking.

Office of Professional Development: The Office of Professional Development is directly overseen by the Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Support and is responsible for the development and delivery of both Pre-Service Training and In-Service Training for all onboarding and current staff located in offices and facilities across the state related to all facets of MDCPS' day-to-day practice. The applied Professional Development curriculum also includes targeted Supervisor Training, Leader Development Training, as well as the deployment of Practice Model Coaches, where needed and available.

Office of Professional Development's responsibilities also include tracking and monitoring compliance with all training requirements, new training program development, producing training reports, and managing training contracts with outside agencies. This office is also responsible for the initial and ongoing Foster Parent Training for all MDCPS prospective and active Foster and Adoptive Parents.

The Director of Foster Care Recruiting reports directly to the Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Support and is responsible for the development and management of Foster Care Recruiting.

The Director of Congregate Care Licensure oversees MDCPS' efforts to license qualified residential facilities and manages any changes in such licensures. Licensure staff also conduct annual compliance-based reviews of each licensed facility and ensure that all facilities maintain high-quality standards to ensure the safety of the children and youth served in those settings.

The Director of Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) has the primary purpose of ensuring that children placed out-of-state are placed with caregivers who are safe, suitable, and able to meet the child's needs in alignment with ICPC policy. The ICPC unit requires an assessment of these factors before a child is placed out of state.



Wendy's Wonderful Kids® - Staff from the Office of Clinical Support serve as technical assistance and support for efforts of the Wendy's Wonderful Kids® program. Through Wendy's Wonderful Kids®, MDCPS administers funding and programming to adoption agencies to engage recruiters dedicated to finding adoptive homes for children in foster care in Mississippi and across the U.S.

Continuum of Care Coordination – This office manages the private provider contracting network's efforts through a system of service delivery and acts as a liaison between the private provider network and MDCPS in matters concerning day-to-day contractor service delivery requirements and expectations.

Deputy Commissioner of Well-being, Permanency, & Safety: The Deputy Commissioner of Child Well-Being, Permanency, and Safety reports directly to the Chief of Staff and provides leadership to MDCPS' frontline and programmatic personnel through an Assistant Deputy Commissioner (ADC) for each of the seven designated Service Areas of the state.

ADCs of Child Well-Being and Permanency Service Areas report directly to the Deputy Commissioner for Child Well-Being, Permanency, and Safety and oversee and support the day-to-day functions of their respective geographic Service Areas. Each Service Area has responsibility for the following Well-Being and Permanency disciplines:

- In-Home Services
- Foster Care
- Resource Development
- Permanency Support Services; and,
- Permanency Specialists (Guardianship and Adoption)

ADC for Policy and Practice Supports Service Areas reports directly to the Deputy Commissioner for Child Well-Being, Permanency, and Safety. Policy and Practice ADC has primary responsibility for managing Therapeutic and Prevention Services. This includes prevention services subgrants and contracts and coordinating the delivery of services to children and families served by MDCPS through various community-based programs.

Permanency Support Services leads MDCPS' state office support units for both termination of parental rights and adoption, and a specialized staff of adoption caseworkers across MDCPS' seven (7) Service Areas.

Policy and Practice Supports ADC also has responsibility for assisting frontline staff with the coordination and tracking of medical services for children in custody and locating placement for children with therapeutic needs. This may include the occasional coordination of interpreter services, who assist frontline staff serving children or families needing services in a language other than English.

The **Foster Care Licensure** staff licenses foster homes (relative and non-relative). These

licensure workers have responsibility for licensing new MDCPS foster homes within prescribed time frames, performing periodic checks of existing MDCPS foster homes, renewing expiring foster home licenses, and assisting frontline staff with identifying available placements for children who enter custody.

ADCs for Child Safety Service Areas report directly to the Deputy Commissioner for Child Well-Being and are assigned to one or more of the seven (7) geographic Service Areas. These ADCs have the primary responsibility for managing all of MDCPS' various types of investigations. Child Safety ADCs are assigned at least one Investigations Director assigned to each of the seven Service Areas. It is the Investigations Director's role to deploy and direct staff dedicated to conducting investigations in their assigned Service Area in carrying out the following tasks:

- Child Protective Services (CPS) Intake Investigations;
- Investigations regarding Maltreatment in Care; and,
- Human Trafficking Investigations.

Refugee and Immigration Administration: Individuals outside the United States seeking admission as a refugee under Section 207 of the INA are processed through the U.S. Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP), which is managed by the Department of State in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). Those admitted as refugees are eligible for U.S. government-funded resettlement assistance.

Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration: The Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration reports directly to the Chief of Staff and has responsibility for all general accounting related MDCPS functions, finance, procurement, administrative services, revenue maximization, and eligibility determinations.

Chief Financial Officer (CFO): The CFO reports directly to the Deputy Commissioner of Finance and Administration and is responsible for tracking cash flow and financial planning of the accounting department, including responsibility for the accounting professionals who perform operational functions. The following disciplines are overseen directly through the office of the CFO:

- **Cost Allocation** staff are responsible for the identification of allowable expenditures and ensuring the utilization of federal funding is maximized. This office also confirms that all allocation of costs are accurately determined and directed to the correct benefiting program(s). In order to ensure these allocations are consistent and uniform throughout the agency, case manager and supervisor salaries, along with related direct and indirect administrative costs, are allocated to funding grants using a Random Moment Sampling (RMS) process.
- **Budget and Grants Management:** This office is responsible for controlling the availability of funds and cash management for expenditure by the agency. Grants management



activities and subgrant claims activities are also conducted by this office.

Budget and Grants Management is also responsible for the financial management of externally sponsored programs, including the preparation and submission of related financial reports and invoices, cash collections, expenditure compliance review, cost transfers, and program closeout.

- **General Accounting:** includes all past, present, and future fiscal activities to include Accounts Payable, Accounts Receivable, Payroll, and Travel.

Accounts Payable is responsible for working with various divisions to ensure that suppliers, service providers, and various other entities receive payments due to them. Accounts Receivable is responsible for the process of ensuring that customers pay for services or products received from the agency.

Payroll staff are responsible for ensuring all MDCPS employees are paid correctly for hours worked in a timely manner and all taxes, insurance premiums, and other deductions are taken deducted from employees' checks according to state and federal rules and regulations. Travel staff are responsible for ensuring all MDCPS employees are reimbursed for travel expenses that they may have accrued while providing services on behalf of MDCPS.

- **County Funds Management:** County funds aid clerical and management staff with the financial aspects of foster care and the responsibilities that go along with providing financial sustainability, such as record keeping, and financial transactions within an individual county while ensuring that a transparent system of financial control adheres to all generally accepted rules of accounting.
- **Chief Procurement Officer (CPO)** also reports directly to the agency CFO. This office is responsible for buying, purchasing, renting, leasing, or otherwise procuring any commodities, equipment, services, or construction. It also includes all functions related to contract procurement, and subgrant procurement, as well as the obtaining of any commodities, equipment, services, or construction, including a description of requirements, selection, and solicitation of sources, preparation and award of contract, and all phases of contract administration.
- **Office of Eligibility:** The Director of Eligibility reports directly to the CFO and is responsible for oversight of the determination of appropriate funding sources to be utilized for children and youth entering MDCPS custody. Eligibility also re-determines annual eligibility for those who have been previously determined to be IV-E eligible. Eligibility staff also make Medicaid eligibility determinations for children and youth in MDCPS custody.



Administrative Services: The Director of Administration supervises staff and provides support to the following MDCPS Divisions: property, fleet management, state office and county office facilities management, emergency management, constituent services, the oversight of administrative assistants (Call Center and Executive), mailroom and supplies, and procurement of vendor quotes for all State Office purchases to be made within state purchasing guidelines.

This office oversees the establishment and monitoring of county relationships and leasing, supervision of agency property, performing asset audits annually in all agency facilities, inputting of new orders received in MAGIC to ensure each asset is tagged with a unique identifier, and managing all other property processing dispositions.

The **Director of Facilities** manages staff involved in conducting facility inspections to ensure safety and functionality, assists state and county offices with acquiring new property (IT and Furniture), works with county officials to ensure maintenance issues are addressed in a timely manner, removal of dispositioned property, transporting of dispositioned property to Office of Surplus Property.

Fleet Management and Emergency Management is responsible for, but not limited to, the management of state office and county office safety and evacuation plans, AED defibrillator inspections, ADA personal emergency evacuation plans, monthly fire and safety equipment inspections, up-keep and maintenance to agency vehicles, process and management of fleet reservations, processing of Fuelman receipts for vehicle usage.

Deputy Commissioner-Office of General Counsel: MDCPS's General Counsel reports directly to the Commissioner and serves as chief legal officer and is responsible for the Office of Legal Counsel. General Counsel handles all legal matters affecting MDCPS' operations and works with programmatic areas and senior leadership to develop agency policy and implement policy initiatives. General Counsel also coordinates with the Office of the Attorney General and outside counsel on litigation matters.

The Office of General Counsel is supported by the Deputy Commissioner/General Counsel, as well as multiple staff attorneys and other Legal support staff. The principal functions of General Counsel are detailed below:

Administrative Hearings: Administrative Hearings conducts all MDCPS administrative agency hearings, including but not limited to employment matters, Foster Parent grievances, central registry appeals, and licensure appeals. Administrative Hearings also drafts recommendations and manages all aspects of administrative hearings.

State Director of Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)-Adoption-KinGap: The State Director of TPR/Adoption/KinGap oversees the termination of parental rights suits, adoption cases, and

related placement matters for MDCPS statewide. The State Director of TPR/Adoption/KinGap also coordinates with the legal team and agency employees regarding these matters.

Privacy and Civil Rights: Privacy and Civil Rights addresses issues regarding the privacy rights of children in custody and provides guidance with respect to civil rights issues raised related to MDCPS custody of children, as well as with respect to employee issues in these areas. Privacy and Civil Rights also coordinates with the MDCPS legal team regarding these claims and lawsuits and with outside legal counsel.

Policy Initiatives-Service Improvements reviews current policy for areas of improvement, drafts amendments, drafts new policy, assists with implementing policy, and works with MDCPS's Human Resources and Well-Being Areas to suggest and implement improvements. Legal authority with regard to all state plans and policy-practice alignment are also maintained through this office.

General Legal Support: General Legal Support provides legal representation and authority to all Service Areas of the state. General Legal Support also offers guidance to MDCPS employees, prepares MDCPS employees for court appearances, oversees and handles litigation other than TPRs and Adoptions, and coordinates with outside counsel. Legal language for all MDCPS contracts, Memorandums of Understanding, etc. is reviewed and approved by General Legal Support as well.

Director of Human Capital: The Director of Human Capital reports directly to the Chief of Staff and leads efforts to meet the needs of all MDCPS staff at every stage of their employment experience. The Director of Human Capital oversees the Core Processing Unit, the Employee Resources Unit, The Compliance Unit, The Background and Fingerprint Unit and the Workforce Wellbeing Unit.

Human Capital staff in all units develop and maintain human resources policies and procedures for the agency as well as develop training for staff on human resource-related activities.

Core Processing: The Director of Core Processing is responsible for overseeing all daily human resources transactions, including hiring, promotions, lateral transfers, etc., in compliance with State Personnel Board requirements. This office also processes transactions that may arise from measures deemed necessary through Office of the Inspector General investigations or other compulsory outcomes stemming from additional investigational sources. Core Processing staff are responsible for building and maintaining individual employee personnel files and maintaining the SPB statewide human resources database. Core Processing staff in coordination with Employee Resources staff provide orientation for new employees. Core processing staff are located throughout the state to provide support and assistance with all human resource functions.



Employee Resources: The Director of Employee Resources is responsible for coordinating employee benefits and resources such as the state agency health insurance and multiple supplemental benefit programs. Employee Resources staff provide benefit orientation for new employees, coordination with partner entities for employee support such as the Public Employees Retirement System and MS Deferred Compensation Program and employment verification services. Employee Resources staff also coordinate all offboarding of employees.

Background and Fingerprint Unit: The Background and Fingerprint Unit is responsible for conducting and processing Background Checks for the hiring of potential employees, interns, and volunteers in coordination with Core Processing staff. This unit also provides fingerprinting and background checks for Foster Parents and foster home household members licensed through MDCPS and through contracted providers. The Fingerprint and Background unit maintains the Mississippi Central Registry and processes requests for background checks from other child welfare partners statewide.

Compliance Unit: The Compliance Unit is responsible for coordinating MDCPS's Family Medical Leave Act, Worker's Compensation and Americans with Disabilities Act benefits and rights. Compliance staff are also responsible for time-keeping processes, maintaining and monitoring the agency's flex schedule options, and review and documentation of disciplinary actions.

Workforce Wellbeing Unit: The Director of Workforce Wellbeing is responsible for coordinating recruitment and retention activities to stabilize the workforce and create a positive work culture. Workforce Well-Being Recruitment staff are responsible for MDCPS's participation in job fairs and interaction with the state's universities and colleges as well as the centralized hiring process of MDCPS.

Workforce Wellbeing staff promote healthy, positive employee relations by supporting morale and a positive work culture by coordinating employee recognition events and awards, conducting employee engagement assessments, providing conflict resolution assistance and bereavement support to employees.

Executive Director of External Affairs: The Director of External Affairs reports directly to the Commissioner and directs the agency's Legislative agenda, collaborates with community stakeholders, and advocates on behalf of the agency. The Director of External Affairs serves as the agency spokesperson when the Commissioner is unavailable and functions as the Public Relations Team Lead. The entire team works to create informational messaging to stakeholders including agency employees, families the agency serves, judicial and government officials, and the general public.

The office of the Director of External Affairs oversees efforts around communications, social media, Constituent Services, and Legislative Affairs. Those offices are defined below:

Communications: The Director of Communications coordinates internal communications by creating content for newsletters, coordinates with the Information Technology (IT)



department to keep the MDCPS website current and serves as an agency liaison with the MACWIS development team. This office is also responsible for website content management and internal communications through regular newsletters and digital mediums.

Social media: This office is operated by the Director of Public Relations and Marketing who is responsible for maintaining a database of media contacts and digital media for MDCPS employees. This office also creates an annual calendar of content based on weekly analysis of social media analytics. This individual also creates and manages content for social media focusing on external facing messaging, cultivates media relationships and serves as the official photographer and videographer for the agency. This office also handles graphic design for collateral materials including business cards, posters, invitations for events, and other special projects as needed. This manager helps coordinate special events for the Adoption Unit and Motivational Mavericks, an employee recognition project.

Constituent Services: The Director of Constituent Services responds to external constituents and stakeholders regarding issues and questions with agency policy and procedures. This Manager refers constituents to appropriate staff members for information and updates on individual cases. This Manager works with an administrative assistant who keeps accurate records of calls and other contacts that arrive in the Constituent Services Office. Constituent Services staff also respond to constituent issues regarding agency policy, frontline services, and various questions from interested community stakeholders.

Legislative Affairs: The Director of Legislative Affairs collaborates with the Commissioner, agency Deputies, and the Office of Legal Counsel to create a Legislative agenda and budget request for the annual Legislative session. This office serves as a liaison with legislative representatives and senators to draft laws benefiting the agency and, by extension, Mississippi's families with children. The Legislative Affairs Director attends committee meetings/hearings and cultivates relationships to build consensus on preferred legislation.

Chief Information Officer: The Chief Information Officer reports directly to the Chief of Staff and oversees all operations of the Information Technology (IT) Department. This includes managing IT staff and system support functions including planning and implementation of new systems, managing technical assistance, selecting, and procuring required technologies, directing IT projects, monitoring cybersecurity and compliance, Data Governance, and setting the technical direction for MDCPS.

IT also manages and implements Application Development Services, Application Support Services, IT Project Management Services, End User Support Services, Network Support Services, Information Security and Compliance Services, and Technical Asset Management Services.

IT also features dedicated support and developmental units for both the Mississippi Automated



Child Welfare Information System (MACWIS) and the Comprehensive Child Welfare Information Systems (CCWIS). The IT Department also has the responsibility of developing, implementing, securing, and supporting all hardware, software, and applications utilized by MDCPS.

Information Security Department: This department defends the agency against the latest cyber threats. The head of this department serves as the agency's Chief Information Security Officer (CISO). Staff performs regular penetration testing of the MDCPS network. Staff are responsible for the development of a vulnerability management program and an incident response plan. CISO leads regular tabletop exercises involving cross-functional teams, including other division-level directors and staff, for incident preparedness. Staff have the responsibility of educating all MDCPS employees about cyber threats and cyber hygiene by developing and managing the agency's security awareness program. The department has the responsibility of advising other departments on information security best practices. Department staff advise and make recommendations on the acquisition of information security products and tools. Department staff collaborates with the Data Management Department on data privacy issues. It also develops partnerships with industry, state, and federal stakeholders for intelligence exchange. The department is responsible for the retention of cybersecurity knowledge and expertise. This includes the development of a team of cybersecurity analysts in the department, as well as developing the aggregate level of cybersecurity knowledge within the MIS division.

IT Audit and Policy Department: This department develops IT internal controls and monitors for compliance. Staff reviews IT operations and assesses them for risk. Staff develops IT policy and ensures policy aligns with industry best practices. Department head works closely with the CIO on IT governance strategy. Staff develop risk-adjusted IT governance policy frameworks to achieve business outcomes while maintaining compliant use of IT resources. Staff develops IT principles, policies, standards, procedures, and guidelines for use in risk-adjusted governance frameworks. Provides a comprehensive view of the risk landscape to identify the right IT governance policies at the right time and provides effective oversight and assurance to the agency on the use of IT assets and resources. Department staff actively contribute to business continuity planning and reviews plans for risk. Department staff also actively contribute to disaster recovery planning and reviews plan for risk. Risk mitigation plans and strategies are developed for identified risks.

IT Procurement and Property Department: This department handles the procurement of products and services from ITS EPLs. It also manages the renewal process for IT hardware maintenance and software support, procurement of items from negotiated and competitive bid contracts, and the routine procurement of supplies. Department staff handle ITS planned purchases for procurements that exceed EPL thresholds but do not exceed \$1M, as well as any



sole source technology procurements. This department will manage the MIS procurement card usage and required reporting for usage. Department staff collaborate with stakeholders on the development and administration of RFPs and conduct procurement functions and reporting in MAGIC. Staff hold DFA certifications such as Certified Mississippi Procurement Agent and Certified Mississippi Fleet Manager. Department staff manage the intake and disposal of IT assets, as well as the transfer and delivery of IT assets. Staff collaborates with MDCPS Property staff during property audits.

The Network Services Department: This department is responsible for supporting network infrastructure, mission-critical systems, and end users. The director of this department collaborates with other division level directors and staff to ensure the agency's technical needs are effectively met. The director manages highly technical teams and technical tasks. This director works closely with the CIO and may brief executive staff on technical issues facing the agency. Network Services is composed of the following three branches:

The Enterprise Applications and Operations Department: This department is composed of the Application Development and Support Branch, Quality Assurance Branch, Project Management Office, and Data Management Team. The director of this department collaborates with other division level directors and staff to ensure that applications are designed and performed in a manner that meets agency objectives. The Enterprise Applications and Operations director works closely with the CIO and may brief executive staff on matters involving the agency's mission-critical applications. This director also works with leadership across the agency on high-priority technical projects and data management issues. This Department oversees the building, maintenance, enhancement, support, and delivery of agency applications. It also manages the data used by enterprise applications, and the data produced by enterprise applications.

Enterprise Architecture and Planning Department: This department seeks to guide the agency through transformation and optimization initiatives. A main objective is to facilitate alignment between agency objectives and IT. Staff members evaluate technologies and assess applicability within the agency. They identify organizational requirements for the resources, structures, and cultural changes necessary to support agility and adaptability. Staff helps the enterprise find the right balance between risk and agility. A major duty is to understand disruptive technical forces and the agency's objectives that are susceptible to digital transformation in order to effectively guide technical investment decisions. Staff scan emerging technologies and the business ecosystem for major disruptive technology and non-technology trends that affect the agency. Staff members provide perspective on the readiness of the organization to change and innovate and support the formation of strategy. They track and apply innovative technologies, anchoring them in the business and operating model to assess their potential, and use agile and lean approaches to evolve and manage innovation. Staff also lead analysis of the IT

environment to detect critical deficiencies and recommend solutions for improvement.

Inspector General: The Office of Inspector General reports directly to the Chief of Staff and serves as a critical check and balance for timely and appropriate service delivery in all areas of MDCPS operations. The Office of Inspector General oversees Continuous Quality Improvement, Internal Affairs Investigations, Internal Audits, Contract and Subgrant Monitoring, and Reporting.

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI): The Director of CQI manages a staff of quality assurance reviewers across MDCPS's seven Service Delivery Areas delivering various forms of Technical Assistance in several disciplines within MDCPS. CQI staff perform periodic and ongoing case reviews that include Foster Care Review which fulfills the 6-month administrative review requirement for children who remain in foster care and Regional Reviews utilizing the federal onsite monitoring system. They are also responsible for initiating, conducting, and offering findings for Child Fatality Reviews and Safety Reviews supporting Maltreatment In Care investigations and review screened-out Maltreatment In Care reports to ensure adequate screenings were conducted. These reviewers are supervised by case review supervisors. Programmatic CQI is also conducted by this office in the form of annual quality assurance contract reviews on congregate care facilities to assess their compliance in service delivery and pursuant to their contracts and scopes of services.

Internal Affairs Investigations: This unit investigates complaints or offenses committed by MDCPS employees and/or contractors. This unit also participates in MDCPS' efforts regarding state and federal compliance for Victims of Trafficking.

Internal Audits: This unit assists MDCPS in accomplishing its objectives by evaluating and improving the effectiveness of the organizations' governance, risk management, and internal controls.

Contract and Subgrant Monitoring: This unit ensures funds awarded to sub-grantees are used for the intended purpose of the award, safeguards public monies to the greatest extent possible, and provides guidance to sub-grantees in establishing and maintaining sound business accounting procedures.

Reporting: The Reporting Unit within the Office of Inspector General has responsibility for overseeing the development, validation, and submission of reports to external partners, which includes, but is not limited to, all federal reporting submitted to the Children's Bureau including federally required reports on the Title IV-B Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP), Annual Progress and Services Report (APSR), Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS), CFSR-PIP, caseworker contacts, Olivia Y. Compliance Reporting, agency plans, etc. In addition, this unit is responsible for facilitating meetings with the Children's Bureau and collecting

appropriate data regarding active missing runaways and fatalities.

PHILOSOPHY OF THE STATE

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services believes Mississippi's children should grow up in strong families, safe from harm and supported through partnerships that promote family stability and permanency. The philosophy of the agency is to provide for the safety and wellbeing of children first in their own homes if possible and in cases where it is not safe or practical for the child to remain, the agency will work with community connections, law enforcement, service providers, other state agencies, and the courts to move each child toward the appropriate placement and permanency in a timely manner.

PRIORITIES for CREATING an EQUITABLE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

MDCPS is dedicated to making sustainable efforts to advance racial equity and reduce identified disparities in our state's child welfare system. In accordance with program instructions from CB, MDCPS is devoted to address racial equity through the four priority pillars: Prevent Children from Coming into Foster Care, Support Kinship Caregivers, Ensure Youth Leave Care with Strengthened Relationships, Holistic Supports, and Opportunities, and Invest in the Child Welfare Workforce. Below are the intended advances that MDCPS has made during the current program year and is striving towards in the future program year.

Prevent Children from Coming into Foster Care

Mississippi's statutory structure places the authority of removal with the youth court judge, whether that officer is a dedicated youth court judge, a referee, or a chancellor. When an investigation is concluding, or when an investigation indicates that removal may be necessary, MDCPS's frontline staff staffs the case with the judge (or the judge's intake unit), and that court makes the determination. The county prosecutor then carries through shelter, adjudication, and disposition. MDCPS is not represented during those proceedings because the statutes do not identify MDCPS as a party, and the court's perspective on MDCPS's role in the proceedings varies from county.

Dorcas is a program within the Baptist Children's Village that collaborates and partners with MDCPS, as well as other agencies within the State. The Dorcas Program provides support services to families who have been identified by MDCPS as having the need. Services are provided in the home, face-to-face visits, referrals as needed and other support services based on the family's need. Ongoing activities include home visits, referrals, parenting, and transportation. The Provider has conducted training to its staff for work with the Dorcas Program as well as participated in continued training for staff of that agency.



Dorcas Providers has presented the Bright Course Family Skills Curriculum, Trust Based Relational Intervention “TBRI” Training (attended by one MDCPS staff) which included an Intro/Overview of TBRI, Connecting Principles, Empowering Principles, and Correcting Principles. The Institute for The Advancement of Family Support Professionals Modules focuses on Family Goals which is more about the process, Personal Safety for Home Visitors, Home Visiting 102, Home Visitor Skills and Strategies, and Child Development Age 0-3.

Support Kinship Caregivers

MDCPS understands that while children whose parents are unable to care for them do better when cared for by kin than by non-kin, the additional responsibility and changing family relationships can create challenges for kinship caregivers that may threaten their health and restrict their ability to provide optimal care to their relative children. The children whom kinship caregivers support have often been exposed to trauma and need special attention, including special education assistance and mental health services. The MS Department of Mental Health offers both inpatient and outpatient substance abuse services. In addition, some centers offer day treatment and specialized services for children and adolescents, elderly persons, and women. Preference is given to pregnant women at all DMH certified programs. Kinship caregivers often do not know about, or have difficulty finding services these children may need, including help enrolling in school, advocacy for individualized education plans, or help securing necessary medical services. MDCPS’ partnership with Catholic Charities to address kinship services is a long-term investment for systemic and equitable change through policy change.

Statistics presented by Catholic Charities, Inc. of Jackson is based on age, gender, and race of individuals receiving services in 2023. This program provides caregivers with information, referrals, and links to needed legal assistance and services. The agency is aligning its efforts after hearing client testimonies where families are having to choose what types of services to seek because they could be discontinued or there can be a reduction in the assistance provided.

Ensure Youth Leave Care with Strengthened Relationships, Holistic Supports, and Opportunities



MDCPS has the distinct privilege of being able to get firsthand data to assess the perspectives of youth who are currently engaging in the foster care system. While aggregate statewide trends (discussed below in Section III) show a high rate overall of children discharged to permanency within 12 months among those entering care, the data nonetheless indicate potential target populations for whom timely permanency needs improvement as well as for children in care between 12 and 23 months for whom exits to permanency have been consistently below the national goal. MDCPS therefore intends to gain deeper insights into the child welfare system experiences of children who either leave foster care in a timely way or remain in care for longer periods of time. Through the Mississippi Youth Advisory Council, the agency has plans to perform data collection and hear how the agency is doing or what can be done to address racial equity if there are differences in experiences and outcomes for different racial and ethnic groups. This topic will be addressed with youth ages 14-21 participating in the Independent Living Program. In conjunction with basic demographic data collection, and to ensure youth leave foster care better than when they entered, the MDCPS's YTSS division will begin focus groups to determine where gaps in service and data collections lie. Some of the questions that will be posed to staff in efforts to begin focus groups with youth and other invested entities include:

- Who is our current target population?
- Do we have trusting relationships with program participants? And if not, how can we remedy this?
- What kind of data collection and feedback can we track with limited resources?
- How do we define success?
- Will our success contribute to equitable change?

ADULT			
AGE			
average = 48.763			
GENDER		(#)	(%)
male:		27	28%
female:		70	72%
RACE		(#)	(%)
white:		34	35%
aa:		57	59%
hispanic:		0	0%
biracial:		6	6%
Total =		97	

CHILD			
AGE			
average = 8.313			
GENDER		(#)	(%)
male:		69	53%
female:		62	47%
RACE		(#)	(%)
white:		23	18%
aa:		93	71%
biracial:		6	5%
hispanic:		5	4%
native:		1	1%
Total =		131	

MDCPS's YTSS is also actively engaging with First Place for Youth and Mississippi Youth Voice which works with former youth that have gone through foster care and have experienced challenges. These organizations highlight both the good and unfortunate things that foster care youth have experienced and allow the youth to come together to discuss their experiences and share how it either remains a challenge or how they overcame those challenges. Through this collaboration, MDCPS's goal is to gain information from former foster care and gauge their experiences and help enhance the experiences for current youth in foster care.

To ensure that youth leave foster care better than when they entered, MDCPS has implemented "whiteboard meetings" with facility providers to strengthen continuum of care for children. From these meetings, one level of care to the next is addressed and how the agency improves processes to make sure that equitable standards and processes are being met. Most of the meetings are not child specific, however, certain children will come to a compromise, and the intention is to meet the needs of all children discussed in these meetings, but also respect the child's own autonomy.

Another distinct way MDCPS seeks to ensure that youth leave foster care better than when they entered is by supporting youth in having normative experiences while in care. MDCPS aims to ensure that youth in the agency's care can enjoy the experiences of all youth. As such, the agency makes every effort to have our youth feel actively engaged in the communities and school. MDCPS hosted a graduation for the graduating class of foster youth to acknowledge their accomplishments.

Invest in the Child Welfare Workforce

There have been significant efforts to stabilize the MDCPS Workforce. MDCPS Workforce Wellbeing Unit consists of two units and prioritizes recruitment and retention efforts for the agency. The Workforce Wellbeing Employee Engagement Team routinely meets with employees and/or supervisors to identify and work through issues to prevent loss and maximize resources. WW Employee Engagement Team also conducts assessments and interviews using Casey Family Program's Employee Engagement Tool with employees at various stages of their employment and also conduct interviews of separated staff to determine trends that can inform retention efforts. They also recognize employees that meet tenure benchmarks with certificates for 1 year, 5 year, 10 year and 20 year certificates. The WW Employee Engagement Team also facilitates the agency's Hope Hero and Hope Hero Supervisor program that allows peer nominations of employees and supervisors that exemplify the agency's core values and contribute to a positive workplace culture. They also support our employees and foster families that experience a death in their family through



our Bereavement program and promote and educate all employees on the benefits of our Employee Assistance Program.

New and enhanced projects and areas of focus were implemented to improve the workplace environment. The list is not all inclusive, and is not limited to all MDCPS projects and areas of focus:

Senior Leadership Team

- MDCPS gained approval from the MS State Personnel Board to develop and implement a career ladder for approximately 1,200 employees in Social Services positions throughout the agency. The implementation of the career ladder allowed the agency to raise salaries as much as 20% and allowed compensation for an employee's human service-related experience, tenure with the agency and social work licensure. MDCPS is also committed to implementing professional development and leadership opportunities for employees with supervisory responsibilities as a retention effort to reduce turnover.

The multiple angles of effort toward stabilizing the MDCPS workforce have resulted in reducing the agency's annual turnover rate from 34-36% in 2020 to 21% in 2023.

- In the summer of 2023, MDCPS and VieMed Healthcare Staffing (VHS) established a strategic partnership to provide extensively needed staffing support for social workers throughout the state. This collaboration focuses on supplying highly qualified social services specialists for in-home clients and child protection investigators in various counties.

Through this partnership, MDCPS aims to enhance its services by utilizing VHS's expertise in healthcare staffing, ensuring that children and families across Mississippi receive the best possible care and support. The SOP manual serves as a comprehensive guide outlining the operational and administrative procedures necessary for effective collaboration and the delivery of quality services to the communities served.

- Monthly learning opportunities, *Peek into Pathways*, began November 28, 2023. The virtual meetings are held through Cornerstone and provide participants with agency education hours. The meetings are not Pathways user training but an opportunity to see the new system and how it will reinforce and support the work that staff does. Peek into Pathways is a learning series for all employees to benefit from:
 - Reinforcing organization culture to protect children, support families, and encourage lasting family connections
 - Introducing different elements of Pathways and how it can support and strengthen the practice and child welfare outcomes throughout the state.
- Connecting Pathways to current MDCPS practices.



- Financial Literacy Workshops were conducted for MDCPS staff at the state office and all service areas throughout the state. Topics included budgeting, retirement planning, and getting out of debt.
- MDCPS hosted a free Mandated Reporting training on March 15, 2024. The virtual live training, *Social Hour with Social Workers*, was in honor of National Social Workers Month. Participants earned 1 CEU for the 1-hour training led by the MDCPS Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Wellbeing and Permanency.

Communications

- MDCPS Communications Director works closely with MDCPS leadership, Workforce Wellbeing and Workforce Development to distribute internal communications that will engage staff with a mix of employee-focused content, organization-focused content, and customer-focused content (children and families). The frequency, consistency and quality of internal communications has increased and allows for expansion of recruitment efforts through social media and marketing.
- The Communications Newsletter ‘spotlights’ a different unit/division each month to boost engagement. The spotlight is a means to capture and retain employees’ attention, helping to align everyone with the organization’s goals and increase morale within the workplace.
- The MDCPS website is continuously updated to improve public and stakeholder interaction as well as offer an interactive employee portal to MDCPS staff.

Workforce Wellbeing (WWB)

- The Workforce Wellbeing Recruitment Team is responsible for the agency’s participation in college and university job fairs as well as community job fairs statewide. They also facilitate the agency’s Centralized Hiring Process which focuses on reducing the processing time for potential employees from application submission to hire. The Centralized Hiring Process also focuses on identifying child welfare competencies in potential employees using realistic job descriptions, a pre-application child welfare fit assessment, in-basket scenario triage and writing assignment and child welfare competency based behavioral interview questions. The Workforce Wellbeing Recruitment Team coordinates with colleges and universities statewide and in contiguous states to create dedicated hiring events and classroom opportunities with schools of social work and other human service-related degrees. They also work closely with the MDCPS internship program to intentionally educate and recruit students to practical internship experiences in child welfare.
- Workforce Wellbeing has a dedicated section, *Employee Connection*, for providing wellness information, supportive content and creating connections with team members.
- Workforce Wellbeing (WWB) expanded the Service Pin and Certificate program to include recognition of 1, 3, 5, 10, 20, and 30 years of service with the agency. Hope Hero and the

Commissioner's Award of Excellence awards are employee recognition awards that also assist in increasing morale and productivity.

- Workforce Wellbeing (WWB) created, with guidance from the Annie Casey Foundation, individual assessment tools that were administered via Survey Monkey and one-on-one interviews with existing staff. There were more than 87 assessments to monitor employee engagement conducted during the quarter. The same assessment tools were utilized with recently separated employees to determine areas of focus to increase employee retention. There were 6 separated employees to respond to the exit interview via Survey Monkey.

The assessment is open-ended questions designed to allow the staff to provide as much information as possible. The structure of the assessment consisted of a mixture of questions: a) general questions about working in the agency; b) current supervisor and leadership team; c) human resources, pay, and benefits, and d) promotion potential within the agency.

- The WWB began the "What If" idea submission, which gives staff an opportunity to submit their ideas to be reviewed and possibly acted upon. The WWB has also started WWB Requests for Contact so that employees can request visits and phone calls from the WWB team to assist with any issues they may be experiencing.
- EAP Awareness Campaign involves notification videos being distributed agency-wide by the Communications unit.

Motivational Mavericks

- The Motivational Mavericks committee coordinated several activities during the year to create and build morale and team cohesion. Attendance and participation in events have steadily increased and staff are more comfortable providing feedback regarding upcoming events and processes that impact agency goals.
- Agency-wide Food Drive was conducted June 24–28, 2024 to help fight summer food insecurity. MDCPS staff dropped off non-perishable food items to local offices beginning June 24th. Donations were collected on June 28th and will be delivered to local food pantries on July 11th. Items requested were canned meats, fruit, vegetables, and soups; peanut butter, cranberry sauce, boxed stuffing mix, potatoes and mac & cheese; and ramen noodles.
- The sale of agency polo shirts, tumblers, and cardigans took place throughout 2023-2024. The promotional products allow MDCPS staff to demonstrate their representation of the agency and provide a sense of unity. MDCPS staff are encouraged to wear polo shirts and cardigans on Friday (blue jeans are allowed) and during MDCPS events.

MDCPS will continue to actively listen to the feedback and concerns expressed by staff and develop strategies and activities to address the needs of the workforce. MDCPS believes that



by meeting our employees where they are and providing employees with a supportive and encouraging workplace environment, employee retention will increase, the workforce will stabilize and engagement with children and families will improve.

II. Collaboration

ONGOING COLLABORATIVE EFFORTS

To carry out its mission, MDCPS collaborates with stakeholders and those with lived experience on both an ongoing and as-needed basis. MDCPS seeks input from external partners through ongoing forums. Stakeholders, including courts and judicial partners, youth and families, tribes, and a variety of service providers, creates opportunities for the child welfare system to work collectively to assess performance, develop theories of change and implement improvement strategies. This collaboration occurs through a variety of commissions, committees, joint trainings, focus groups, and agreements. These collaborative efforts are integrated throughout the APSR narrative. The agency fulfills our collaboration efforts through strategic planning, training, establishing working committees and creating avenues that foster community buy-in and feedback. Community providers assist in collaboration with the agency and community stakeholders. This engagement is vital in building a trustworthy relationship with community partners. It also ends the negative stigma of child welfare agencies. Additionally, it shows the connection of collaboration and resources available from both MDCPS and other community stakeholders. These transformative efforts are all a part of the integrated and collaborative work the agency does to increase the number of community and family voices to help carry out our mission. Examples of current partners and other stakeholders include:

CarePortal

CarePortal is technology that connects the children and families that are served at CPS to local churches. CarePortal gives local churches and individuals an opportunity to help provide tangible items to our families that may help lead to preventing a child from being removed from their home, re-unifying a child with his or her family, or simply provide a safer environment for a child to live in.

When one of our Safety or Wellbeing team members identifies an urgent need with one of the families they are serving, this vetted need can be entered into CarePortal. The need is then sent to local churches and church responders who have agreed to be part of the CarePortal mission. A responder can then agree to help this family and from this point, the responder is connected to the appropriate CPS team member and can then start to fulfill the request.

Another phase of this collaboration is the church or group of responders coming around these families will provide for additional needs, tangible, emotional, and spiritual. CPS staff are encouraged to provide the CarePortal team with the church name and key contact within the church that may be interested in local missions. Additional information about CarePortal technology can be found at careportal.org.

Collaboration with Parents

Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention Services exist to provide education and awareness programs that support the prevention of child maltreatment. These services are designed to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Please see attached resource list that contains prevention services (in-home and community-based) in various counties of the state funded through MDCPS.

On July 15, 2023, Starkville Oktibbeha School District Discovery Center held its first Annual Drive-Thru Back to School Bash Event in the Discovery Center parking lot. The City of Starkville Police Department assisted with traffic control. There were 22 organizations that donated supplies and free screening services. Southwire (our major donor during COVID-19) decided to return to hosting their own event. In addition to the Advisory Council/Leadership Team, there were seven organizations to volunteer to help pre-pack and to work the day of the event.

The “My Family Treasures Keepsake Journal” is an interactive tool that families may use each month that provides monthly opportunities for families to plan and spend quality time together ON PURPOSE. Each month contains Family Quotes and Family Strengthening Topics/Tips. In addition, families may attach a family photo and document historical information such as weddings, births, deaths, graduations, anniversaries, etc.

The “Family Treasure Box” will be replacing the “Parenting Question of the Week.” It will be posted every first Tuesday of the month on Facebook. The focus will remain the same, which is to share information that will help strengthen the family unit.

Community Action Coalition (CCS) of Lowndes participated in this project and started to have a mechanism to connect for services. The plan is to have quarterly events for the community to gain knowledge of resources that are available.

Partnering with the Boys & Girls Clubs of the Golden Triangle Area for National Bullying Awareness & Prevention Month.

An ACT Raising Safe Kids Facilitator Training for some of the staff at Southern Christian Services. The American Psychological Association is in the process of updating their materials for this curriculum.

Parents and partners became involved by collaborating on social media posts and direct contact



with the entity. Organizations were asked to be a part of the initiatives to serve families.

Three organizations agreed to join: Boys & Girls Club, Starkville Oktibbeha School District Discovery Center, and Southern Christian Services. These organizations provided information on safe sleep, parenting education, and other mental health/community-based services available in the area.

Project CARE will provide child abuse and neglect prevention services to increase protective factors (e.g., parental resilience, knowledge of parenting, social connections, concrete supports, and social emotional competence in children) for Oktibbeha County families through a 2-tiered program focusing on parental education and support services.

Parenting Engagement Active Parenting Classes:

- Discipline Techniques
- Discipline /Choices and Consequences
- Discipline and Tantrums
- Active Parenting Class You and Your Child
- Active Parenting Class Preparing for School Success
- Active Parenting Class the Power of Words
- Active Parenting Class Who Owns the Problem
- Your Childs Brain Development

Program Coordinator presented the kinship program to organizations in the community to promote the program utilizing the platform of the Petal First Baptist Church for their Annual Resource and Health Fair. The fair is an opportunity for children and families to gather information about community efforts and to receive necessary and free resources before the start of the new school year. During the fair, families had access to Petal uniforms, undergarments, new shoes, backpacks, vision, speech, and hearing screenings, haircuts and manicures, information about multiple community organizations and their services, and more. Upcoming events, program services, program brochure and the referral process were provided to attendees.

The Discovery Center Team hosted a Crisis and Response Lunch & Learn at the Starkville Police Department Community Room. All area organizations that respond to crises or provide some type of emergency service were invited to share criteria and protocols to follow to receive appropriate and timely services for those in need.

A conference call with a representative from the MS Early Childhood Association was made to discuss partnering on an event to help families with children with special needs. Since then, the agency has continued to plan via ZOOM meetings.

April Events

- April 3, 2024: The Discovery Center conducted their Annual CAPM Community Pinwheel



Ceremony. Local officials, pastors, community leaders, and parents joined us in planting pinwheels in the Discovery Center Parking Lot to help raise awareness of child abuse.

- April 11, 2024: The center participated in the MDCPS Resource Fair at The Mill with a resource table and provided a mini-Vitality Café for parents that attended.
- April 12, 2024: The center conducted our first Child Passenger Safety Car Seat Check & Installation at the Neighborhood Walmart. Representatives from MDHS Office of Injury came to provide guidance and assistance if needed.
- April 15, 2024: The center was interviewed by WCBI TV about child abuse prevention.
- April 18, 2024: The center conducted a CAPM Community Engagement Event at First Baptist Church Warehouse with Guest Speaker Frankie Johnson from MDMHS who presented to the adults an overview of the “I Got You! Healthy Life Choices for Teens” program prior to presenting the actual program to Starkville High School youth on April 24, 2024.
- April 23, 2024: The center presented an overview of our program services at the Oktibbeha & Lowndes Child Protection Services In-Circle Meeting.
- April 24, 2024: The center attended the Winston TRIAD meeting, facilitated a discussion on Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention, and distributed child abuse awareness packets.
- April 25, 2024: The center participated in the Noxubee CPS CAPM Walk & Health Fair and handed out child abuse prevention materials and program services information.
- April 25, 2024: The center attended the Oktibbeha Community Action Coalition and provided a debriefing of our partnership with CAC for the CAPM Community Engagement Event.
- April 26, 2024: The center attended the SHS Parent Teacher Organization meeting.
- April 28, 2024: The center provided CAPM presentations for CAPM Blue Sunday at St. James United Methodist Church and Charity Full Gospel Church.

Kinship caregivers engaged in the program will receive assistance and support in areas including, but not limited to: (1) Provide caregivers with information, referrals, and advocacy services, (2) Provide linkages to needed legal services and legal informational factsheets on whether the state has health, educational consent laws, or other legal assistance for Kinship caregivers accessing government programs, (3) Assist caregivers in utilizing existing community resources and support systems, including educational, health, mental health systems, (4) enhancing parenting skills, and (5) Improve family resources (e.g., basic needs items, money to pay for bills, tutoring resources, recreational activities, scholarships, etc.) At a minimum, Kinship Navigators provide caregivers with information, referral, and connection services to meet immediate needs.

The Kinship Program was visible in the community to better focus our efforts and strategies to support the program. A meeting was held with CPS and YC to discuss the ongoing free legal



assistance throughout our legal clinics and promote relationships and partnerships.

In a steadfast commitment to supporting caregivers who play a crucial role in the lives of children raised in placements away from their families, Catholic Charities hosted the Annual Caregivers Appreciation event. The Kinship Navigator Program Coordinator highlighted the organization's dedication to providing essential resources and information to caregivers, aiming to keep children within the familial support system and prevent their entry into foster care. The event served as a tangible expression of gratitude and support for caregivers. Recognizing the significant challenges they face, the Caregivers Appreciation event offered an array of services, including access to information, resources, food, games, clothing, school supplies, and non-perishable food items. The Program Coordinator emphasized the importance of acknowledging the efforts of caregivers and creating a space where they could come together for food, fun, and support. The event aimed not only to celebrate the resilience of caregivers but also to address any economic or financial struggles they might encounter in their role.

The Kinship Program was involved in the following events: Magnolia Medical Foundation Event: Stress Management Techniques and Skills, Women of Wisdom (W.O.W.) Luncheon, Journey of Hope, MS Access to Justice Conference, Harrison County Coalition meeting, Open Doors Homeless Coalition meeting, SHEA Community Baby Shower, Edwards Street Legal Clinics, and Fetal and Infant Mortality Review Meeting.

Catholic Charities staff members joined forces with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyer Project and Access to Justice to orchestrate the Temporary Guardianship Review Clinic. The clinic's primary aim was to meticulously examine past cases in which temporary legal and physical custody had been granted. Caregivers had the opportunity to provide testimony, articulating the reasons they believed the temporary agreement should persist. The overarching objective was to ensure that these caregivers could continue caring for the child(ren) without encountering previous safety concerns or resource limitations.

Catholic Charities staff members collaborated with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyer Project and Access to Justice to organize the Temporary Guardianship Clinic. The primary purpose of this clinic was to facilitate the provision of essential legal documentation to individuals who are caring for children in relative placement situations, where the children are living away from their biological parents. The clinic particularly focused on assisting those who, due to their financial circumstances below the poverty level in Harrison, Hancock, and Stone County, could not secure guardianship independently.

Catholic Charities, Inc. Kinship Navigator program continues to organize and participate in various networking opportunities to enhance community engagement and support. This month, a Diabetes Prevention and Health Screening event was held in partnership with Magnolia Medical Foundation and Magnolia Health. Our Diabetes Prevention and Health Screening event



provided valuable resources and education to kinship caregivers, helping them better manage their health and prevent chronic illnesses. Additionally, we attended coalition meetings in Jackson and Harrison Counties to provide continuum partnerships and exchange ideas. Furthermore, we participated in a virtual Trauma Informed Care event.

Catholic Charities staff members joined forces with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyer Project and Access to Justice Commission to compose the Temporary Guardianship Review Clinic. The clinic's primary purpose was to meticulously examine past cases in which temporary legal and physical custody had been granted. Caregivers had the opportunity to provide testimony, articulating the reasons they believed the temporary agreement should continue. The all-encompassing objective was to ensure that these caregivers could continue caring for the child(ren) without encountering previous safety concerns or resource limitations.

Catholic Charities staff members collaborated with the Mississippi Volunteer Lawyer Project and Access to Justice to organize the Temporary Guardianship Clinic. The primary purpose of this clinic was to facilitate the provision of essential legal documentation to individuals who are caring for children in relative placement situations, where the children are living away from their biological parents. The clinic particularly focused on assisting those who, due to their financial circumstances below the poverty level in Harrison, Hancock, and Stone County, could not secure guardianship independently.

Success Story

Grandparents who raise their grandchildren under challenging circumstances deserve recognition and support. The caregiver's strength and resilience in making ends meet while grieving the loss of their son demonstrated their commitment to providing the best possible life for their grandson. "I didn't know where the strength would come from, but I knew something had to be done." Kinship was excited to celebrate with the family after obtaining legal guardianship of their grandson during their recent court hearing. The caregiver allowed Kinship to join their team of support as they were surrounded by family. "We are blessed to have a great support system because they really help out and are there."

The family will continue to rally around one another and motivate and encourage them on their journey towards reaching their long-term goals, no matter what obstacles they may face. The grandchild is blessed to have such a caring and nurturing grandparent to guide him through life and provide the love and support he requires. "I just want my grandson to see me as a strong person who was always there for him since his dad has gone on."

Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth continued to provide supportive services, parent education, and resources to families. Parenting Classes were held at Born Free, Flowood Restitution Center, Harbor House, and the Friendship Connection. Parenting Classes via Zoom were also available. Efforts will continue to increase educate the community about child abuse

and neglect and the impact of trauma on development through public speaking events, media campaigns, and other information sessions. The agency has also implemented a Fatherhood Initiative and Triple P online parenting program. Community Outreach events continue to be vital in the agency's mission to assist families. Concrete Supports such as food, clothing, infant items, resource materials, counseling and referrals continue to be available for families. The ACT Raising Safe Kids continues to also be implemented in the program.

Baptist Children's Village: Dorcas In-Home Family Support System

Dorcas is a Support Services Program based through Baptist Children's Village and is an intensive in-home services program. The Dorcas Program continues to provide services to families who need support service to maintain their family. The program served 24 families with 56 children and 34 adults from April 1, 2024, through June 22, 2024.

The Baptist Children's Village mission is to help children, and their families fully understand and experience the healing ministry of Christ by meeting their daily needs and inspiring them to become Christian adults who are happy, healthy, and mature. DORCAS offer residential and non-residential services free of charge. Emphasis is placed on emotional strength, family values, academic achievement, and spiritual growth. The Dorcas Program is not a contractual service nor does MDCPS provide funding to BCV for the program. BCV does not charge any fees for its Dorcas Program services. However, community service providers may charge fees when a family receives services to which they are referred. Families enrolled in the Dorcas Program pay the cost of such fees, either through household income, or through enrollment and participation in public assistance programs intended for such purposes. BCV's Dorcas Program serves Region I-North, Region III-North, Region III-South, and Region II East.

MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) (title IV-B, subpart 2)

Youth Villages do not provide intensive in-home services through the in-CIRCLE Family Support Services Program as of October 1, 2023. The Program service has now been transitioned to Intercept Services.

Youth Villages

Weekly Supervisor Meetings are held in-person and virtual (video conferencing) to discuss needs for program improvement, census, and staff development. Weekly consultations with staff, supervisor, and consultant help identify treatment needs for each family and development of staff skills. Quarterly Boosters meetings are held in person and provided to all staff, supervisors, and clinical consultants to teach skills in dealing with targeted clinical areas. [Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services & Youth Villages](#)



Mississippi CPS is a proof point site for transformative system change in child welfare. A Proof Point Site is a jurisdiction that is actively engaged in system change in child welfare and working to improve services and supports for children and families served and selected to participate in transformative system change activities. *See the attached flyer for additional details.*

Practices and Policies Workshop: August 29-30, 2023

MDCPS' mission is to protect children and strengthen families, which includes standing in the shoes of the parent for just under 4,000 live souls. MDCPS believes Mississippi's children should grow up in strong families, safe from harm and supported through partnerships that promote family stability and permanency. This belief is too often not a reality for Mississippi children today. The agency convened the workshop to further the collaboration, trust, and empathy necessary across child-serving systems to protect our children and strengthen our families. The 95 guests included individuals with lived experience (including young people who aged out of foster care and parents who benefitted from prevention services), legislators, family court judges, service providers, advocates, and CPS staff at multiple levels.

The agency is collaborating on the workshop with Youth Villages. Youth Villages is a private nonprofit dedicated to helping emotionally and behaviorally troubled children and their families live successfully. Youth Villages is building a practices and policies strategy and directing resources towards complementary investments in three to four states delivering its intensive in-home service Intercept – Mississippi being one – that can help reduce the number of children and adolescents experiencing unnecessary time in foster care. Next steps include continuing our in-progress initiatives, further assessing many of the workshop ideas and the state of our system more broadly and preparing to begin new initiatives that are collectively identified as having a high impact. The agency will continue to engage in this work, where most appropriate.

Workshop objectives:

- Co-create a shared vision for improving family stability by identifying and implementing the highest potential child welfare system practices and policies, with an emphasis on safely preventing entries into foster care and achieving lasting permanency as rapidly as safely possible
- Understand how CPS can, in deep partnership with others, best advance this shared vision.

Based on a careful review of available evidence, research, and conversations with many of the participants, Youth Villages and MDCPS identified five important questions to focus on at the workshop. These questions are:

1. How might we continue to establish a child welfare system that is viewed through the eyes of a child and their family?
2. How might we strengthen the necessary collaboration across child-serving systems?
3. How might we improve mutual trust among the courts, CPS professionals, and service



providers to improve child and family outcomes?

4. How might we build alternate pathways to high quality services for families without CPS involvement?
5. How might we better use data and evidence to make intake, placement, and service referral decisions?

The following workshop materials are attached for review:

- Workshop exercises
- Day 1 and 2 presentations
- Plenary session notes
- In-progress initiatives

General Funding

Canopy continues to provide intensive in-home services through the in-CIRCLE Family Support Services Program. State General Funds from April 1, 2024, through June 22, 2024, were allocated for this Provider. The Program has served 179 families with 401 children and 194 adults. 82 referrals were for Family Preservation, 52 referrals were with Family Reunification services, and 45 were Family Support Services.

Intercept

Intercept is an intensive in-home services program geared toward reducing out of home placements and accelerating permanency. Intercept is a statewide Evidence Based Program that began in October 2022, that offers services to families who have been identified as those with abuse/neglect and/or behavioral issues which would cause removal. The program is intensive and can last up to six months based on the need. Services are available to the family 24 hours. The Program has served 208 families with 439 children and 282 adults. 102 referrals were Family Preservation, 39 were Family Reunification and 67 were Family Support Services from April 1, 2024 to June 22, 2024.

In-CIRCLE is offered through Canopy only and provides intensive in-home services to families whose children were at risk of removal and/or to reunite these children with their families by conducting home visits, providing therapy, concrete needs, referrals, etc. During the program year, the program provided intensive in-home services providing families with the support that they need. These services included home visits, therapy, parenting skills, alcohol and drug assessment, concrete needs, referrals, etc.

Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth (SCSCY) promote efforts to support and prevent child maltreatment through parenting classes, support groups Parent Café's, and case management services. SCSCY case management services include Concrete Support, Counseling, and Donated Items. Parent Strong Prevention Services collaborated with MDCPS Infant Safe Sleep Initiative Prevention Program help educate mothers who have babies (infants to six

months) on sleep safety. This initiative is to help prevent child fatalities because of unsafe sleep environments and conditions. This initiative is still ongoing; mothers are also given diapers, wipes, and pack n plays. This is an additional collaboration with the agency and subgrantee.

Staff educated mothers with Parent and Pregnant Women Program at Harbor House and mothers at Born Free Residential Treatment Facility. Mothers were provided informational bags provided by MDCPS which includes the following items (safe sleep onesie, baby wipe case, reusable bandage case and a safe sleep educational pamphlet). Additionally, SCSCY educated the community about child abuse and neglect and the impact of trauma on development through public speaking events, media campaigns, and informal information sessions. All Support groups focused on educating parents about the research informed Five Protective Factors that helps increase family strengths, enhance child development, and reduce likelihood of child abuse and neglect.

Youth Villages Training

Training Name	Training Tips	Date
Drivers Safety	Compliance	Due May 31, 2024
A Supervisor's Guide: The Americans with Disabilities Act	Compliance/leadership	Due May 31, 2024
Clinical Foundations	New hires	Due May 20-21, 2024
7 Habits of Highly Effective People	Leadership development	Central: May 15-16, 2024 Biloxi: May 5-8, 2024
HIPAA Course & Acknowledgement Form	Compliance	Due May 3, 2024

7 Habits of Highly Effective People - Leadership training (Central and North Sups)

Clinical Foundations- New Hires

Active shooter Compliance training

Civil Rights Compliance training

Preventing fraud, waste, and abuse in Youth Villages Compliance training

Canopy Conferences

Title	Date	Number of attendees
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MACCA-Self Care Edition	8/23-24/2023	8
MHASM: Building an Effective Peer Support Program via virtual	8/10/2023	1

Canopy Trainings/Continuing Education

July 2023

Title	Date	Number of attendees
Clinical intervention training – What is an Evidence Based Practice	7/7/23	35
Trauma and the Body	7/12/23	34
Effective steps for Collaborative Documentation	7/14/23	8
Week of understanding-Diversity and Inclusion	7/19/23	11
Initial Risk Assessment Training	7/21/23	65
Behavioral Interviewing for Supervisors	7/28/23	11
Parent Corner- What is an IEP	7/13/23	1
Understanding Family Safety	7/27/23	10

August 2023

Title	Date	Number of attendees
PracticeWise Group	8/8/2023	7
Week of understanding (inclusive)	8/9/2023	11
NCFAS Training Refresher – Supervisors & Therapists	8/14/2023	37
NCFAS Training Refresher Case Managers	8/18/2023	30
NCFAS Train-the-Trainer	8/16/2023	13
Assessment training	8/18/2023	4
Trauma in the Body	8/18/2023	67
MAB (Managing Aggressive Behaviors)	8/29/2023	30
Active Parenting Training	8/31/2023	11

Title	Date	Number of attendees
Supervisor Training Managing New Hires	8/25/2023	11
Parent Corner Webinar (Self-esteem and body image)	8/10/2023	41

September 2023

Title	Date	Number of attendees
PracticeWise Consultation Training Group A	9/06/2023	6
PracticeWise Consultation Training Group B	9/13/2023	7
Treatment Planning and Documenting	9/11/2023	11
Driving Hope as a Change Agent	9/13/2023	46
Being the Best Me in 2023 – Suicide Prevention and Awareness	9/15/2023	36
Managing Aggressive Behaviors	9/11–12/2023	3
Navigating Microsoft Teams	9/15/2023	38
Peer Support Webinar: Mandating Reporting by Damien Thomas	9/15/2023	1
In-CIRCLE Supervisor Training	9/18-19/2023	11
Trustmark Bank – Financial Literacy for in-CIRCLE Families	9/19/2023	11
Parent’s Corner Training – Youth and Trauma	9/14/2023	45
Solution Spotlight: Link	9/14/2023	28
Solution Spotlight: Cares (PRTF)	9/21/2023	37
Solution Spotlight: MYPAC	9/28/2023	49
Canopy Leadership Academy – Aspiring New and Future Leaders	9/27/2023	3
Canopy Leadership Academy – A Time to Think (Book Club)	9/29/2023	10

Canopy In-Service/Community Outreach

July 2023



Title	Date	Number of attendees
Community Clothes Closet and Back to School Event -Itta Bena	7/14-15/23	1
Back to School Bash-Starkville	7/8/23	1
Back to School Bash-Emerson	7/15/23	1
Great Future Forum – Gulfport	7/7/23	35
Back to School Convocation – Perry Central High School	7/25/23	1
Back to School Convocation – William Carey College	7/26/23	1
In-Service with Adams Co.	7/7/23	8
In-Service with Pike Co.	7/6/23	8
In-Service with CPS Desota Co.	7/13/23	4

August - September 2023

Title	Date	Number of attendees
In-Service with Hinds County CPS	8/25/2023	5
In-Service Copiah County	09/06/2023	6
In-Service Lawrence County	09/12/2023	5
Youth Ambassador Meeting - Hattiesburg	09/14/2023	2
Youth Ambassador Meeting – Tupelo	09/26/2023	7
Canopy Service and Value Awards Ceremony	09/22/2023	10

Victims of Human Trafficking Collaboration

In 2020, the Mississippi Legislature established the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund to provide funding for direct service providers who serve victims of sex and labor trafficking. Miss. Code Ann. §97-3-54.11. The fund is funded by, among other things, assessments for certain criminal convictions and legislative appropriations. In January 2024, pursuant to a legislative appropriation in 2023, it was announced that nine organizations across Mississippi would be recipients of this second round of support from the Fund, to support them in their mission of helping human trafficking victims become survivors. The recipients of the funding are:

- Center for Violence Prevention
- Domestic Abuse Family Shelter

- El Pueblo
- Gulf Coast Center for Nonviolence
- Hope Village
- Mississippians Against Human Trafficking
- Natchez Children's Advocacy Center
- Southern Christian Services
- Sunnybrook Children's Home

Attorney General Lynn Fitch announced the distribution of \$2.08 million from the Victims of Human Trafficking and Commercial Sexual Exploitation Fund to nine organizations that help human trafficking victims become survivors. This is the second round of grants from the Fund since the Mississippi Legislature created it in the 2020 Legislative Session. MDCPS is partnered with three of the organizations to provide related services for youth in the agency's care. There is not an official MOU in place with these entities. However, the Human Trafficking services are available to all victims whether victims are in the care of MDCPS or not:

[Hope Village](#) received \$321,722 to help establish a shelter for minor victims of human trafficking. The funds will be used to renovate an existing building to specifically meet the needs of minor victims. The award will also fully fund the salary of a Program Director for the new human trafficking program and partial salary of a full-time therapist.

[Southern Christian Services](#), also a 2023 grantee, received \$492,278 to continue operation of a children's human trafficking shelter, a project in cooperation with Sunnybrook Children's Home.

[Sunnybrook Children's](#), also a 2023 grantee, received \$27,800 to continue providing a facility and grounds maintenance for the shelter facility operated by Southern Christian Services.

[Mississippi Conference on Children and Families 2024 \(formerly Joint Planning\)](#)

MDCPS hosted the 2024 Mississippi Conference on Children and Families (MCCF is *formerly Joint Planning*) on May 6, 2024, from 10:00 am - 3:30 pm. The MCCF is an annual event hosted by MDCPS in coordination with the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, United States Department of Health and Human Services. For the MCCF, a diverse group of stakeholders is convened to discuss pressing and emerging issues in our child welfare system, particularly those related to Mississippi's federally required five-year plan, the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP).

The theme, *We Need Each Other: Together We Can*, was suitable for this year's conference. It provided a safe space for CPS staff and other organizations to discuss and collaborate on different concepts. The theme welcomed the discussion about what is working now and what is not working. Participants discussed the importance of retaining staff and working together to

move each child to permanency in a timely matter. The Senior Leadership Team hopes that each organization in attendance realizes that we need each other, how much we need each other, and that we work better together.

A major concern during previous joint planning meetings and staff casings is the role of courts/judges and how it impacts the agency's efforts to increase timely permanency. The 2024 MCCF had a significant increase in attendance from members of our judicial system.

Administrative Office of Courts	Oktibbeha County Youth Court
Bolivar County Youth Court	Warren County Youth Court
Grenada County Youth Court	Yazoo County Youth Court
Jackson County Youth Court	Office of Attorney General
Lauderdale County Youth Court	MS Access to Justice Commission
Lee County Youth Court	MS Office of State Public Defender
Madison County Youth Court	

The format involved a panel discussion on MDCPS plans, breakout sessions by the agency's Senior Leadership Team, and lived experience videos from Kinship Foster Care families. The objectives of the MCCF were to provide participants (98 in-person and 86 virtual) with the agency's pathways to prevention, permanency, and care. The presenters and participants discussed the State's child welfare services, including analysis of the service needs of children and their families, the selection of unmet service needs that will be addressed in plans for program improvement, and the goals and objectives to enhance the capability of the State in providing child welfare services. Highlights of the conference are provided below.

The panel discussion on MDCPS strategic planning and reporting plans - Child & Family Services Plan (CFSP/5-year strategic plan), Disaster Preparedness Plan, Training Plan, Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan, Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan - was facilitated by the Deputy Administrator of Human Capital and the Deputy Commissioner, Finance & Administration. The panel provided an overview of each plan, how each plan integrates with the agency's CFPS goals, and how each plan impacts MDCPS staff, children and families: services, available resources via partnerships/collaborations with various agencies/stakeholders, etc.

The Kinship Navigator program provides support for caregivers who have taken on the primary role and responsibility of caring for their relatives' children between the ages of birth to 18. Caregivers can be a grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, or non-blood related kin. Children include the caregiver's siblings, nieces, nephews, or grandchildren. Kinship assists caregivers in learning about, locating, and using programs and services to meet the needs of the children they are raising, in addition to their own needs as caregivers. Caregivers receive help navigating through local, state, and federal forms of assistance to determine their eligibility and guidance through the Kinship permanency process to obtain Legal Guardianship or Adoption to establish a legal

commitment to the child. The program works to identify and address the family's holistic needs, stressors, health, safety, and well-being while incorporating a family-driven approach to support and strengthen their kinship care arrangement.

A video entitled 'Voice of Lived Experiences' played during lunch. Participants watched personal testimonies of current and former foster children's experience in foster care. A grandmother discussed the importance of Kinship Care and the support given to her during the process. A Catholic Charities staff member interviews a family as they discuss their experiences working with Catholic Charities and other agencies.

The Breakout Sessions consisted of three topics: Collaboration, Judicial Review, and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). The presenters, members of the Senior Leadership Team, rotated to groups in the main area of the venue in 30-minute sessions. The sub-topics of the three sessions were We Each Have a Role, Mississippi's Child Welfare System, and Making the Data Align. In-person participants had an opportunity to share concerns, suggestions, and observations regarding each session on flip charts posted around the room. There was a flip chart for each of the three CFSP goals and one for general comments.

Many participants noted a gap in communication from leadership to field staff. One of the overarching areas essential to supporting MDCPS's priorities is the workforce. A stable, qualified workforce, including restructuring efforts, is intended to create a more seamless connection between front-line staff and Agency leadership. MDCPS started monthly Commissioner's Update Brief (CUB) meetings as a response to this concern. The CUB meetings serve as an open forum to encourage parallel conversations and for management to provide updates on the work of the community and receive feedback from Senior Leadership.

Workforce Wellbeing initiatives are essential to bridging the gap between front-line and Agency leadership. The unit continues to utilize assessment tools that assist in monitoring job satisfaction and researching appropriate ways to support staff. Additionally, the Workforce Wellbeing Unit ramped up efforts in encouraging MDCPS staff to take advantage of resources provided by the EAP program. A monthly video campaign highlights topics covered on the ComPsych website. The videos are meant to empower employees with health education and lifestyle skills that enable staff to achieve their best possible health, positively affect employee morale and job satisfaction, and optimize performance and productivity.

Participant comments regarding Goal 2 primarily referenced family engagement and staff training. Professional Development Services' efforts to enhance and upgrade training brought about the change from Clinical Supervisor Training (CST) to Developing Effective & Accounting



Leaders (DEAL); the concept, as well as the name, was re-vamped. The initiative provides focused staff training and frequent practice opportunities to reinforce learning objectives. The team facilitated a pilot group of supervisors within the agency to obtain feedback before introducing the new curriculum. Based on feedback, small tweaks were made. Professional Development Services also delivered contract training for Investigation and In-home services. MDCPS leadership and team leads are working with Professional Development Services to continually elevate services provided by this unit. Additional details regarding current, ongoing, and future initiatives are in the *Staff and Provider Training* section (Items 26 and 27) section of this report.

During the *We Each Have a Role* session, participants discussed how MDCPS, partners, and stakeholders each have a vital role in the success of the state's child welfare system, connected by collaboration. The *Mississippi's Child Welfare System* session discussed the importance of our judicial counterparts regarding the welfare system. The importance of collaborating with judges, workers, and other organizations to better service children and their families of MS. The agency needs to know what is working and what should be improved. The *Making the Data Align* session discussed the importance of data and what the data reveals. Data provides a visual aid to help understand why instances occur and assist in finding solutions to problematic areas.

CITIZENS REVIEW PANELS

Children's Trust Funds (CTF)

In addition to community-based funding, the Children's Trust Fund (CTF) will continue to match additional finance and programmatic efforts in expanding the array of prevention services around the state. The CTF's primary purpose is to encourage and provide financial assistance in the provision of direct prevention services for child abuse and neglect. Activities to prevent child abuse and neglect that may be funded will include parental/caregiver educational programs, community awareness, program development, advocacy efforts, conferences/training, concrete supports to keep families safely together and mental health services. The Advisory Council includes directors, or their proxy, from the Mississippi Department of Health, Mississippi Department of Education, Mississippi Department of Mental Health and Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services. The CTF Advisory Council is also comprised of citizen members representing each of the four Federal Congressional Districts. These members demonstrate knowledge in the area of child abuse and neglect prevention and, to the extent practicable, shall represent (a) private nonprofit agencies or individual professions which have special expertise or community involvement specifically in the area of child abuse prevention, (b) professional providers of child abuse and neglect prevention services, (c) persons with demonstrated experience in business administration or personnel management, and (d) volunteers in child abuse and neglect prevention services. Although the CTF Advisory Council does not oversee the

disbursement of CBCAP funds, these individuals are informed of funding and services provided through CBCAP. Additionally, the Advisory Council makes recommendations for child maltreatment prevention services to be provided within the State of Mississippi. Such services are performed through the general structure of prevention services which are funded by CBCAP and CTF monies. Due to various streams of funding, limited CBCAP funding was used to focus on direct/concrete services of the community, and various training for staff. MDCPS will utilize CBCAP funding to promote and provide parents and families with strategic efforts and services to promote safety and permanency.

The Mississippi Child Death Review Panel

MDCPS continues to participate in the Mississippi Child Death Review Panel. Mississippi law creates the Mississippi “Child Death Review Panel. The CDRP identify factors that put children at risk of injury or death. The purpose is to foster the reduction of infant and child mortality and morbidity in Mississippi and to improve the health status of infants and children. The panel’s membership consists of “one (1) representative from each of the following: the State Coroners Association, the Mississippi Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, the Office of Vital Statistics in the State Department of Health, the Attorney General’s office, the State Sheriff’s Association, the Mississippi Police Chiefs Association, MDCPS, CAC, the State Chapter of the March of Dimes, the State SIDS Alliance, the Mississippi Children’s Safe Center, Safe Kids Mississippi, and the Mississippi State Fire Marshal’s office. The panel is tasked with creating a report for the Mississippi Legislature outlining “appropriate recommendations to the Legislature on how to most effectively direct state resources to decrease infant and child deaths in Mississippi through case review.

As stated in the states 2020-2024 CFSP, CDRP aspires to:

- Identify factors that put children at risk of injury or death.
- Share information among agencies that serve children and families.
- Improve local investigations of unexpected child deaths.
- Identify and fill gaps in existing service systems.
- Reveal trends in unexpected child injury and death.
- Educate the public about child injury and death prevention strategies.

The Child Death Review Panel (CDRP) continues to compile findings reports from each case based on sources such as Mississippi vital records, toxicology reports, autopsies, and death scene investigations. The CDRP identify factors that put children at risk of injury or death. The Mississippi Department of Health is the state lead agency for the CDRP. The quarterly meetings were held more frequently over the past year to catch up from the COVID-19 related cancelations. In the July meeting there was discussion on potentially catching up the child deaths being reviewed. Dr. Henderson suggested not only reviewing 2021 cases but also 2022 cases

during the rest of this year and next year to become more current. Quarterly meetings were held via ZOOM on July 20, 2023, September 21, 2023, December 7, 2023, February 8, 2024, and March 28, 2024.

The CDR committee recommended that the state consider promoting awareness and prevention measures for gun violence (youth), drowning deaths, and child deaths. They also recommended promoting gun safety education messaging on gun violence which is the #1 cause of death for persons under the age of 18. The committee expects to continue discussions and work on an implementation date. Currently the committee is discussing logistics of the statewide Safe Sleep Campaign. Cases will continue to be reviewed at an accelerated pace to catch up to the current year's cases. The CDR committee recommends that the state continue promoting awareness and prevention related to child deaths.

Ongoing Activities

- Dr. Vernesia Wilson shared the results from the 4/13/2023 meeting regarding SUID and SIDS suggestions. The follow-up question for responses was "What can we do to lower the SUID and SIDS rate in the state?" The responses to the survey were reviewed. Dr. Wilson informed the group about the creation of the MS SUID/SIDS Reduction Task Force. The task force will schedule their first meeting in August.
- Sheila Brand informed the group that she was a part of the Children's Justice Act Task Force, and they have funds for the distribution of cribs and car seats.
- Dr. Vernesia Wilson gave an update on the expansion of FIMR program expansion to all nine public health districts. (July Meeting)
 - The Coastal Region's FIMR Program Activities update was presented by Cheryl Doyle, RN, MSHSA. Ms. Doyle provided an update on what has been going on with the FIMR program on the MS Gulf Coast over the past 10 years. Cheryl noted that some of the social challenges impacting cases on the gulf coast are poverty, late prenatal care or no prenatal care, unsafe infant sleep environments, obesity, lack of preconception care, mental health issues, child abuse, and domestic violence. She also provided an update on the monthly case review team meetings held in the hospitals and the Community Action Team (CAT) meetings that are held quarterly. The CAT meeting scheduled for November will be on human trafficking. (September meeting).

Quarterly Meetings significant information discussed

September 21, 2023

- The underlying theme from the motor vehicle and transportation related cases that were reviewed was the lack of restraints and possible distractions. These factors could have contributed to the untimely deaths noted in the case reviews.

- The members discussed the lack of completed toxicology reports. Current requirements for toxicology reports to be completed were explained. Toxicology reports are not currently required or mandated for motor vehicle accidents.

December 7, 2023

Total Number of Fire Deaths = 7

Total Number of Drowning Deaths = 8

Total Number of Other Notable Deaths = 3

FIRE DEATHS SUMMARY:

7 deaths were caused by smoke inhalation.

DROWNING DEATHS SUMMARY:

Snapshots of the deaths are as follows:

- Freshwater drowning accident (non-swimmer fell into a pond)
- One death was an undetermined accident
- Anoxic Brain Injury drowning
- 1 year old slipped in bathtub
- Drowning at a water resort
- Death caused by being pinned under water
- Fell into a swimming pool
- Fell overboard from a boat

OTHER NOTABLE DEATHS SUMMARY:

Causes of death include the following:

- Cardio-pulmonary Arrest/Vaping Burn-Out
- Undetermined (Underlying causes suggests SUID)
- Failure to Thrive/Severe Protein-Energy Malnutrition (child was a smoker)

February 8, 2024

There were 23 Sudden Unexpected Infant Death/SIDS cases reviewed for calendar year 2021. The ongoing theme appeared to be unsafe sleep environments. It was discussed that the following be considered:

- Development of protocols to assist the panel with requesting information regarding cases reviewed.
- Safe sleep needs to be addressed again. We need to find a way to reiterate the importance of safe sleep.

March 28, 2024

- The remaining SID cases for 2021 were reviewed. The floor was open to discuss the theme for a Statewide Safe Sleep Campaign. It was discussed that there needs to be a drill down to find out why parents are bed sharing with their infants, even after being educated not to. Two meeting participants, that are mothers, discussed the difficulty of soothing an

infant child unless they are near them, and that other mothers may experience similar issues. Another meeting will be scheduled to discuss the specifics of this campaign.

- The Child Death Review Protocol, member expirations/appointments, chair and co-chair elections were discussed.

The link to the MS State Department of Health website where CDRP annual reports are located is: <https://msdh.ms.gov/msdhsite/ static/31,0,392,63.html>

Mississippi's Youth Advisory Council

Mississippi's Youth Advisory Council (YAC), formerly Teen Advisory Board, is a youth leadership and advocacy training platform coordinated through the Youth Transition Support Services (YTSS) Office. YAC engages youth in I.L. programs and policy changes/updates through monthly regional meetings and quarterly state level meetings.

YTSS Social Services Manager met with MS Youth Council on April 20, 2024, to update the council on MDCPS Independent Living activities and programs. A request to the council leader, First Place for Youth, that a YTSS staff member sit in on council meetings at least quarterly to have conversation with youth on upcoming activities and projects. The following suggestions were given by youth as it relates to MDCPS processes and procedures:

- Whole custody files should be available to youth upon request as it has vital details of their history enclosed.
- Giving Birth Certificates to youth in Acute Care is not a good idea. MDCPS needs to figure out how to work collaboratively on getting documents to youth upon exit.
- A mentorship program is desperately needed. They just want someone to call when they don't know how to do things or need to ask questions.
- During their whole foster care journey, they had to watch what they say for fear of losing placement, take parenting foster youth's children, or worse. "Therapeutic group homes do not care."

Since YTSS experiences challenges keeping in-care youth engaged in the MDCPS youth advisory council, the YTSS Social Service Manager suggests that Chafee funds be used to contract an outside entity to coordinate the youth council, provide reports and youth feedback to MDCPS on policy practice and procedure. There have been no recent conversations about an outside entity coordinating the youth council. As of now, the YTSS team continues to work with the YAC.

FOSTER PARENT SUPPORT

Foster Parent Recruitment and Shared Parenting

The MDCPS Communications Director has utilized various social media platforms to explore and



explain the role of foster families in the Shared Parenting relationship with the parents of foster children in their care. MDCPS's educational and public relations effort are focused on how foster parents are needed statewide to both care for children and to serve as support and role models/mentors for those children's parents and family. The photographic and video materials have been integrated into the agency's ongoing foster parent recruitment efforts and are being used as part of MDCPS's ongoing efforts to recruit foster parents for key populations of foster youth, which include children ages 10 and older, sibling groups, children with special needs, and children at risk of aging out of foster care without permanent family connections.

The new MDCPS website has a page specifically designed for Foster and Adoptive parents. Content heading for the page includes sections for Foster Parent Updates, Support Group schedules and helpful resources. This section of the website is used in conjunction with messages delivered by staff via face-to-face interaction to provide foster parents with consistent and current information on shared parenting and other topics relevant to their role.

Foster Parent Support Groups

The Liaisons notifies the foster parents, the licensure unit, and partnering therapeutic agencies directly of the support group schedule via email each month. Licensure staff have access to the sign in sheets of each group (Smartsheet) that are collected by the Liaisons. Foster parents receive training credit for participating in face-to-face and virtual meetings.

Foster Parent Forums

Foster Parent Forums are a town hall type meeting where the Liaison meets with foster parents' face to face to answer questions, address concerns, and update foster parents on MDCPS policy. The Liaison notifies foster parents, the licensure unit, and our partnering therapeutic agencies directly of the support group schedule via email each month. Licensure staff have access to the sign in sheets of each group (Smartsheet) that are collected by the Liaison. Foster parents receive training credit for participating in face-to-face and virtual meetings. The MDCPS foster parent liaison participated in events aimed at engaging with foster families.

The Liaisons regularly utilizes email to share information with the agency's foster parents. These emails are used to keep our foster parents updated on training opportunities, MDCPS policy, and other helpful information. To address feedback received from foster parents, the Foster Parent Liaisons utilize a Smartsheet form for foster parents to share with the agency when our staff goes above and beyond their routine tasks/duties for the child placed in their home or their family.

The Liaisons now have the benefit of CarePortal to better assist families. When one of our Safety or Wellbeing team members identifies an urgent need with one of the families they are serving, this vetted need can be entered into CarePortal. The need is then sent to local churches and



church responders who have agreed to be part of the CarePortal mission.

Project CARE continues to serve children and families through community-based services. Services are geared towards preventing child abuse and neglect and by increasing the protective factors. Services are available for families through a 2- tiered program focusing on parental education and support services. Parenting Classes both onsite and virtual continues for the subgrantee. Concrete support, respite care, support groups/classes, case management services, the utilization of the Family Resource Center and outreach activities continues through the subgrantee. Various community events will continue throughout the reporting period.

Project CARE continued community-based programs including Parenting Classes. Classes facilitated in person and online via zoom. Topics included:

- Parent Engagement Active Parenting- The Importance of Bonding with your Child
- Brain Building in our Children.
- Discipline Methods
- Parent Engagement- Active Parenting
- Breathing Exercises for Stress
- Building Family Bonds Through Shared Traditions

Concrete Supports were also provided to families such as:

- Food, Clothing, Hygiene Items, Diapers, Wipes, Books, School Supplies, Car Seats, and Toys. Respite Care for families of young children while they pursue job prep/work, go to doctors' visits, care for sick family members, and participating in parenting classes. Support groups and Support Classes for Autism participants, Childbirth & Breastfeeding, and Computer Classes are also included. The Family Resource Center continues to be utilized and patrons and families.

All parent engagement classes continued throughout the reporting period. Class topic discussions included Parent Engagement Active Parenting-The Importance of Bonding with your Child, Parent Engagement- Active Parenting- Brain Building in our Children, Parent Engagement Active Parenting-Discipline Methods. We discuss Respite Care for families of young children while they pursue job prep/work, go to doctor visits, care for the sick, and participate in parenting classes. We discussed Support Group and classes including autism support participants, childbirth and breastfeeding, and basic computer classes. Project CARE also began serving teen parents along with their parent and support system through zoom for teens not in school and their parents and support system to be able to participate in Active Parenting classes. We engage at-risk communities by bringing Active Parenting classes into the community. Project CARE partners with First United Methodist church's Laundry Love Ladies of Starkville to provide services to the Brookville Garden community, a government subsidized apartment complex with a high occurrence of at-risk residents. Active Parenting classes are taught in the neighborhood.



Patrons continued to visit the Resource Center throughout the reporting period. Provided parenting classes at the Discovery Center which allow parents the opportunity to gain parenting skills, knowledge, and wisdom, even from other parents' experiences. We provided classes that lead to the overall wellbeing of the family such as the Cooking Matters: Healthy Cooking Class series being offered. This is a six week, two-hour per week class where families learn to cook healthy meals for their families. Participants physically participate in meal preparation here at the Discovery Center and receive ingredients to prepare that meal at home for their family, which gives them actual meal preparation experience.

Ongoing activities include increasing community awareness of the protective factors to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. We continue providing parenting classes and community-based services.

Foster Parent Feedback Group

Foster parents can share when our staff goes above and beyond their routine tasks/duties for the child placed in their home or their family via a SmartSheet form. The feedback is shared with the staff members and their chain of command up to the Deputy Commissioner as well as with the Commissioner's Office and the agency's Work Force Well-Being Director.

MDCPS developed a foster parent grievance policy in July 2023 allowing foster parents the option to share concerns and/or grievances via a dedicated email address (Fpgrievances@mdcps.ms.gov) or a link on the MDCPS website. Furthermore, two out of three Foster Parent Liaisons monitor and direct the foster parent grievances to the appropriate department and managers for resolution. Foster Parent Liaisons develop and maintain relationships with foster parents and serve as an advocate for their concerns and/or questions.

STATE AGENCY COLLABORATIONS

Division of Youth Services (DYS)

MDCPS continues to collaborate with The Mississippi Department of Human Services (MDHS) via the Division of Youth Services (DYS) to provide services for juveniles at risk of becoming delinquent. MDCPS has continued to provide administrative support services in this collaborative effort. MDHS, DYS is the division that administers probation, aftercare services, and institutional programs for juveniles who have been adjudged delinquent in the Mississippi Youth Courts and are at risk of becoming delinquent. MDCPS and the MDHS, Division of Youth Services (DYS)'s, Community Services Director met to discuss and track the status of youth that have been identified as "crossover" youth. This is a joint effort that targets open protective cases for clients that have been transferred to the state juvenile institution, Oakley

Youth Development Center (OYDC). Additionally, MDCPS and the Division of Youth Services participates in the State Level Case Review team led by the Mississippi Department of Mental Health to problem solve placement issues for youth with SED (Serious Emotional Disturbances) and delinquency issues.

Mississippi Department of Education (MDE)

MDCPS Education Unit and MDE work in partnership to promote educational stability for all children in foster care. In accordance with the state policy and procedure, MDCPS and MDE are committed to helping students in foster care remain academically stable while completing courses and advancing to the next grade/level. This partnership is a strength for both agencies while working closely to monitor and maintain as much educational stability for children in care by implementing Every Student Succeed Act. This law was signed on December 10, 2015, and the implementation began in January 2016. The law emphasizes the importance of limited educational disruption of children in foster care. This law has helped to improve the awareness of the unique needs of children in foster care by creating and increasing meaningful dialogue specifically focusing on what is in the best interest of the child. MDCPS Education Unit relies on the MDE Point of Contacts to ensure educational stability for children in care by assisting in completing and monitoring of Best Interest Determinations (BID) for every school-age youth that comes into care or home placement changes while in care. The compilations of BIDs are documented at BID@mdcps.ms.gov.

The Education Unit ensures enrollment, attendance and educational stability for all compulsory school-age children that are in foster care. We assist and support social service area staff in adhering to the MSA requirements for education to include reviewing education records of school age children that come into care, monitor the enrollment timeframe/deadlines for those that change placement while in care and monitor the completion of best interest determinations (BIDs) for school age children. In addition, the EDU provides coaching, resources, and serves as subject matter experts to the field staff as guidance for a child's education plan and development.

The Education Unit has plans to increase the availability of Education Liaisons by conducting educational webinars and lunch and learn sessions to provide a more hands on approach to assist service area staff in understanding the importance of completing and submitting the educational documents as required. In addition, teaching them how to advocate for educational support for children in care by reviewing documents to identify areas of need. This includes completing a Best Interest Determination (BID), a notification of placement (Change) form as well as submitting education records. We will schedule educational webinars and one-on-one coaching sessions once we increase the unit's human resources. We anticipate these activities beginning the month of June and July of 2024 since we have increased the unit's human capita by four additional staff members.



Ongoing small group coaching, in-service and numerous follow-ups to educational concerns from service area staff collectively and individually regarding child placement: enrollment verification, school attendance, special education, and best interest determination practices continue throughout the current APSR reporting period. Monitoring the number of education referrals helps us to determine how and what service area needs more coaching and in-services. By monitoring the number of referrals, we receive after providing the coaching to those identified service areas is how we measure to see if the training is working. Provide additional one on one assistance with meeting the MSA requirements.

The Education Unit tirelessly working to have an Education Liaison for every service area by the end of June 2024, so that we can maintain the education requirements for the unit as well as, provide more assistance and support to staff related to educational needs of compulsory school age children in care. Education Liaisons will undergo specialized training sessions focused on key components of education, empowering them to become more knowledgeable and qualified in addressing specific areas of concern to enhance their expertise and effectiveness in providing targeted assistance and support. An ongoing goal is to actively cultivate strong and collaborative relationships with every Point of Contact and Superintendent across all school districts.

Children and Families/Individuals Served

July – Sept 2023	Oct – Dec 2023	Jan – March 2024	April – June 2024
Sixty-five (65) referrals were made, and educational services were provided to either/all the children, foster parent(s), school district(s), social service area staff.	Eighty- six (86) referrals were made, and educational services were provided to all referred children, foster parent(s), school district(s), social service area staff.	One hundred (100) referrals were made, and educational services were provided to all referred children, foster parent(s), school district(s), social service area staff.	One hundred and seven (107) referrals were made, and educational services were provided to either/all the children, foster parent(s), school districts, and social service area staff.
Forty-nine (49) educational records were received and reviewed during this quarter and services were provided as	Eleven (11) educational records were received and reviewed during this quarter and services were provided as needed.	One hundred and ten (110) educational records were received and reviewed during this quarter and services were	Sixty-six (66) educational records were received and reviewed during this quarter and services were provided as

July – Sept 2023	Oct – Dec 2023	Jan – March 2024	April – June 2024
needed.		provided as needed.	needed.

Appropriate edits were completed to the Education Manual to assist service area staff with clear guidance for completing and understanding educational processes and procedures. The staff provided ongoing coaching, in-services and numerous follow-ups to educational concerns for service areas collectively and individually regarding child placement, enrollment verification, school attendance, special education, and best interest determination practices. The Education Unit created a facility education records review procedure (FERR) to help identify and understand how to best support youth residing in residential facilities and detention centers that have an Individual Education Plan (IEP) under special education services. Training was provided to staff on how to utilize the FERR.

The Education Unit also expanded efforts to request to review education records of youth within thirty (30) days of coming into care by making the request directly to the point of contact for the school district and following up with identified educational concerns. The Education Unit began engaging in foster care training to provide valuable educational information and resources.

The number of education referrals helps us to determine how and what service area needs coaching and in-services. By monitoring the number of referrals, we receive after providing the coaching to those identified service areas is how we measure to see if it is working. We plan to assist the service area staff more in understanding the importance of completing and submitting the educational documents as required by the MSA lawsuit. This includes completing a Best Interest Determination (BID), a notification of placement (Change) form, and submitting education records. We call each specialist to inform them of the required documents and ask them to email them as follow up to the request. We reach back out if we have not received it and walk them through the process of obtaining the information. We identified this as a need in February 2023 and began implementing it, March 1, 2023, and addressing educational concerns and needs of compulsory school age children.

Staffing issues continue to be a constant barrier for the Education unit. While a limited number of positions are available to this unit, potential applicants are discouraged from accepting positions due to the salary. The unit had four (4) Education Liaisons and one (1) Program Specialist. Two of the Education Liaisons were promoted to other positions within the agency and the Program Specialist resigned. This caused delayed responses to education referrals, reviews of education records, verification of school placements and education documentation. One additional hire was approved in late December, which still left only two

Education Liaisons providing support to all seven service areas.

The Education Unit was approved for three staff that completed new hire orientation and training. Twenty-one training courses were conducted as a part of the new hire orientation. Nineteen in-services to school district POCs and counselors. In addition, twenty-three in-service/training with service area staff with small group and one-on-one coaching. We have increased collaboration with Mississippi's Department of Education's Special Education unit to ensure compliance with IDEA regulations across districts and our agency. The Education unit has participated in committee meetings with other states focused on foster care and education.

We also face more enrollment challenges for our school-age children with individual school districts. We have started discussions with our legal team regarding specific language in court orders to help with the enrollment piece. We have begun referencing the joint guidance between MDCPS and Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) to remind school district Points of Contact (POCs) of the agreed-upon actions concerning enrollment for foster care children. We received significant push-back from several school districts with regards to identifying Special Education Decision Makers for children in care. Monitoring and tracking children with IEPs across different educational settings has been difficult. Our aim is to bolster and enrich our training techniques with school districts to prioritize the inclusion and success of children in foster care in all educational settings.

We are still working on amendments to our policy and some protocols to ensure that our youth's voices are heard, and rights are not violated as it relates to school hearings for potential expulsions. The unit continues to incorporate our latest amendment to the policy when training and coaching service area staff, which is to ensure that we allow all due process hearings for youth that are charged with misconduct and facing a long-term suspension. The unit continues to request that the service areas make referrals to our unit when hearings are scheduled.

The Best Interest Determination (BID) and the Education Records Review (ERR) report is how we ensure equity for all school-age children. These reports capture the child's age, date of birth, gender, grade, county, school district, and school records. This gives the Education unit the opportunity to review, address and provide the needed support for each youth based on the information received.

Mississippi Department of Human Services

MDHS, Division of Early Childhood Care and Development (DECCD) receives the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) Grant. This Grant funds the Healthy Families Mississippi program. Healthy Families Mississippi home visiting program supports



teen, women, fathers, and families with in-home services and education during pregnancy and after the baby is born. This is a voluntary comprehensive home visiting support program that provides family support workers to assist families by linking them to the following community services and resources: child development, nutrition, financial and safety education, and referrals for family support services. Healthy Families Mississippi serves pregnant mothers or families with children three (3) months or younger who are low-income families, families with a history of substance abuse, families with a history of domestic violence, and families with a history of incarceration.

Division of Economic Assistance (DEA)

The Division of Economic Assistance is the division that administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), formerly known as the food stamp program, and the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) cash assistance program formerly known as welfare. The State Refugee Coordinator (SCR) continues to collaborate with this division for the Refugee Cash Assistance Program (RCA). RCA is part of the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) Program. Through this program, financial assistance is provided to eligible refugees for up to eight months from their arrival date in the United States (or from the date of their immigration status for asylees or victims of trafficking). RCA is for eligible people who do not have minor children. The SRC and DEA are in constant communication regarding refugees applying for RCA, the status of their applications, payment amounts, duration of payments, and federal reporting. MDCPS continues the collaboration with the Division of Economic Assistance (DEA) to assist refugees applying for Refugee Cash Assistance Program with application status, payment amounts, etc.

COLLABORATIONS with STATE COURTS, LEGAL and JUDICIAL COMMUNITY

CFSR PIP

Collaboration efforts between MDCPS and Mississippi's judiciary are continuous with the intent to complete Round 3 of Mississippi's CFSR PIP and advance CFSP goals and strategies.

Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or other Planned Permanent Living Arrangements is a collaborative effort. Achieving permanency timely requires collaboration with the youth court, service providers, family members and foster parents. MDCPS Field Operations leadership team conducts regular reviews of agency data and uses the information to identify areas where practice and coaching require additional attention and developments. CQI and Field Operations continue to collaborate by assisting field staff and supervisors better understand the data. Information is shared with leadership to create a feedback loop that informs initiatives, policy, training, and practice improvement.

MDCPS, in conjunction with the Mississippi Judicial College and the Court Improvement Project, hosted a statewide mandatory judicial training on September 13-15, 2023. The training was a joint meeting with youth court judges, referees, and MDCPS staff with the intent to address issues faced by all stakeholders and continue reinforcing the PMLC principles.

MDCPS's plan for Goal 4, Strategy 1, Activities 3-5 (CFSR PIP), was to "Improve Service Array and Delivery" by diversifying intensive in-home services and expanding available funding for services by implementing the Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA). CB approved transfer of activities 3-5 from the CFSR PIP to the APSR. Additional action regarding the renegotiation of the activities and FFPSA is contained in the *Renegotiation Items from the CFSR PIP* and the *Additional Services Information: FFPSA* sections respectively.

Joint Planning

As previously mentioned, MDCPS hosted the Mississippi Conference on Children and Families (*formerly Joint Planning*) in May 2024. The in-person and virtual convening focused on how collaboration, judicial review, and CQI impacts pathways to prevention, permanency, and care. Emerging issues in our child welfare system were the focus of all presentations. Additional details regarding the conference can be found in the *Collaboration: Mississippi Conference on Children and Families 2024* section.

Title IV-E Reimbursement for Legal Representation

Mississippi intends to reimburse the Office of the Attorney General for its representation of the agency in Mississippi courts through the utilization of IV-E funds. MDCPS also has an MOU with the Mississippi Office of the State Public Defender that allows for the utilization of Title IV-E funds for the reimbursement of legal representation of indigent parent(s) whose children are in MDCPS custody.

Title IV-E PIP Collaboration (Section 422(b)(13) of the Act)

Mississippi does not have an active Title IV-E PIP. However, MDCPS's eligibility unit continues to maintain a shared Smartsheet with the MDPS Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) and the Administrative Office of Courts to identify cases with court order deficiencies so they may be addressed by AOC with the local youth court. The OLC and the AOC, through the Jurist in Residence, notifies the local youth courts of those deficiencies as an educational tool/reminder regarding the language that is required in order for a child to be considered IV-E eligible. The OLC and AOC also asks the court to submit transcripts that can supplement the order and provide the missing language.

MDCPS has also been working with Doug Swisher at Public Knowledge to review our Eligibility



manual and procedures. Through that work, MDCPS has discovered that internal policy created requirements and restrictions that are not necessary to meet IV-E eligibility requirements for federal reimbursement. This effort is intended to assist in determining why Mississippi's penetration rate is lower than states with comparable demographics. MDCPS and Mr. Swisher found several internal policies that were hindering the Eligibility Unit's ability to make timely IV-E determinations, and the Office of Legal Counsel is assisting in amending those policies.

The Parent Representation task force meets quarterly, and its purpose is specifically to work to expand the availability of parent representation, which is an established goal in Mississippi's CFSP. In 2023, the Office of State Public Defender's Parent Defense Program provides parent representation in twenty-eight (28) Mississippi counties, and ten (10) additional Mississippi counties fund their own parent defenders. As a reminder, although MDCPS supports parent representation at all stages of a case, MDCPS has no control over the implementation of parent representation across the state. MDCPS does have a seat on the Parent Representation task force and supports the work through that task force. The Supreme Court also recently seated an ad hoc committee to study ways to decrease the length of time required to try TPR cases, and MDCPS has advocated for increased rates of parent representation and early parent representation (beginning at shelter) to move children to permanency faster.

Mississippi Youth Court Information Delivery System (MYCIDS)

MYCIDS is a system for real time management of the activities of the Mississippi Youth Court System. It is a web-based application that provides support for the intake of youths into the court system, scheduling of youth cases, management of court dockets, tracking of custody situations, necessary document generation and provides a base dataset for statistical reporting purposes.

The Office of Permanency has implemented the use of notification alerts within the MYCIDS system. This alert notifies the Permanency Support Services/Termination of Parental Rights Unit as soon as the court order changing the child's permanent plan of adoption is uploaded into the MYCIDS system. This alert assists the Unit with identifying new TPR cases and working with assigned direct service staff to ensure that TPR Referrals are submitted within the 30-calendar day timeframe and by the last day of the child's 15th month of the most recent 22 months in foster care.

The Information Technology department offers training courses to assist new and current users in understanding the procedures used in MYCIDS. Topics will cover all areas and will be specific to the user's job description. The following training dates were completed during the reporting period for this year's APSR. Training agendas are attached.

Itawamba County (Tishomingo County)

June 3-7, 2024



Desoto County
Harrison County

June 10-14, 2024
June 24-28, 2024

MYCIDS/SACWIS Interface

One of the AOC's joint projects for the upcoming fiscal year is to develop an interface between MYCIDS and SACWIS, the Mississippi Child Protection Services data system. This has been a long-term goal that we hope to finally bring to fruition within the next 18 months.

Redefining Neglect to Mitigate the Effects of Poverty on Removal

The AOC partnered with Casey Family Programs, the University of Mississippi Child Advocacy Clinic, and Mississippi Judicial College to study the feasibility of redefining neglect to consider the effects of poverty as opposed to intentional neglect. This could lead to a new approach in processing reports of neglect that are solely based upon the family's socio- economic condition. To accomplish this, however, the definition of neglect under Miss. Code Ann. § 43-21-105 must be revised. In doing so, these measures will increase the capacity of our public and private child welfare agencies to meet the needs of financially challenged families. Per David Calder, co-author of the study, research estimates that approximately 75% of all cases referred to Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services in Mississippi each year involve reports of "child neglect." In many cases, children are alleged to be "neglected" because they do not have "the care necessary" for their "health, morals or well-being," even if it is unintentional because of the family's socio-economic condition. Enabling more parents to provide for the health, safety, and welfare of their children would cause the number of cases requiring state intervention and judicial oversight to be dramatically reduced. The desired goal of these measures is to empower families and strengthen communities, prevent the unnecessary removal of children from their homes, and thereby give the disadvantaged children of our State the opportunity and hope for a prosperous future.

The task force/committee that started this work before the COVID pandemic re-started its work in advance of the 2023 Mississippi Legislative session. Although proposed legislation was submitted in 2023, that bill did not make it out of committee. Proposed legislation regarding a new definition of neglect was submitted during the 2024 legislative session. The bill passed, and the new definition of neglect will take effect on July 1, 2024. The new definition of neglect is:

“Neglected child” means a child:

(i) Whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, neglects or refuses, when able so to do, to provide for him proper and necessary care or support, or education as required by law, or medical, surgical, or other care necessary for his well-being; however, a parent who withholds medical treatment from any child who in good faith is under treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer in accordance with



the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglectful under any provision of this chapter; or

(ii) Who is otherwise without proper care, custody, supervision or support; or

(iii) Who, for any reason, lacks the special care made necessary for him by reason of his mental condition, whether the mental condition is having mental illness or having an intellectual disability; or

(iv) Who is not provided by the child's parent, guardian or custodian, with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding such failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused and the child is in imminent risk of harm.

Youth Court Prosecutors Conference

The annual conference for the youth court prosecutors was held March 7-8, 2024, in Meridian, Mississippi. MDCPS General Counsel Lowery and Deputy General Counsel Shelton spoke at the conference and provided the youth court prosecutors with information on safety plans and other MDCPS updates.

2024 State Government Lawyers Seminar

The Attorney General's office hosted its annual State Government Lawyers Seminar June 12-13, 2024. MDCPS staff attorney Willis and Special Assistant Attorney General Roussel presented information on adoptions from MDCPS custody. Topics included the path from TPR to adoption, what documents make up the adoption packet sent by CPS to adoption attorneys, and a step-by-step how-to guide for filing and finalizing CPS adoptions.

Municipal Prosecutors Conference

The conference for municipal court prosecutors was held on June 24th. MDCPS staff attorney Jones spoke at the conference and presented information on properly serving MDCPS personnel for municipal court trials, obtaining MDCPS records, and the Mississippi disclosure statutes.

III. Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes

SAFETY, PERMANENCY, and WELL-BEING OUTCOMES

The Continuous Quality Improvement Unit consist of the following units: Foster Care Review Unit, Service Area Review Unit, Technical Assistance Unit, Safety Review Unit and Evaluation and Monitoring Unit.



Foster Care Review is the federally mandated 6-month administrative review (impacts Title IV-E review requirements) and also serves as the state required 6-month administrative review for courts that do not hold a 6-month review hearing. Service Area Reviews: conducts reviews in the Federal Oversight Monitoring System as an internal review process that mimics the CFSR reviews and Expedited Licensure Reviews for MSA. Safety Review Unit (SRU): conducts review of all investigations, screen outs, and the MSA Post-MIC monitoring and THV provisions. Technical Assistance unit conducts reviews on all youth with a plan of DLC 14 years and under or living with a non-relative.

The CQI Unit makes great effort to incorporate equity, diversity, and inclusion for all children and families during the collection of data from the case reviews. Both quantitative and qualitative data is collected by the unit. A lot of data is collected on families and children from the case reviews. The reviews produce specific data for different requests such as MSA reporting, corrective actions, data quality and case practice. These reviews provide information that is analyzed across every Service Area. The results are analyzed based on several factors such as, case type, length of time in care, type of permanent plan, age of child, etc. This analysis offers opportunities to provide feedback regarding consistency of practice across the state. Review results can be analyzed by Service Area or by county as well. Timely Permanency, comprehensive assessments and provision of needed services are a focus of the qualitative reviews. Information is shared with leadership to provide a feedback loop that informs initiatives, policy, training, and practice. The current MACWIS system presents a barrier as the unit is unable to provide all needed reports. The unit implemented a Standard Operation Procedure (SOP) for statewide Corrective Action because of a qualitative review and started tracking Summary, Assessment and Plan (SAP) narrative documentation for quality during foster care review, in-home reviews and reviews of investigations.

The agency collaborated with The Center for States to develop a new CQI Plan. A Steering Committee was developed consisting of multi-unit input and collaboration. Ongoing Steering Committee meetings were held to build a robust CQI Plan for the agency. The initial date of achievement was April 30, 2024, however, that timeline has been extended until December 2024. Additionally, sub-groups from the main CQI Steering Committee have been developed to focus on specific elements of the plan working towards the CQI Plan draft development. Focus Groups were held in all seven Service Areas to gather information needed for the CQI Self-Assessment. The information gathered was used to inform the CQI Team of the needed changes in operational procedures so that the data could be better understood by all agency staff.

CQI staff have participated in the SDM meetings with other units by providing feedback to help guide the new processes being developed. Staff from CQI collaborated with the Professional Development Services in Fall 2023 to present data measurements from Safety



practices to the agency safety unit. Strategic tips were provided to help staff understand how to improve the quality of their practice based on the data presented. Continuously engage Service Areas to promote understanding of the data offering strategic tips to improve the quality of practice and how to use data to inform practice in each Service Area. In winter 2023, collaboration started for internal DEAL Training with PDS (Developing Effective and Accountable Leaders.) CQI Unit provided feedback for curriculum development and commitment for upcoming cohorts. The CQI Unit also presents during week 3 of each preservice class describing each unit within CQI and each unit's contributions to the agency.

The CQI Unit renamed the Regional Review Unit to Service Area Review Unit in October 2023. The Service Area Review Unit completed modules from the Theory of Change self-paced training on Capacity Building website. All CFSR Round 4 E-Learning Academy was completed by all Service Area Review Unit. The unit drafted a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for Round 4 CFSR for Service Area Review Unit and was implemented in January 2024 as a baseline that aligns with the Agency's Service Area restructure. Service Area Review and Evaluation and Monitoring Units continue to engage Service Areas to promote understanding of the data offering strategic tips to improve the quality of practice and how to use data to inform practice in each Service Area. The Service Area Review Unit completed reviews for Service Areas 1-3 and are finishing reviews for Service Area 4. A total of 18 foster care cases and 12 in home cases from each area was completed (72 total foster care and 48 in home type case reviews).

Service Area Reviews for Service Areas 5-7 will be completed in the coming months. The reviews will continue until November 2024. Service Area Reviews are completed in each Service Area for a period of 45 days, due to the number of cases increasing. Following the area reviews, Data-to-Action meetings to be implemented starting in Q2 that offer the results of the area reviews as well as other CQI data that informs needed practice changes or confirms positive practices.

FCR updated the SAP questions on the FCR Supplemental form and Smartsheet were implemented April 2024. SRU implemented the new Maltreatment In Care review tool in April 2024 including feedback from Public Catalyst.

Members of the CQI unit received training from the National Partnership for Child Safety. Ongoing collaboration will occur to develop a new process for responding to, learning from and reviewing Fatalities and near Fatalities reviews.

County Conferences were held by FCR staff for all children that have been in custody at least 5 months and/or children that have ongoing reviews every 6 months after their initial review. Data is collected via County Conference tab in MACWIS for federal and state law requirements and FCR Smartsheets capture data for MSA standards. Updates were made to

the FCR supplemental form to clarify and provide consistent options in the CQI Unit to collect data on SAP documentation. The Safety Review Unit reviewed all Maltreatment in Care Investigations within 30 days of completion within the PUR. SRU also reviewed Non-MIC Investigation, Closed Without Findings Investigations, Screen Out MIC and Non-MIC intakes, In-Home cases, and the MSA Trial Home Visit requirements. All data is collected via Smartsheet.

Safety Review Unit coordinated with Public Catalyst in February 2024 and developed a new Maltreatment In Care (MIC) review tool to improve the quality of Maltreatment In Care Reviews conducted within 30 days after approval. The new Maltreatment in Care tool was implemented in April 2024. The tool being utilized is the same tool that Public Catalyst utilizes to review substantiated and unsubstantiated reports.

The case review unit has been viewed as CQI, however, CQI is a concept that belongs to the entire agency and begins with performance review of each worker. The case review unit has long been required to carry out CQI activities but because that data collection and analysis belonged to that unit, it diminishes the sense of urgency and ownership at the county level to enter data correctly, analyze the data or to take corrective action steps to strengthen or improve case deficiencies. However, the Leadership Team will continue to hold meetings in the future to break down the Quality Case Review Unit and how all units are a part of CQI. This information was also reflected in the CQI Self-Assessment.

The CQI Unit conducts multiple case reviews. All units collect qualitative data for the MSA. Foster Care Review is the federally mandated 6-month administrative review (impacts Title IV-E review requirements) and also serves as the state required 6-month administrative review for courts that do not hold a 6-month review hearing. Regional Review: conducts reviews in the federal Onsite monitoring system for the CFSR and PIP reporting. SRU: conducts review of all investigations and the MSA THV provisions. Technical Assistance unit conducts reviews on all youth with a plan of DLC 14 years and under or living with a non-relative.

Safety Outcomes 1 and 2 (1355.34 (b)(1)(i))

In Quarter 4 of 2023 (October - December), there were no Regional Reviews held for the state of Mississippi. Instead, the team transitioned between Round 3 to Round 4 CFSR Review standards. MDCPS completed all of Round 4 training materials and some material from Center for States, Capacity Building Center on Theory of Change. The unit transitioned to Service Areas whereas reviews started January 2024 with service area 1. The year 2024 will be the first year that Service Area Reviews will have been completed (using Round 4 OMS platform).

Children's Bureau is aware and have been made aware of MDCPS changes. CB staff have completed Secondary Oversight of some reviews to ensure our staff is measuring according to the Round 4 CFSR Review Criteria. CB is taking a summer break from MDCPS but has committed to pick up with oversight of the reviews in October 2024.

The plan is to report out by service areas by the end of the year, then complete a yearly report from the Office of Inspector General. Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) staff implemented and carried out the following efforts during Measurement Periods 12 and Post Round 3 PIP measurement. The focus of these intentional, concerted efforts was to support the improvement of quality practice statewide.

- The Technical Assistance Unit was developed as a support to Service Areas to assist in addressing practice indicators where opportunities for improvement are identified from reviews or special request. ADC's and Managers can complete a referral form on SharePoint to request assistance from the TA unit. The SAP Documentation learning labs were revamped and reimplemented by the Technical Assistance Unit in March 2024. Feedback received on evaluation forms from the previous SAP Documentation trainings (2023) were instrumental in the updates made to the SAP learning labs. The labs were broken into two different categories: Intro and Refresher. The introductory lab introduced attendees to the SAP concept and expectations but also incorporates application. The Refresher lab is mostly application and practice. It provides sobering reminders of why quality documentation is imperative and how documentation affects staffing, caseloads, compliance measures, funding, and most important our families we serve.

Safety Outcome 1, Item 1: *Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.* Were the agency's responses to all accepted child maltreatment reports initiated, and face-to-face contact with the child(ren) made, within time frames established by agency policies or state statutes?

As of June 30, 2023, the Round 3 CFSR PIP requirements had been met. Internal reviews continued until September 30, 2023. No reviews occurred from October 1, 2023 – December 31, 2023, as the review process trained and restructured to Service Areas and Round 4 criteria.

For Safety Outcome 1 (Item 1), the Practice Performance Report was exported from the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) for the Agency structured Baseline (Non CFSR) Period of January 2024 to June 2024.

Item 1: Timeliness of Initiating Investigations of Reports of Child Maltreatment

Item 1 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	37
Number of Total Applicable Cases	59
Performance (%)	62.71%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance reflected that delays in initiation of investigations or assessments and/or face-to-face contact were due to circumstances beyond the control of the agency and were only found in 2 of 24 applicable cases (8.33%). Qualitative Review Data from Non-MIC Investigations Review Sample completed by the Safety Review Unit reflects that 51% of investigations were initiated timely (1,220 of 2,373) while 11% reflected circumstances beyond the control of the Agency for timely initiation (117 of 1,093). Those reviews were completed from January 2024 through June 2024. While CORE Reports do allow for a real time glance at timely initiation, the number is fluid and is contingent on completed documentation of practice efforts.

Safety Outcome 2, Item 2: Services to Family to Protect Child(ren) in the Home and Prevent Removal or Reentry into Foster Care. Did the agency make concerted efforts to provide services to the family to prevent children’s entry into foster care or re-entry after reunification?

Item 2 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	63
Number of Total Applicable Cases	97
Performance (%)	64.95%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected Agency made concerted efforts to provide or arrange for

appropriate services for the family to protect the children and prevent their entry or reentry into foster care in 47.06% (16 of 34) of foster care cases and 60% (21 of 35) of in-home case types. Also, the Practice Performance report reflected that concerted efforts were not made to provide appropriate services to address safety/risk issues and the child(ren) remained in the home in 11.76% (4 of 34) of foster care cases and in 40% (14 of 35) of in-home cases.

Safety Outcome 2, Item 3: Risk and Safety Assessment and Management. Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess and address the risk and safety concerns relating to the child(ren) in their own homes or while in foster care?

Item 3 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	79
Number of Total Applicable Cases	120
Performance (%)	65.83%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected the Agency conducted ongoing assessments that accurately assessed all risk and safety concerns in 76.39% (55 of 72) of foster care cases and 54.17% (26 of 48) of in-home type cases. Also, the Practice Performance report reflected the Agency developed an appropriate safety plan with the family and continually monitored the safety plan as needed, including monitoring family engagement in safety-related services in 62.5% (5 of 8) of foster care cases and 50% (10 of 20) of in-home case type.

Permanency Outcomes 1 and 2 (1355.34 (b)(1)(i))

Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Permanency Outcome 1, Item 4: Stability of Foster Care Placement. Is the child in foster care in a stable placement and were any changes in the child's placement in the best interests of the child and consistent with achieving the child's permanency goal(s)?

Item 4 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	58

Item 4 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Number of Total Applicable Cases	72
Performance (%)	80.56%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected the placement changes for the child during the period under review were planned by the agency in an effort to achieve the child's case goals or to meet the needs of the child in 48% (12 of 25) of the applicable cases. However, child's current or most recent placement setting was considered stable at the time of review in 95.83% (69 of 72) of the applicable cases.

Permanency Outcome 1, Item 5: Permanency Goal for Child. Did the agency establish appropriate permanency goals for the child in a timely manner?

Item 5 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	49
Number of Total Applicable Cases	72
Performance (%)	68.06%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected permanency goals (Permanent and Concurrent) in effect during the period under review were established in a timely manner in 77.78% of reviewed cases (56 of 72). Also, Practice Performance results reflected the Agency filed or joined a TPR petition before the period under review (PUR) or in a timely manner during the PUR or an exception applied in 64.71% of the cases reviewed (22 of 34).

Permanency Outcome 1, Item 6: Achieving Reunification, Guardianship, Adoption, or Other Planned Permanent Living Arrangement. Did the agency make concerted efforts to achieve reunification, guardianship, adoption, or other planned permanent living arrangements for the child?

Item 6: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	33
Number of Total Applicable Cases	72
Performance (%)	45.83%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected the agency and court made concerted efforts to achieve concurrent goals. If one of two concurrent goals was achieved during the period under review, rating is based on the goal that was achieved in 49.23% (32 of 65) cases reviewed.

Permanency Outcome 2, Item 7: Placement with Siblings. Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that siblings in foster care are placed together unless separation was necessary to meet the needs of one of the siblings?

Item 7: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	39
Number of Total Applicable Cases	52
Performance (%)	75%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected there was a valid reason for the child's separation from siblings in placement 58.06% of the applicable cases reviewed (18 of 31).

Permanency Outcome 2, Item 8: Visiting with Parents and Siblings in Foster Care. Did the agency make concerted efforts to ensure that visitation between a child in foster care and his or her mother, father, and siblings was of sufficient frequency and quality to promote continuity in the child's relationships with these close family members?

Item 8: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	37
Number of Total Applicable Cases	54
Performance (%)	68.52%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected the frequency and quality of visitation between the child and mother was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship in 77.08% (37 of 48). Practice Performance report reflected the frequency and quality of visitation between the child and father was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship in 66.67% (18 of 27). Also, the Practice Performance report reflected the frequency and quality of visitation with siblings in foster care was sufficient to maintain and promote the continuity of the relationship in 80% (24 of 30) applicable cases reviewed.

Permanency Outcome 2, Item 9: Preserving Connections. Did the agency make concerted efforts to preserve the child’s connections to his or her neighborhood, community, faith, extended family, Tribe, school, and friends?

Item 9: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	51
Number of Total Applicable Cases	72
Performance (%)	70.83%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected Concerted efforts were made to maintain the child's important connections (for example, neighborhood, community, faith, language, extended family members including siblings who are not in foster care, Tribe, school, and/or friends) in 70.83% of applicable cases reviewed (51 of 72).

Permanency Outcome 2, Item 10: Relative Placement. Did the agency make concerted efforts

to place the child with relatives when appropriate?

Item 10: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	55
Number of Total Applicable Cases	71
Performance (%)	77.46%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that of the applicable cases the child's current, or most recent, placement was with a relative in 28.17% (20 of 71 cases). Practice Performance results reflected concerted efforts to seek maternal relatives reflected: to identify at 83.33%, to locate at 83.33%, to inform at 83.33%, and evaluate at 100% of the 12 applicable cases. Practice Performance results reflected concerted efforts to seek paternal relatives reflected: to identify at 92.86%, to locate at 85.71%, to inform at 71.43%, and evaluate 85.71% of the 14 applicable cases.

Permanency Outcome 2, Item 11: Relationship of Child in Care with Parents. Did the agency make concerted efforts to promote, support, and/or maintain positive relationships between the child in foster care and his or her mother and father or other primary caregivers from whom the child had been removed through activities other than just arranging for visitation?

Item 11: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	29
Number of Total Applicable Cases	50
Performance (%)	58%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected concerted efforts were made to promote, support, and

otherwise maintain a positive, nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and his or her mother in 64.58% of applicable cases (31 of 48). Also, concerted efforts were made to promote, support, and otherwise maintain a positive, nurturing relationship between the child in foster care and his or her father in 51.85% of the applicable cases (14 of 27).

Well-being Outcomes 1, 2 and 3 (1355.34(b)(1)(iii))

Well-Being Outcome 1: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs. Well-being Outcomes include: (A) families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children’s needs; (B) children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and (C) children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Item 12: Needs and Services of Child, Parents, and Foster Parents. Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess the needs of and provide services to children, parents, and foster parents to identify the services necessary to achieve case goals and adequately address the issues relevant to the agency’s involvement with the family?

Item 12 - Overall Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	53
Number of Total Applicable Cases	120
Performance (%)	44.17%

Well-Being Outcome 1, Sub-Item 12A: Needs Assessment and Services to Children

Item 12a: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	82
Number of Total Applicable Cases	120
Performance (%)	68.33%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency conducted formal or informal initial and/or ongoing comprehensive assessments that accurately assessed the children's needs in 88.89% of the 72 applicable foster care cases and in 60.42% of the applicable 48 in-home cases. Appropriate services were provided to meet the children's needs in 78.33% of the 60 applicable foster care cases and in 35.14% of the applicable 37 in-home cases.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Sub-Item 12B: Needs Assessment and Services to Parents

Item 12b: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	49
Number of Total Applicable Cases	105
Performance (%)	46.67%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that concerted efforts were made both to assess and address the needs of mothers in 57.41% of the 54 applicable foster care cases and 56.25% of the 48 applicable in-home cases. Concerted efforts were made both to assess and address the needs of fathers 36.11% of the 36 applicable foster care cases and 50% of the 30 applicable in-home cases.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Sub-Item 12C: Needs Assessment and Services to Foster Parents

Item 12c: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	57
Number of Total Applicable Cases	68
Performance (%)	83.82%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency adequately assessed the needs of the foster or pre-adoptive parents related to caring for children in their care on an ongoing basis in 86.76% of the 68 applicable foster care cases. The agency provided appropriate services to foster and pre-adoptive parents related to caring for children in their care in 71.08% of the 38 applicable cases.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Item 13: *Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning* Did the agency make concerted efforts to involve the parents and children (if developmentally appropriate) in the case planning process on an ongoing basis?

Item 13 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	66
Number of Total Applicable Cases	112
Performance (%)	58.93%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency made concerted efforts to actively involve the following family members in the case planning process:

- Target child in foster care cases at 93.02% of 43 cases.
- Children in in-home cases at 65.85% of the 41 cases.
- Mothers of foster care cases at 65.38% of the 52 cases.
- Mothers of in-home cases at 72.34% of the 47 cases.
- Fathers of foster care cases at 48.28% of the 29 cases.
- Fathers of in-home cases at 55.17% of the 29 cases.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Item 14: *Caseworker Visits with Child*

Were the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and child(ren) sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?

Item 14 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January 2024 – June 2024

Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	96
Number of Total Applicable Cases	120
Performance (%)	80%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected the typical pattern of visits between the caseworker and the child (ren) was sufficient in 95.83% of the 72 applicable foster care cases and 77.08% of the 48 applicable in-home cases reviewed. The quality of visits between the caseworker and the child(ren) was sufficient in 94.44% of the 72 applicable foster care cases and 68.75% of the 48 applicable in-home cases reviewed.

Well-Being Outcome 1, Item 15: Caseworker Visits with Parents

Were the frequency and quality of visits between caseworkers and the mothers and fathers of the child(ren) sufficient to ensure the safety, permanency, and well-being of the child(ren) and promote achievement of case goals?

Item 15 Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January 2024 – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	57
Number of Total Applicable Cases	101
Performance (%)	56.44%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that both the frequency and quality of caseworker visitation with the mother were sufficient in 65.38% of the 52 applicable foster care cases and 65.96% of the 47 applicable in-home cases reviewed. Both the frequency and quality of caseworker visitation with the father were sufficient 48.28% of the 29 applicable foster care cases and 51.72% of the 29 applicable in-home cases reviewed.

Well-Being Outcome 2: Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.

Well-being Outcomes include: (A) families have enhanced capacity to provide for their

children’s needs; (B) children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs; and (C) children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs. For Well-Being Outcome 2 (and the subsequent Item), the Practice Performance Report was exported from the Onsite Review Instrument (OSRI) for the PIP Measurement Period. The Practice Performance Report offers an analytical breakdown of practice elements measured from the rolling Regional Reviews that contribute to the overall Well-Being Outcome 2 rating of Sustainably Achieved at 79.31% (n=161), Partially Achieved at 3.45% (n=7), and Not Achieved at 20.69% (n=42).

Well-Being Outcome 2, Item 16: Educational Needs of the Child. Did the agency make concerted efforts to assess children’s educational needs, and appropriately address identified needs in case planning and case management activities?

Item 16: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	65
Number of Total Applicable Cases	75
Performance (%)	86.67%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency made concerted efforts to accurately assess the children's educational needs in 93.44% of the 61 applicable foster care cases and in 78.57% of the 14 applicable in-home cases reviewed. Results reflected that the agency made concerted efforts to address the children's educational needs through appropriate services in 88.57% of the 35 applicable foster care cases and in 60% of the 10 applicable in-home cases reviewed.

Well-Being Outcome 3, Item 17: Physical Health of the Child. Did the agency address the physical health needs of children, including dental health needs?

Item 17: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024

Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	59
Number of Total Applicable Cases	89
Performance (%)	66.29%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency provided appropriate oversight of prescription medications for the physical health issues of the target child in foster care in 66.67% of 12 applicable cases reviewed. The agency ensured that appropriate services were provided to the children to address all identified physical health needs in 72.27% of the 44 applicable foster care cases and in 40% of the 15 applicable in-home cases. The agency ensured that appropriate services were provided to the children to address all identified dental health needs in 69.23% of the 39 applicable foster care cases (there were no applicable in-home cases).

Well-Being Outcome 3, Item 18: Mental/Behavioral Health of the Child. Did the agency address the mental/behavioral health needs of children?

Item 18: Case Review Results	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	24
Number of Total Applicable Cases	53
Performance (%)	45.28%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency provided appropriate oversight of prescription medications for the mental/behavioral health issues of the target child in foster care in 37.5% of the 24 applicable foster care cases. The agency ensured that appropriate services were provided to the children to address all identified mental/behavioral health needs in 71.43% of the 35 applicable foster care cases and in 52.94% of the 17 applicable in-home cases. No other qualitative review process collects data around mental/behavioral health issues or services provided. However, during any review process, if it is identified that a child(ren) needs such services, a corrective action request is sent to the local leadership to ensure services are connected to the child(ren) in need (applicable to foster care and in-home case types). CORE Reports do allow for a real time glance at “Custody Child

Medical/Dental/MH Exams”, the number is fluid and is contingent on completed documentation in the electronic system for just foster care type cases.

CFSR SYSTEMATIC FACTORS

Statewide Information System

Statewide Information System, Item 19: How well is the statewide information system functioning statewide to ensure that, at a minimum, the state can readily identify the status, demographic characteristics, location, and goals for the placement of every child who is (or within the immediately preceding 12 months, has been) in foster care?

MDCPS’s current data reporting system includes daily CORE Reports quantitative data reports that track agency performance. CORE, the Agency’s Central Online Reporting Environment consists of reports that are primarily built around the MSA requirements, and many of them loosely align with several of the CFSR Items discussed in this section. However, the Agency has identified opportunities to improve the quality of the data that feeds CORE Reports, and on the use/analysis of quantitative data. MDCPS, however, is looking to better understand and ultimately improve the quality of data (accuracy and timely entry) and access to it. Through the work of an independent contractor, an assessment of current status is underway and includes in-depth analysis of the quality, accuracy, timeliness of entry, and accessibility of the information. This work also includes an assessment of gaps in administrative data needed to support CQI efforts. (Additional information is provided in Section IV.) To further support improvement in this area, MDCPS has engaged a private contractor RedMane Technologies, LLC to transition the current statewide information system (MACWIS) to a CCWIS-compliant system.

Specifically, MDCPS will focus on improving data quality, management, and literacy throughout the implementation of this CFSP/APSR, and as such, the CORE Reports will likely be revised. As MDCPS develops a fully functioning CQI Team, a significant focus will be on quality data collection and analysis.

Additional information about the development and use of data is provided in Section III, Item 25, Section V (Quality Assurance) and will also be included in the next submission of the MDCPS Data Quality Plan.

The agency has worked hard to improve the number of cases with the case plan goal not established. The number has gone from 3,580 to 27. The technical assistance efforts and other internal procedures have being essential to this improvement. A case plan goal, per regulations, must be determined within a predetermined number of days of placement.

Item 5 assesses if an appropriate permanency goal was established for the child in a timely

manner. The case review results, provided above in Item 5, show that MDCPS has significantly improved performance and has met its CFSR Round 3 PIP goal, more work needs to be done.

Item 5 Permanency Goal for Child Practice	Reporting Period 11	Reporting Period 12	Reporting Period 13
Data Period	April 2022 - March 2023	July 2022 – June 2023	Oct 2022 – Sept 2023
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	132	147	144
Number of Total Applicable Cases	210	210	210
Performance (%)	62.86%	70%	68.57%

Case Review System

Case Review System, Item 20: Written Case Plan. The case review system is functioning statewide to ensure that each child has a written case plan that is developed jointly with the child’s parent(s) and includes the required provisions.

The Family Team Meeting process is used to develop Family Service Plans. Agency policy and best practices approaches outline the engagement of parents and case participants in the development of initial and ongoing reviews of family service plans. However, this was identified as an area needing improvement during Round 3 CFSR. And although MDCPS’s performance in this area has improved, it remains below substantial conformity.

The Case review process (Foster Care Review and Regional Review using the OSRI) provides additional insight into performance. FCR data from the MSA is specific to the plan being Reunification for involving parents in case planning. This would skew data and not have data on cases that the plan has changed to a DLC type plan, IL, or Adoption in which TPR has not occurred.

Item 13 Child and Family Involvement in Case Planning	Service Areas 1-4
Data Period	January 2024 – June 2024
Number of Cases Rated as a Strength	66
Performance (%)	58.93%

While the above results show State Rating Summary (combined case types), Practice Performance report reflected that the agency made concerted efforts to actively involve the following family members in the case planning process:

- Target child in foster care cases at 93.02% of 43 cases.
- Children in in-home cases at 65.85% of the 41 cases.
- Mothers of foster care cases at 65.38% of the 52 cases.
- Mothers of in-home cases at 72.34% of the 47 cases.
- Fathers of foster care cases at 48.28% of the 29 cases.
- Fathers of in-home cases at 55.17% of the 29 cases.

MDCPS plans to strengthen the interview structure to provide opportunities for children, parents, and stakeholders to be more actively involved in the development of goals, plans, and solutions related to each circumstance. This is included in Goal 2/Objective 2 in Section V.

Case Review System, Item 21: Periodic Reviews. Is the case review system is functioning statewide to ensure that a periodic review for each child occurs no less frequently than once every 6 months, either by a court or by administrative review?

This systemic factor continues to rate as a strength. An internal administrative review is held every 6 months for all children in foster care and a report entitled the Youth Court Hearing and Review Summary is submitted to the court after each review. The Foster Care Review Unit (a subunit of CQI) conducts the review which includes a comprehensive review of the child's electronic, paper and MYCIDS (youth court) file. A county conference is then held to discuss the child's plan, progress towards the plan and potential barriers. Parents, grandparents, caseworkers, resource parents/caregivers, the child and child's Guardian Ad Litem are required to receive invitation to participate in the county conference. This is currently tracked with MSA 6.4.a on the FCR Supplemental form.

All efforts are made to schedule and hold the conferences prior to the six-month timeframe and all children receive a review. Only <1% of the children have a longer period under review (more than 6 months) (See table below). The Youth Court Hearing and Review Summary outlines the discussion that took place at the 6-month review and provides the court with information related to the efforts made by the agency, the parents and resource parents to achieve permanency for the child. The Agency has the option to request a court hearing when the Youth Court Hearing and Review Summary is submitted. In addition to the Youth Court Hearing and Review Summary, which is provided to the court, the Periodic Administrative Determination is provided to the County of Responsibility worker and Supervisor outlining documentation and practice areas that require follow up or recommending further

assessment. The 6.4.a report is utilized to ensure that all children in state custody receive a timely periodic review. The report is reviewed quarterly to correctly identify the percentage of children overdue for a review due to potential reporting or reviewer data entry errors. MYCIDS court orders are reviewed for those children identified as overdue (the review was not held prior to 6 months) to determine if a review court hearing was held in between the 6-month administrative review. The data below represents the percentage of children due for a 6-month review in each MSA quarter and the review was held timely.

MDCPS continues this case review process. This data represents children due for a review in each quarter and the review was held timely.

Reporting Period	Timely Administrative Review
Q1 2023 (January 2023 - March 2023)	99%
Q2 2023 (April 2023 - June 2023)	99.8%
Q3 2023(July 2023 - August 2023)	99.6%
Q4 2023 (September 2023 - December 2023)	99.8%
Q1 2024 (January 2024 - March 2024)	99.6%

Case Review System, Item 22: Permanency Hearings. Is the case review system is functioning statewide to ensure that each child has a permanency hearing in a qualified court or administrative body that occurs no later than 12 months from the date the child entered foster care and no less frequently than every 12 months thereafter. The case reviewers assess court orders that are entered into the MYCIDS system by the court, MACWIS and the hard case file in the county of responsibility. The agency has also added a request for hearing button in MACWIS to ensure timely hearings are requested by the agency.

Effective July 1, 2024, the timeline for courts to conduct permanency hearings is changing. Permanency hearings will now be held every 60 days for children under three who have been adjudicated as abused or neglected and every 120 days for children over three who have been adjudicated as abused or neglected. Mississippi Senate Bill 2792 defined that timeline change for the Mississippi Youth Courts. The legislative action was amended to prevent cases from languishing and to move the child(ren) from permanency faster.

Through the case review process, the case reviewers assess court orders that are entered into the MYCIDS system by the court, MACWIS and the hard case file in the county of responsibility.

Court data is not consistently collected and kept statewide, therefore, there are concerns

about data quality and availability that affect the state’s ability to report performance accurately in this area. To address this concern, MDCPS has requested that a hearing button be added to MACWIS to ensure timely hearings are requested by the agency.

MDCPS has and continues to collaborate with the AOC (Administrative Office of Courts), the Jurists in Residence, and local youth court judges in sharing data around timely hearings. Improving collaboration with courts that supports effective practice and timely permanency is addressed in Goal 5 of the CFSR PIP. See the table in Item 21 for results from qualitative reviews conducted by the foster care review staff for Olivia Y. reporting. The MSA 6.4.a report is utilized to ensure that all children in state custody receive a timely periodic review. The report is reviewed quarterly to correctly identify the percentage of children overdue for a review due to potential reporting or reviewer data entry errors. MYCIDS court orders are reviewed for those children identified as overdue (the review was not held prior to 6 months) to determine if a review court hearing was held in between the 6-month administrative review. This is a standard workflow process for the Foster Care Review Unit. Federal requirements expect an administrative review to be held within every six months. Mississippi Youth Court Law sets the same expectation. The MSA requires additional data collection. Therefore, workflow process attempts to meet all requirements / data collection in this efficient method. The data below represents the percentage of children due for a 6-month review in each MSA quarter and the review was held timely. This is MSA item 6.4.b.2 and every child in foster care receives a review within a 6 month timeframe.

Reporting Period	Reasonable Steps to Ensure a Permanency Hearing
Q2 2023 (April 2023 - June 2023)	96.4%
Q3 2023 (July 2023 - September 2023)	98.7%
Q4 2023 (October 2023 - December 2023)	98.5%
Q1 2024 (January 2024 – March 2024)	96.5%

Case Review System, Item 23: Termination of Parental Rights

MDCPS agrees with the CFSR rating for this item as an area needing improvement. The Office of Permanency conducted a qualitative review for the period of January 1 – December 31, 2023. Results from this review found that 31% of the applicable cases rated a complaint (674 children with timely TPR referrals or timely ASFA documentation out of 2,207 children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in care prior to or during the calendar years 2022 and 2023). It was noted that MDPCS requires much needed improvement in filing timely TPR referrals and notating initial/subsequent ASFA exceptions.

- TPR Referrals for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2022– 6.3.b.2
281 Timely TPR Referrals (Numerator)/1,079 Total Population (Denominator)
- TPR Referrals for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2023– 6.3.b.2
297 Timely TPR Referrals (Numerator)/1,128 Total Population (Denominator)
- ASFA Exceptions for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2022–
6.3.b.2 - 66 Valid ASFA Exceptions (Numerator)/1,079 Total Population (Denominator)
- ASFA Exceptions for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2023 –
6.3.b.2 - 30 Valid ASFA Exceptions (Numerator)/1,128 Total Population (Denominator)

The method of analysis was related to provision 6.3.b.2. A termination of parental rights (TPR) referral shall be made on behalf of a child before the child has spent more than 15 of the most recent 22 months in foster care unless an available exception pursuant to the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) has been documented by MDCPS in the child's case record. After the initial ASFA exception, MDCPS may continue the exception for only one additional six-month period unless continued invocation of the exception is reviewed, approved, and documented semi-annually by the RD assigned to the county of responsibility for the child.

This quality assurance process has been established within the permanency support unit as part of the Olivia Y. CQI plan to ensure proper tracking, reporting and accountability to this provision. MDCPS details a process of leveraging timely termination of parental rights through court engagement and collaboration to ensure timely permanency for all children in care in the CFSR PIP.

The data presented was collected from MACWIS by the Data Reporting Unit and analyzed by the Office of Permanency.

The barriers and compelling reasons observed for not filing/referring a TPR packet to the AG's office in a timely manner include: (1) the county not submitting the packet to State office in a timely manner; or (2) a TPR packet may contain deficiencies that must be corrected on the county level before the packet can be referred to the AG's office.

A process is being built within the new Pathways system that will trigger alerts at certain parts of the TPR process for the reviewing and tracking of timely TPR packet submission and/or ASFA exceptions. The Office of Permanency is working through policy and procedure revisions that are intended to improve the timeliness and accuracy of the TPR and ASFA Exception process.

Case Review System, Item 24: Notice of Hearings and Reviews to Caregivers. Is the case

review system is functioning to ensure that foster parents, pre-adoptive parents, and relative caregivers of children in foster care are notified of, and have a right to be heard in, any review or hearing held with respect to the child? The case reviewer assesses MACWIS> Court Tab> Legal History> Select Current Custody line> County Conference tab> select current County Conference> Invitation Letter> review list of invitees and compare to Placement tab. All invitees are recorded in the MSA 6.4.a data question noted below.

Barriers include courts sending invitations of upcoming dates; courts not having updated information for child(ren) – invitations are mailed to the previous caregiver. MDCPS workers usually inform caregivers of upcoming court dates or print an unofficial letter. A way to address these barriers would be to add a character in the Court tab that allows MDCPS to print letters and invite important case members to court (*like how the county conference letters are selected, printed, and mailed*).

In Pathways, MDCPS Specialists will be able to select persons to invite to the county conference, and the Foster Care Reviewer will be able to record persons that attended the conference. Pathways will generate the invitations for county conference as a PDF that can then be mailed or emailed to the person being invited.

Currently, there is not a plan in Pathways for generating notices/invitations to case participants of upcoming court hearings. The court dockets are set in MYCIDS, not in Pathways. We are working with the courts on building an interface with MYCIDS and hope to be able to receive information about the court schedule/docket as part of that interface. If we can receive court schedule/docket information from MYCIDS, we could evaluate sending invitations/notices of court hearings as a possible future enhancement to Pathways.

Information collected during interviews with stakeholders during the CFSR, showed that caregivers are not routinely notified of reviews and court hearings, and that their right to be heard in these proceedings is not always guaranteed. Stakeholders reported that practice varies across the state and that in some jurisdictions, caregivers are not allowed to remain in the courtroom or offer information during hearings. Due to these reasons, Item 24 is an area needing improvement.

The table below shows results from qualitative reviews conducted by the foster care review staff for Olivia Y. reporting. The method of analysis was related to provision 6.4.a. A child's permanency plan shall be reviewed in a court or administrative case review at least every six months. Foster care reviews (FCR) shall satisfy this administrative case review requirement.

The County Conference invitation letter includes a space at the bottom for the invitee to respond and let their comments be heard during the county conference if they are unable to be there in person or via phone/conference line.

MDCPS will take all reasonable steps, including written notice, to ensure the participation of the child, parents, caregivers, and relevant professionals in court or administrative reviews. MDCPS has begun developing plans for improving notifications to parents, foster parents, and others. It should be noted that the County Conference invitation letter is not simply notice of a hearing, but it is also an invitation to attend and participate. If a person is unable to be there in-person arrangements for teleconference or phone are available. If attendance is not possible, the bottom of the invitation provides space for their input; their comments are returned to the agency. The MDCPS will evaluate opportunities to collect data to identify the percentage of foster parents attending the hearings in an effective way. See the table below for results of the foster care review performance for the periods covered in this update: MDCPS began collecting the data by participant in 2020 and that information was included in each quarterly report submission. Also, the report data for each quarter submission from the MSA Quality Case Review Summaries report (the methodology to obtain the data is included on that can be found below.

Foster Care Review Results for Reasonable Steps* to Ensure Participation Reasonable steps include written notice, for participation in FCR	
Reporting Period	% Invited to Participate in FCR, by role
Q2 2023 (April 2023-June 2023)	• 78.8% - Mother invited • 79.1% - Father invited • 79.5% - Child invited • 75.1% - GAL invited • 75.9% - Caretakers invited • 100% - Relevant Professionals invited. • 64.8% - All relevant parties invited
Q3 2023 (July 2023- September 2023)	• 77.4% - Mother invited • 76.5% - Father invited • 77.5% - Child invited • 72.7% - GAL invited • 72.3% - Caretakers invited • 100% - Relevant Professionals invited • 64% - All relevant parties invited

Foster Care Review Results for Reasonable Steps* to Ensure Participation Reasonable steps include written notice, for participation in FCR	
Reporting Period	% Invited to Participate in FCR, by role
Q4 2023 (October 2023- December 2023)	• 80% - Mother invited • 80% - Father invited • 77.3% - Child invited • 76% - GAL invited • 77.2% - Caretakers invited • 100% - Relevant Professionals invite • 68.2% - All relevant parties invited
Q1 2024 (January 2024 – March 2024)	• 83.5% - Mother invited • 82.2% - Father invited • 82% - Child invited • 78.9% - GAL invited • 81.2% - Caretakers invited • 100% - Relevant Professionals invite • 71.3% - All relevant parties invited

Quality Assurance System

Item 25: Quality Assurance System. How well is the quality assurance system functioning statewide to ensure that it is (1) operating in the jurisdictions where the services included in the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are provided, (2) has standards to evaluate the quality of services (including standards to ensure that children in foster care are provided quality services that protect their health and safety), (3) identifies strengths and needs of the service delivery system, (4) provides relevant reports, and (5) evaluates implemented program improvement measures?

The Technical Assistance Unit was developed as a support to Service Areas to assist in addressing practice indicators where opportunities for improvement are identified. The SAP Documentation learning labs were revamped and reimplemented by the Technical Assistance Unit during the PUR. ADC's and Managers are able to complete a referral form on SharePoint to request assistance from the TA unit. Two strategic meetings were held within each Region. A focus on each training provides details on how to assess the safety and well-being of families as well as how to document using the SAP format to capture the assessment of visit.

The program's ongoing activities will include case reviews, collection of data, analysis, reporting and training. Our goals are to provide reliable, comprehensive data from the case reviews that can be used to inform agency leadership and offer insight into needed revisions

in policy, practice, procedures, training as well as offering a venue to measure success. Service Area Reviews include 30 cases per Service Area. FCR reviews every child in custody every 5 months that the child remains in custody (prior to or within every 6 months), Safety Reviews are conducted on all maltreatment in care investigations and screen outs and a large percentage of regular ANE investigations and screen outs. The Congregate Care Unit is no longer apart of the CQI Unit. However, Congregate Care reviews every provider at a minimum annually and monthly assessments are conducted with all employees, resource parents and children served by congregate care providers.

Meetings are held after each Service Area Review, so each Service Area Review has a meeting at a minimum once a year. Reports are submitted to each Assistant Deputy Commissioner and Social Service Manager monthly and a report is provided to each Supervisor after each FCR. Every FCR/county conference offers an opportunity for a meeting to discuss the case and any questions. Also, the CQI Unit revised the Case Staffing Tool and created a Documentation Framework for all field staff to utilize to capture quality documentation. The Technical Assistance unit completed SAP refresher or introductory course to all staff as mentioned up above.

Challenges include conducting a 100% review of all children and collecting a large amount of information results in difficulty determining priority. The case review unit has been viewed as CQI, however, CQI is a concept that belongs to the entire agency and begins with performance review of each worker. The case review unit has long been required to carry out CQI activities but because that data collection and analysis belonged to that unit, it diminishes the sense of urgency and ownership at the field level to enter data correctly, analyze the data or to take corrective action steps to strengthen or improve case deficiencies. However, the Leadership Team will hold meetings in the future to break down the Quality Case Review Unit and how all units are a part of CQI.

A lot of data is collected on families and children from the case reviews. These reviews provide information that is analyzed across every Region and every county. The reviews produce specific data for different requests such as MSA reporting, corrective actions, data quality and case practice. The results are analyzed based on several factors such as length of time in care, type of permanent plan, age of child, etc. This analysis offers opportunities to provide feedback regarding consistency of practice across the state. Review results can be analyzed Regionally or by county as well. Timely Permanency, comprehensive assessments and provision of needed services are a focus of the qualitative reviews. Information is shared with leadership to provide a feedback loop that informs initiatives, policy, training, and practice.

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of time in care, type of permanent plan, age of child, etc. This analysis offers opportunities to provide feedback regarding consistency of practice across the state. Review results can be analyzed Regionally or by county as well. Timely Permanency, comprehensive assessments and provision of needed services are a focus of the qualitative reviews. Information is shared with leadership to provide a feedback loop that informs initiatives, policy, training, and practice.

During the CFSR, Round 3, Mississippi received an overall rating of Strength for Item 25: Quality Assurance System. Since 2018, MDCPS has continued to implement improvement strategies, further strengthening the quality assurance system.

In July 2018, the Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services reorganized its agency structure to align skills and resources to the work required for CQI activities. What was previously known as the Foster Care Review unit and the Evaluation and Monitoring unit were consolidated into the Quality Case Review unit. In 2019 the Safety Review Unit and Congregate Care Unit were also consolidated under the same structure. However, in 2023, Congregate Care was moved under the leadership with the Licensure Unit. This arrangement increases staff capacity to perform the functions of quality case reviews with consistency and integrity of the process.

The Quality Case Review Unit is comprised of approximately fifty staff who conduct various case reviews, including:

- **Foster Care Reviews:** The Foster Care Review is conducted for every child in foster care six months and every six months thereafter. Additional details on this process are found under Item 21.
- **Safety Reviews:** A case review is conducted for every investigation that includes a child in foster care to monitor the quality of the investigation. This process was developed in response to the MSA. Throughout the year, the Safety Review Team also reviews a percentage of other in-home maltreatment investigations.
- **Service Area Reviews:** The Service Area Reviews are conducted in every region throughout the state using the federal On-Site Review Instrument (OSRI) and provide performance information that is the primary driver for Regional Action Plans. The QA process described in this Item focuses predominately on these Regional Reviews.

The case review unit has been viewed as CQI, however, CQI is a concept that belongs to the entire agency and begins with performance review of each worker. The case review unit has long been required to carry out CQI activities but because that data collection and analysis belonged to that unit, it diminishes the sense of urgency and ownership at the field level to enter data correctly, analyze the data or to take corrective action steps to strengthen or improve case deficiencies. However, the Leadership Team will hold meetings in the future to break down the Quality Case Review Unit and how all units are a part of CQI.



Although CQI is an identified program unit, its activities and processes are intentionally embedded throughout the fabric of the agency in collaboration with and, in some instances, led by other program units. There is a myriad of performance reviews that occur a part of the MSA, foster parent licensure reviews, and more than seventy quantitative data reports that track agency performance (CORE Reports). CORE, MDCPS' Central Online Reporting Environment consists of reports that are primarily built around the MSA requirements, and many of them loosely align with several of the CFSR Items discussed in this section. However, MDCPS has identified opportunities to improve the quality of the data that feeds CORE Reports, and on the use/analysis of quantitative data. MDCPS will focus on improving data quality, management, and literacy throughout the implementation of this CFSP/APSR, and as such, the CORE Reports will likely be revised. As MDCPS develops a fully functioning CQI Team, a significant focus will be on quality data collection and analysis. Additional information about the development and use of data is provided in Section V (Quality Assurance) and will also be included in the next submission of the MDCPS Data Quality Plan.

Additional insight into case practice is acquired from case-specific interviews with key individuals; if interviews can't be arranged, the case is eliminated. Key case-specific individuals include the child(ren) (when they are age and developmentally appropriate), parents, caregiver/foster care provider, the caseworker or supervisor, and, when possible, other service providers, or the attorney for the child (Guardian Ad Litem). The information provided by interviewees provides MDCPS with key insight into practice that may not be thoroughly represented in the written case record.

Currently, the case review sample is a random representation of children and families receiving foster care and in-home services through MDCPS. MDCPS continually seeks opportunities to improve the case review process and will be reviewing the guidelines for sampling to ensure that it reflects regional demographics, including proportional racial and ethnic representation.

When fully staffed, Service Area Review Unit has one administrative support person, nine dedicated reviewers, and two supervisors. To ensure that practice is assessed uniformly among the team members, staff participate in monthly training sessions to discuss and clarify questions related to the interpretation of the meaning of particular case review questions, variation in reviewer's ratings, and trends in findings. Consistency among case reviewers is achieved by a series of quality control procedures. Each case that is reviewed undergoes two levels of quality control reviews.

The results from case reviews are used to drive improvement efforts throughout the State. A

case review item is rated as a strength when 90% of the cases that were reviewed are found to be substantially achieved. Case review findings, including strengths and areas needing improvement are compiled and shared internally. Throughout the upcoming planning year, MDCPS will identify opportunities to share the case review findings with key external stakeholders; internal and external stakeholder CQI-focused groups are found in Section IV, Quality Assurance.

- There are several improvement opportunities for the QA case review process that will be addressed in the upcoming APSR planning year.
- Quality Case Review Staff are strategically assigned to support and provide feedback to regions statewide during the Regional Action Plan meetings ongoing for each of the region's yearly cycle. The plan for improvement is to change RAP facilitation approaches with the regions to be qualitative, solution focused discussions looking at the region's current CORE reports that are comparable to practice items rated for PIP measurement (strategic comparison of quantitative and qualitative Agency data). The RAP facilitation will also be regionally led to strengthen the understanding of regional dynamics that impact the quality of services and local practice. While facilitating, MDCPS staff will attempt to identify interventions used with family systems or possibly what is needed by frontline staff to improve practice efforts and family outcomes.
- The methodology for identifying the sample of case to be reviewed will be addressed.
- Other CQI-related improvement strategies are located within Section IV: Quality Assurance.

Staff and Provider Training

Item 26: Initial Staff Training. How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that initial training is provided to all staff who deliver services pursuant to the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) that includes the basic skills and knowledge required for their positions? The system is currently functioning well, and MDCPS has improved since last year. Beginning in 2024, MDCPS began migrating from online pre-service training to in-person training sessions. The training schedule is included in the attachments. Weeks 2, 4, 6, and 8 are the in-person weeks for the training. The first in-person week was the week of January 8th -12th.

This decision is based on our commitment to enhancing the learning experience for our team members. In-person training provides opportunities for increased engagement, collaboration, and hands-on learning that we believe will further strengthen our workforce. We understand that this shift may require adjustments, and we are committed to providing the necessary support and resources to facilitate a smooth transition. For now, the training is being held at the State Office.

Professional Development Services completed three new hire training classes. Additionally, with the new curriculum for the Supervisor training, the name was changed from Clinical Supervisor Training (CST) to Developing Effective & Accountable Leaders (DEAL). In doing so, the team facilitated a pilot group of supervisors within the agency to obtain feedback before introducing the new curriculum. Based on feedback, small tweaks were made. Professional Development Services facilitated the new curriculum during February 2024. Professional Development Services also delivered contract training for Investigation and In-home services. Mandatory training was also provided to the administrators/principals of the Jackson Public School district. The program continues to deliver all new hire training, along with Supervisor training for individuals promoted to a supervisory position who serve in a case carrying role. The team also developed a one week intensive to address the training needs for both In-home and Investigation contract staff. The team delivered two-day intensive Investigations training that now includes a 2-hour delivery of Human Traffic basics. PDS also initiated a new process of having our interns participate in new hire training. This is in collaboration with the Mississippi Academic Pathways (MAP); a partnership with the eight public universities in Mississippi. MDCPS Foundational Development will assist in a rewrite of new hire training to include content for all disciplines and not case carrying only.

The team is in the process of rewriting and rebranding the Clinical Supervisor training to focus more on leadership, trauma, grief, self-care and diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging and specific frameworks (Kadushin model), with planned implementation in February 2024. The team will continue with new hire training, Supervisor training and development, contract training, 18-month follow up for all new hires and will begin restructuring new hire training to be job specific development for the specific work (training specific for Safety-Investigations; training specific for In-home and Out of Home Care, Licensure, etc.); training for MCIA-call center and Investigations 2-day Intensive with HT component. Future goals include:

- Completion of rewriting the Clinical Supervisor training and renaming/rebranding it to DEAL (Developing Effective & Accountable Leaders).
- Offering multi-site contract training and multi-site Safety/Investigations training to deliver the training in proximity to the community.
- Developing a two-to-three-day Intensive for case carrying supervisors (March 2024)
- Non-violent crisis intervention training (May 2024)
- TBRI-Trust Based Relational Intervention (June 2024)
- Stewards of Children/Darkness to Light-Child Sexual Abuse (October 2024)
- Offer additional professional development experiences from external collaborations including:
 - Motivational Interviewing

- Certified Trauma Professional/Clinical Certified Trauma Professional
- Accenture Virtual Reality AVEnues; MDCPS had several meetings with a demonstration onsite June 3, 2024
- Stewards of Children: MDCPS will participate in their train-the trainer for their child sexual abuse program, Darkness2Light
- National Human Trafficking Technical Assistance Center-Train the Trainer (Q1, 2025)
- FFPSA training once plan is accepted
- Enhance our statewide training calendar for agency use (Q1, 2025)
- Mississippi Department of Public Safety & MDCPS-Interdiction training (Q1, 2025)

Professional Development participated in the Hope Summit (August 30, 2023), sponsored by Hope Rising MS as a collaboration with legislative officials, the courts, and community providers/stakeholders. The Summit aimed to spread the framework of Hope across Mississippi, with leading voices in their fields. Our program welcomed other partnerships and collaboration:

- The University of Southern Mississippi School of Social Work (Center for Human Traffick and Research)
- The University of Mississippi Medical Center (TEACH ECHO) for ongoing Mandated Reporter training.
- University of Southern MS virtual house collaboration for minimum facts interviewing.
- Crisis Prevention Institute-evaluating opportunity to enter a partnership for them to deliver a train the trainer for MDCPS staff and providers.
- Mississippi Academic Pathways (MAP), a partnership with the eight public universities in Mississippi. This collaboration initiated a new process of having our interns participate in new-hire training.
- The program had several meetings with Accenture Virtual Learning and an onsite demonstration on June 3, 2024.
- Stewards of Children: MDCPS will participate in their train-the-trainer for their child sexual abuse program, Darkness2Light.

Professional Development incorporated a section in the DEAL (Developing Effective & Accountable Leaders) training on (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging). The program will include content in the rewrite of the new hire development program formally called pre-service/OJT. Data regarding the number of individuals trained will be available once new content is incorporated. The program will continue refining our training content and collaborate with external partners for additional insights on how to have meaningful training content that addresses equity for all. The Professional Development Director initiated communication with Big Brothers Big Sisters of MS who has an outreach/community

education team that works with local partners regarding DEIB. We anticipate further engagement in Quarter 1, 2025. Professional Development Services will assess how to collect data to show equity regarding training delivered to support more education and awareness about equity.

The challenge for our program remains the expressed need for training while building capacity. Our method to address this is to broaden our reach through internal collaborations with other program areas who will also go through some of the train-the-trainer sessions. This will allow us to leverage internal resources to support the training needs. We are still working on our priority list and will identify a Big 5 as a strategy. Upon execution and completion of the Big 5, then we will reassess the priority list. We feel there were no barriers that prevented the program from achieving compliance requirements as our team has expanded to 46 trainers statewide with five Managers providing direct oversight and the Director supporting strategic initiatives and services. However, we advocated for and was approved to bring on board additional support personnel to assist with managing the day-to-day operations of our Learning Management System (Cornerstone), along with support for logistics as it relates to in-person training (identifying appropriate training sites, coordinating hotel accommodations, and all day to day follow up with the new hire training process).

Item 27: On-going Staff Training. How well is the staff and provider training system functioning statewide to ensure that ongoing training is provided for staff that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to the services included in the CFSP? MDCPS continues with new hire training, Supervisor training, and development, contract training, 18-month follow-up for all new hires and will begin restructuring new hire training to be job-specific development for the specific work (training specific for Safety-Investigations; training specific for In-home and Out of Home Care, Licensure, etc.); training for MCIA-call center; and Investigations 2-day Intensive with HT component.

Ongoing Staff Training – Internal

- Investigations and Human Traffic training that is currently offered for all Investigations team members within the agency.
- Development of new Supervisor training, contract training ongoing as needed, 18-month follow up for all new hires and will begin restructuring new hire training to be job specific development for the specific work (training specific for Safety-Investigations; training specific for In-home and Out of Home Care, Licensure, etc.); training for MCIA-call center.
- Development of a five-day Intensive for case carrying supervisors as part of the new supervisor program DEAL (Developing Effective & Accountable Leaders). The first cohort was delivered during Q4 of the reporting period.
- Graduated Caseloads-Professional Development anticipates roll out graduated caseloads

statewide in Q1, 2025

Ongoing Staff Training – External Collaborations

- TBRI-Trust Based Relational Intervention: Train the trainer Q4 2024; agency implementation Q3 2025
- Non-violent crisis intervention training; Train the Trainer July 2024; agency implementation Q2 2025
- Darkness to Light/Stewards of Children-Child Sexual Abuse;
- Agency Implementation-Q2 2025
- Train the trainer (self-paced learning) Implementation (self-paced training) / June-August 2024 / Implementation Q2 2025
- Mississippi Academic Pathways (MAP): MDCPS is actively engaged in several evaluation and research activities in partnership with the eight state-funded universities through the MAP initiative. These activities are strategically aligned to support and enhance the goals and objectives outlined in our comprehensive plan for child welfare services.

In 2023, Professional Development Services (PDS) made significant changes to its supervisor training program, transitioning from a one-week training to a three-part, 8-month program. This program includes two forty-hour, in-person instructional courses. The first course (Part I) focuses on leadership and coaching, designed for all leaders in the agency, while the second course (Part II) is job-specific, focusing on investigations and well-being and permanency, Part III consist of a cycle of 5 topics to be delivered to the cohort within their practice environment in small groups: with a graduation ceremony at the conclusion of the program. PDS also developed curriculum to support a one-week intensive training for contract staff, In-home and later Investigations.

PDS was also tasked with developing a process to implement graduated caseloads, which was piloted in Lauderdale County. The statewide rollout of this process began in the Spring of 2024.

Additionally, in 2023, PDS partnered with the School of Social Work at the University of Southern Mississippi to collaborate on training specifically for human trafficking. This training is now part of a 2-day intensive investigation training. The Center for Human Trafficking and Research and Training, housed within the School of Social Work at the University of Southern MS, in partnership with Kidz Hub Child Advocacy Center created a minimal fact interviewing video for MDCPS training purposes.

Looking ahead to 2024, PDS has several collaborations underway, including Trust Based Relational Intervention (TBRI) train the trainer, Darkness2Light (Stewards of Children) train the trainer, Accenture virtual reality (train the trainer), USM/NHATTC train the trainer, a rewrite of the new hire training, CPI, YIPA (Youth Intervention Programs Association).



Other upcoming training initiatives include Certified Clinical Trauma Professionalism, Certified Trauma Professional, FFPSA. PDS is also gearing up for the train the trainer of Pathways training, which will then be delivered to agency staff over eight weeks. To promote enhanced service delivery, PDS is partnering with both internal and external partners for curriculum consultation and development.

In addition to on-going staff training, MDCPS recognizes that on-going staff morale is critical to supporting workforce well-being, which in turn, is expected to be more prepared to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

MDCPS has implemented several projects and areas of focus to improve training strategies and activities that address our workforce and staffing needs:

- MDCPS announced a partnership with Esper in December 2023. Esper is an online collaborative platform that allows MDCPS staff to browse, search, view policies, procedures, forms and other references. All agency policies and procedures are being moved from SharePoint. Staff receive an email notice stating what has been updated and posted to the library as updates, new policies, procedures, forms and references are completed and approved.
- Motivational Mavericks (MM) was created to establish and maintain a happy workforce and a positive agency culture. Promotional products are sold to assist with funding morale-boosting activities. The product line has been expanded to include tumblers and cardigans in addition to T-shirts. The activities are meant to be permanently integrated into the agency culture. Staff are encouraged to share honest feedback through one-on-one dialogue with a MM team member or by sending an email to motivationalmavericks@mdcps.ms.gov.

Workforce Wellbeing (WWB) Unit

- The WWB Unit started off 2024 with a video introducing the team members and notifying staff to expect a monthly video message highlighting topics covered on the ComPsych website. The videos are meant to empower employees with health education and lifestyle skills that enable them to achieve their best possible health, positively affect employee morale and job satisfaction, and optimize performance and productivity.
- The *Employee Connection* tab, <https://www.mdcps.ms.gov/employee-connection>, was created by the Workforce Wellbeing Unit to support the agency efforts to better serve MDCPS staff by providing the resources necessary for creating a healthy workplace culture. The agency considers its workers' well-being and works to support well-being holistically: through mind, body, finances, purpose, growth, and inclusion. By integrating these well-being components into the workplace, MDCPS helps workers feel their best and perform at their best, ensuring that Mississippi families thrive.
 - Condolences and Support was established to support staff during moments of pain, loss, and grief. Supervisors are encouraged to make the Workforce Wellbeing and

Leadership Teams aware of an employee death or death in an employee's immediate family (spouse, parent, stepparent, sibling, child [biological, adopted, foster child, or a child where the employee acted as a parent], stepchild, grandchild, grandparent, son-in-law, daughter-in-law, mother-in-law, father-in-law, brother-in-law, or sister-in-law) by completing a form via a bereavement link.

- Wellbeing Resources, by way of the Employee Assistance Program (EAP), provides each employee of MDCPS with local in-person or tele-behavioral health assessment, short term counseling services (up to 10 sessions, per issue per employee/family member per year), referral services, educational materials, and community resource referrals to supplement EAP counseling. Our current provider is ComPsych. The EAP program offers MDCPS employees confidential assistance for issues including, but not limited to, stress, burn-out, trauma exposure, secondary trauma or compassion fatigue, work/life balance, marital/family problems, substance or process disorders, addictions, anxiety, depression, grief, etc.
- 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a collaboration with the Mississippi Department of Health. MDCPS staff can call, text, or chat 988 to be connected to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (NSPL). It will be confidential, free, and available 24/7/365. 988 offers 24/7 access to trained crisis counselors who can help people experiencing mental health-related distress. That could be thoughts of suicide, mental health or substance use crisis, or any other kind of emotional distress. MDCPS staff can call or text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org for themselves or if they are worried about a loved one who may need crisis support. 988 serves as a universal entry point so that no matter where you live in the United States, you can reach a trained crisis counselor who can help.
- MDCPS continues to utilize annual conferences to bring together staff around priorities and promote collaboration within the Mississippi child welfare system. Initial parameters of the *2023 Forward Together Conference* included hosting agency employees in each of the northern, central, and southern regions (Natchez, Southaven, Meridian) of Mississippi from September – November 2023. To support as many opportunities for participation as possible, the conference was extended to include optional virtual attendance. The structure of the conference was to include large general sessions for a greater sense of togetherness.

The anticipated outcome was to create opportunities for a wider range of employees to engage with one another, receive information and educational opportunities. The total number of staff that attended the 2023 conference is 1,153.

Presentations:

- ❖ Commissioner Sanders: Agency Priorities, Successes, Ongoing Initiatives
- ❖ Christopher Rand, MDCPS Inspector General: Pathway to Employee Wellbeing



- ❖ Assistant Deputy Commissioners: Success Stories
- ❖ Dr. Rick Morton: Upside Down Leadership
- ❖ Breakout Sessions:
 - Health & Wellness in the Workplace: Strategies for Success
 - The Stress-Obesity-Illness Connection – Allison Nooe
 - Prioritize Mental Health – Angela Adams, LMSW
 - An Ethical Guide to Self-care – Patricia Digby, LMSW
 - Leadership – Empowering Change
 - Effective Leaders: Consensus or Change Maker – Angela Adams, LMSW and Patricia Digby, LMSW
 - Just Keep Giving – Janie Walters
 - Leading Change – Dr. Rick Morton
 - Leading & Shaping Organizational Culture
 - Leading Through Change – Misty McGaugh, LMSW and Britany Binkowski, J.D.
 - Leading the Path Forward – David Barton and Mark Williamson
 - Less is More: Addressing Initiative Fatigue – Misty McGaugh, LMSW and Britany Binkowski, J.D.
- ❖ Benefits – Public Employees’ Retirement System and Mississippi Deferred Comp
- ❖ Normal is Gone and it Won’t Be Back – Janie Walters
- ❖ Courtroom Interaction & Etiquette – Honorable Staci S. Bevil
- ❖ The Unspoken Language – Devon Loggins, Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports

MDCPS will continue to actively listen to the feedback and concerns expressed by staff and develop strategies and activities to address the needs of the workforce. MDCPS believes that by meeting our employees where they are and providing employees with a supportive and encouraging workplace environment, employee retention can be increase, the workforce will stabilize and engagement with children and families will improve.

Professional Development delivers training to over 1,500 MDCPS employees. A primary challenge remains the expressed need for training while building capacity. Our method to address is to broaden our reach through internal collaborations with other program areas who will also go through some of the train the trainer sessions. This will allow us to leverage internal resources to support the training needs. We are still working on our priority list and will identify a big 5 as a strategy. Upon execution and completion of the big 5, then we will reassess the priority list.

Item 28: Foster and Adoptive Training. How well is the staff and provider training system

functioning to ensure that training is occurring statewide for current or prospective foster parents, adoptive parents, and staff of state-licensed or approved facilities (that care for children receiving foster care or adoption assistance under title IV E) that addresses the skills and knowledge needed to carry out their duties with regard to foster and adopted children?

Foster Parent Orientation is conducted weekly by the Foster Parent Recruitment Unit and it is conducted virtually with foster parent applicants. Pre-Service Training is provided after MDCPS has received an application and conducted a walk-through of the home along with background checks. Foster Parent Training is conducted both in-person and online through a Cornerstone portal, named Parental Roles in Establishing Permanency (P.R.E.P.). The Licensure Unit Specialists and Supervisors provide in-person training. Foster parent applicants must complete all required training components to meet licensing requirements.

Once licensed, foster parents must complete 10 hours of ongoing training every year, five hours must be in-person training and five hours can be completed online. When the annual training hours are completed, the foster parents meet the two-year re-evaluation requirements for twenty hours of on-going training, with ten hours of in-person training. In-person training hours are available through monthly Foster Support Groups, agency approved trainings conducted by Licensure specialists/supervisors, agency approved community trainings, and agency approved conferences

For the current reporting period, July 1, 2023 - May 31, 2024, (250 non-relative homes were approved; 342 relative homes were approved). All these families were trained.

MDCPS contracts with Foster Parent College (Fosterparentcollege.com) and Foster Care & Adoptive Community, Inc. (FosterParents.com) to provide online and ongoing training opportunities to foster parents. All foster families have access to complete free educational training online. Training topics with both companies include positive discipline, conflict resolution, creating a healing environment for our children, anger management, eating disorders, sleep disorders, runaways, Reactive Attachment Disorder, sex trafficking, mental illness, problematic sexualized behaviors, lying, self-harming, fire play, Autism and a variety of many more.

MDCPS is charged with developing and maintaining Foster Support Groups that meet monthly. An agenda is developed for each meeting, but the meeting also acts as a support system and a place where foster parents can discuss questions, concerns, and issues.

MDCPS is charged with the monitoring of private partners who also have the mandate that staff and foster parents are providing with ongoing training and foster parent are provided with opportunities to participate in support groups.

Service Array and Resource Development



Item 29: Array of Services. How well is the service array and resource development system functioning to ensure that the following array of services is accessible in all political jurisdictions covered by the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP)?

A needs assessment was conducted amongst MDCPS Staff to determine the services needed in various areas. MDCPS advertised an RFP to solicit the various suggested services statewide to procure for community-based services geared towards primary and secondary prevention. Many of these services have been added through current grantees. Additionally, Intercept was added to the array of services for intensive in-home services. Services were to target any child or youth under the age of 18, as well as the child's family.

- Drug rehab/ treatment both in-patient and outpatient
- Respite Care
- Domestic violence
- Homelessness
- Anger management
- Parenting classes (Implementing the Protective Factors)
- Pregnant and/or parenting teen mothers
- Transportation for parents/in home cases
- Free Transportation systems
- Drug testing availability
- Appropriate mental health services including in-patient.
- Services to locate jobs.
- Outreach programs to educate parents on needed items.
- Support systems/mentor programs/peer support
- Services for infants for diapers, wipes, and safe sleep
- Utility assistance for needy families.
- Clothing and food assistance
- Education support services for parents/caregivers
- Mentoring (ex: Fatherhood Engagement, Male and/or Female mentoring)
- Public Awareness (Required)
- Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth will serve the Central counties.
- Health Connect America will serve the Northern counties.
- Starkville Discovery Center will serve counties in the Northeastern part of the state.
- Kinship Navigator will serve the Southern and Central counties.

Health Connect America

Interest meetings in each office were conducted by members of the administrative team. Amory, Jackson, and Senatobia counties were identified as offices with potential new staff members and potential family referrals for FCT.

Staff will have a one-on-one meeting with Supervisors to further discuss role and expectations and begin training if they choose to step into the FCT position. Family



Centered Therapy (FCT) conducted another site visit in August 2023. Additional marketing opportunities with MDCPS offices are being coordinated in hopes of spreading awareness and further gaining referrals. Supervisors will attend a mental health event at Lewisburg High school and market for FCT on October 28, 2024.

FCT supervisor attended and assisted in hosting a Mental Health event at the Byhalia office. MDCPS in Jackson was present and had a table among other vendors from the community. Between staff families and community members, there was an attendance of 106 people. There were eight vendors present that talked about FCT and how Byhalia and Saltillo offices are working to offer new intensive in-home services.

Supervisors participated in the Byhalia office's Thanksgiving basket deliveries the week of thanksgiving and is hopeful that new families can be reached utilizing this time of giving.

Additionally, in-CIRCLE will provide preservation and reunification services and will be discussed later in the report.

1. Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs.
2. Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children to create a safe home environment.
3. Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable; and
4. Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency.

All programs have continued to provide support services to families who have been identified by MDCPS as having the need. Services are provided in the home, face-to-face visits, referral to community-based programs as needed and other support based on the family's need. During this APSR reporting period, the Programs' families received home visits which included therapy sessions, referrals to Alcohol and Drug (A&D) assessments and have attended parenting sessions (Active Parenting Curriculum). To ensure integrity, each parent receives a completion certificate. Concrete needs have been offered to families as needed which may include transportation and other soft and hard supports. Families will continue to be provided with services in the home, face-to-face visits, referral to community-based programs as needed and other support based on the family's need.

The Dorcas program expanded statewide, therefore MDCPS expects the number of families served to increase. There are plans to expand services into the 7th service area of the state within the next year.

Numbers served by each program:

Quarter 1, July – September 2023



- **Dorcas:** There have been 35 referrals, with 88 children and 56 adults served through the program.
- **Intercept:** there have been 127 referrals, with 322 children and 226 adults served through the program.
- **In-CIRCLE (Youth Villages):** There have been 27 referrals, with 72 children and 43 adults served through the program. Beginning October 2023, in-CIRCLE with Youth Villages will be transferred entirely to Intercept Services.
- **In-CIRCLE: Canopy:** There have been 103 referrals, with 234 children and 98 adults served through the program.
- **Health Connect America** - There were 2 referrals, 5 children and 3 adults through Family Centered Therapy.

Quarter 2, October – December 2023

- **Dorcas:** There have been 20 referrals, with 52 children and 28 adults served through the program.
- **Intercept:** there have been 198 referrals, with 462 children and 282 adults served through the program.
- **In-CIRCLE: Canopy:** There have been 94 referrals, with 235 children and 96 adults served through the program.
- **Health Connect America** - There were 9 referrals, 30 children and 12 adults through Family Centered Therapy.

Quarter 3, January – March 2024

- **Dorcas:** There have been 23 referrals, with 64 children and 37 adults served through the program.
- **Intercept:** there have been 217 referrals, with 499 children and 295 adults served through the program.
- **In-CIRCLE: Canopy:** There have been 184 referrals, with 405 children and 200 adults served through the program.
- **Health Connect America** - There were 3 referrals, 11 children and 4 adults through Family Centered Therapy.

Quarter 4, April – June 2024

- **Dorcas:** There have been 24 referrals, with 56 children and 34 adults served through the program.
- **Intercept:** there have been 141 referrals, with 439 children and 282 adults served through the program.
- **In-CIRCLE: Canopy:** There have been 134 referrals, with 401 children and 194 adults served through the program.

A primary challenge is the growing wait list. The list increases as the number of families referred increases. The Prevention Unit is coordinating with the Provider as they will offer triage services to those families on the Wait List which may include Care Coordination Services, and referrals to other services in the community. Staffing concerns are another concern as the number of referrals has increased and the unit is small handling hundreds of referrals per month. Although we have a shortage, our priority is to get the services for the families referred in a timely manner.

To ensure equability across the state for all families served through our various programs, our In-Home Services programs have addressed inequalities in transportation by partnering with Medicaid to cover transportation for those with transportation inadequacies. The program also offers translators for those whose English is a second language, or those who do not speak English. The in-CIRCLE program is also working with the Canopy LINKS program to provide services to clients in rural areas throughout the state.

All demographics on the families are compiled and may include race, ethnicity, etc. The programs have an extension data collection system of demographics which includes race, gender, ethnicity, and other factors to help ensure their program's equality. Families have been identified as minorities, gender based, non-English speaking, etc.

Service array and resource development continues to be areas needing improvement. MDCPS provides services to address the safety and well-being, prevention, permanency, and well-being of families and children through internal service provision and in collaboration with other child and family service providers. Currently MDCPS does not have a system in place that collects information by jurisdiction.

In Pathways, there is more robust functionality for MDCPS Specialists to document referrals to services and service utilizations. There is planned interfaces with CWCAs that will include receiving more detailed data from them about services they provide to referred children and families. (Note: CWCA interface development is expected to extend past initial Go Live of Pathways) Further, in Pathways, service providers will be entered into the system by a centralized unit to reduce duplication of service providers and improve accuracy of information related to services provided by the provider and the area(s) of the state in which they are authorized to provide services. All of this should allow us to provide improved data around services being utilized.

Based on anecdotal information and informal polling of regional directors, service needs vary across the state. It has been consistently noted that there is limited access to services in some of the more rural parts of the state and that there is a growing need for additional adolescent substance abuse programs. The aforementioned factors can cause service gaps. MDCPS currently has statewide coverage for in-home services through two contracted providers. The Prevention

Unit will be exploring evaluations plans and methods of collecting and analyzing data. We have identified many of the services and initiatives below.

1. Services that assess the strengths and needs of children and families and determine other service needs:

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services continues to assess the strengths and needs of children and families through two core formalized assessment tools: CFA and Safety and Risk Assessment. The Safety and Risk Assessment is completed during all open investigations. This tool is used to help assess the safety and risk of children and to determine if ongoing services are needed with the family. If it is determined that ongoing services are needed, the appropriate case type is opened and/or relevant referrals are made for the identified services. When an ongoing service case is opened, the Child and Family Assessments (CFA) are completed. This tool helps to identify areas to be addressed within the family to mitigate harm and/or risk factors and is listed as tasks/goals in the Family Service Plan (FSP). Together the CFAs and FSPs are jointly developed with the family, within 45 days of case opening, and updated every 90 days thereafter for as long as the case remains open. In addition, staff may reach out to other professionals including educators, medical professionals and mental health providers who may be involved with the child and family to gain information when completing an assessment.

2. Services that address the needs of families in addition to individual children to create a safe home environment:

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services uses a Safety Checklist during the initial assessment (investigation) with a family to identify the presence or absence of safety issues within the physical home environment. This tool is used to bring awareness and attention to safety issues such as poisons, fire hazards, drowning hazards, firearm hazards, car safety, general safety (including safe sleep) and other areas within the home that could potentially cause safety concerns. The Safe Sleep protocol was implemented in Fall 2016 with families that had children 18 months and younger. The goal is to identify unsafe sleep situations and assist the family in correcting any unsafe sleep situations as part of prevention of co-sleeping fatalities. such cases of safe sleep issues, the Prevention Unit has budgeted funds to purchase cribs and pack n plays for families. The frontline staff can request assistance utilizing various prevention funds.

For subgrantees through Prevention, surveys are conducted through the grantee for satisfaction and developmental purposes. Grantees use the data to explore options of better serving the community needs.

The safety of each child in the home continues to be individually and collectively assessed during investigations and monthly through ongoing casework. To make reasonable efforts to prevent removal, MDCPS also uses safety plans that allow the agency and families to provide

alternative living arrangements to reduce harm and risk in unsafe living situations for a limited time with the infusion of the supports from service providers.

Effective July 1, 2024, the definition of “reasonable efforts” is being expanded, and the new definition makes it clear that reasonable efforts to prevent removal and reunify families must be individualized and, efforts cannot be required that do not meet the family’s needs.

The definition was changed due to legislative action. It prevents families from enduring activities unrelated to why a child(ren) came to the attention of CPS. For example, having to take drug tests when drugs were not an issue. The expected impact is that fewer children will be removed, and reunification will happen sooner.

The new definition is: “Reasonable efforts” means the exercise of reasonable care and due diligence by the Department of Child Protection Services to use services appropriate to the child's background, accessible, and available to meet the individualized needs of the child and child's family to prevent removal and reunify the family as soon as safely possible consistent with the best interests of the child. Reasonable efforts must be made in collaboration with the family and must address the individualized needs of the family that brought the child to the attention of the Department of Child Protection Services and must not consist of required services that are not related to the family's needs.

3. Services that enable children to remain safely with their parents when reasonable:

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services continues to receive support from local boards of supervisors within all 82 Mississippi counties. The amount of financial support varies from county to county, however. These funds allow counties around the state to provide informal support to children and families. These allocations have been used to meet an array of needs so that children can remain safely in their homes. More specifically, county funds have been used to assist families in the community who are experiencing financial difficulties with paying utilities, food or for housing/rental assistance. In addition, these funds have been used to assist with purchasing furniture such as beds to ensure appropriate sleeping; drug screenings to support the verification that a parent is free of illegal substances; intake fees for assessments at local mental health or outpatient substance abuse clinics as well as other identified family needs as presented. These families may or may not have cases with MDCPS. MDCPS has contracted with Canopy and Youth Villages to provide family preservation and reunification services through our program called In-CIRCLE. There are currently waitlists for in-CIRCLE Services. However, the providers offer care coordination and referral; to other support services until they can fully admit the family into the program. Preservation and Reunification services are provided. Services include crisis management, case management and in-home help that includes individual and family therapy. The DORCAS program is currently available in northern and central Mississippi, by referral, for in home family support services. The Program reduced service areas due to staffing:



<https://www.baptistchildrensvillage.com/locations>. The purpose of the Dorcas In-Home Family Support Program is to provide family-driven, youth guided interventions to improve the stability of enrolled families and their ability to provide adequate care for the children for whom they are responsible. These interventions increase families' access to and utilization of community resources and assistance. The goal is to reduce the likelihood of removal or other disruption of their living arrangement.

The Dorcas Program is available in Regions, I-N, I-W, II-E, II-W, II-N, and III-S which is in the Central and Northern part of the State. This Program through Baptist Children's Villages provides services to families who need support service to maintain their family.

in-CIRCLE is an intensive in-home service designed to prevent removal and maintain children safely in their homes, or if removed, to assist with services to reunify. The purpose of the program is to provide intensive in-home programs that provides family preservation, reunification, and support services program for families with children who are at-risk of out-of-home placement or those currently in out of home placements for reducing time spent in foster care by providing reunification supports and services.

in-CIRCLE is Statewide and offers services to all families regardless of race, color, gender, political, social, or economic status. There is a wait list established for families who are not able to get into the program within 48 hours. There is a triage for those families, and they are contacted by the Provider and Coordinated Care Services are offered to address immediate needs and diffuse crisis. This intake service may include referrals to community-based agencies until the family can be admitted for intensive services. The average number of families on the wait list per month is 42-60. The wait list is no longer than 30 days at which time, families are moved to another Provider who has slots available. Also, within that 30 days, Care Coordination Services are provided which include phone contact, crisis management, referrals, and other soft supports.

It is notable that foster care entry rates in the state have declined over the past five years; they were slightly above the national rate in FY 2017, then dipped slightly below and are currently close to the national rate.

4. Services that help children in foster and adoptive placements achieve permanency:

The Mississippi Department of Child Protection Services understands the importance of finding the most appropriate, family-like placement setting for children and youth who must enter the states' foster care system. Additionally, in order of succession, permanency plans are determined in conjunction with the youth court, and case practice is aligned based on the established plan to aid in achieving permanency. Moreover, families can be referred to In-CIRCLE (reunification) for more intensive family support.

If a child must enter foster care, the agency seeks family or fictive kin first to provide care to the child(ren). These families are afforded the opportunity to become licensed relative foster parents through the expedited licensing process. The training is abridged, to expedite the support offered with being fully licensed and to maintain the child with relatives; hopefully to expedite permanency, but still fully trains the family in providing care for the child(ren).

Parenting and Education classes continued to be held at:

- Born Free/New Beginning Residential Treatment Program
- Harbor House Chemical Dependency Services (includes pregnant women and men)
- Flowood Community Work Center Restitution Center
- The Center for Independence: The Friendship Connection
- Additionally, grantee continues to provide supportive services and parenting education.

Ongoing activities are provided to support coordinated community-based efforts to develop, operate, enhance, and where appropriate to network initiatives aimed at the prevention of child abuse and prevention. To increase community awareness of the protective factors to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Educate community about child abuse and neglect and the impact of trauma on development through public speaking events, media campaigns, and informal information sessions.

MDCPS has an administrative structure (resource unit) that supports each of its fourteen (14) regions that is staffed with licensure specialists, adoption specialists, supervisors, and bureau directors. Their focus is on the recruitment and retention of foster and adoptive parents at the county and state level. All the Resource Unit staff (both Licensure and Adoption) work together to provide recruitment, pre-service training, in-service training, and home studies to license foster/adoptive homes across the state. Adoption Specialists also work with all children/youth in care whose permanent plan is adoption.

When reunification is no longer an option, other permanency options are explored including adoption. MDCPS closely tracks children, when their permanent plan changes to adoption, to ensure that they are achieving permanency timely. Although a manual process, in the fall of 2017, MDCPS identified the children with a plan of adoption and begin tracking them through regional calls to get a status and address barriers known that is preventing the case for moving forward to TPR and adoption. These calls have proven to be effective in getting children to permanency sooner. In SFY 2021, 518 children were permanently connected with a family through adoption.

Item 30: Individualizing Services. How well is the service array and resource development system functioning statewide to ensure that the services in item 29 can be individualized to meet the unique needs of children and families served by the agency?

MDCPS has successfully released two separate Request for Proposals to expand available services to children and families. MDCPS has received responses from the first proposal and has awarded new subgrants. MDCPS is still awaiting responses from the second request. Once all proposals are received, reviewed and providers selected, the Agency will continue work focused on *developing a protocol or assessment for determining the appropriate referral among the pool of in-home services programs* and a manual of in-home services. The in-CIRCLE Program has revised the RFP to include the levels of service. In addition, the agency will offer services such as intensive clinical intervention, individualized behavioral programs, specialized therapeutic care, etc.

Agency Responsiveness to the Community

Item 31: State Engagement and Consultation with Stakeholders Pursuant to CFSP and APSR.

How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that, in implementing the provisions of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) and developing related Annual Progress and Services Reports (APSRs), the state engages in ongoing consultation with Tribal representatives, consumers, service providers, foster care providers, the juvenile court, and other public and private child- and family-serving agencies and includes the major concerns of these representatives in the goals, objectives, and annual updates of the CFSP?

MDCPS rated this item as a “Strength.” The agency continues to engage its stakeholders readily and consistently with its major initiatives, goals, and objectives that are pursuant to the CFSP and APSR. This is done to increase communication, understanding, and collaboration strategies across service systems with the goal of strengthening families and communities. The department continues to meet regularly through monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, annual, and as needed meetings with its stakeholders including the Administrative Office of the Courts, Children Advocacy Centers of Mississippi, Tribal partners, Mississippi Association of Child Caring Agencies, representatives from mental health, education, state universities, and others to discuss the progress and/or barriers to the goals, objectives, interventions identified under the 2020-2024 CFSP. For the development of the state’s APSR, the MDCPS Division of Federal Reporting contacts its stakeholders to request quarterly and periodic updates about any joint initiatives, service delivery information, successes, any perceived barriers, and strategies for improvement. These collaborative efforts are integrated throughout the APSR narrative. MDCPS continues to work towards completing the collaboration efforts identified in the 2020- 2024 CFSP, the periodic updates provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of each strategy. This also serves as an internal/ external feedback loop to ensure that these activities were joint activities, each entity fulfilled their obligations, and initiatives were completed by established target dates. MDCPS also shares the Program Instructions and APSR

with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) and its stakeholders. MDCPS attends quarterly meetings with MBCI and collaborates on cases/issues on an as-needed basis. Members of the tribe are invited to participate in Mississippi's joint planning and other statewide meetings through the Commission on Children's Justice. And these meetings inform the CFSP/APSR to a degree. The MDCPS will continue to strengthen relationships with collaborators to develop a more robust partnership in framing the actual text of the CFSP/APSR.

Item 32: Coordination of CFSP Services with Other Federal Programs. How well is the agency responsiveness to the community system functioning statewide to ensure that the state's services under the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) are coordinated with services or benefits of other federal or federally assisted programs serving the same population?

MDCPS rates this item as a "Strength." MDCPS heavily depends on the coordination and integration of services from its stakeholders to help with the development and revision of its policies and programs that support the agency's vision and mission. MDCPS actively continues to collaborate with other agencies by establishing Memorandum of Understandings (MOU) that strengthens and aid in coordinating services or benefits with other federally assisted programs that serve the same population. A Memorandum of Understanding has maintained its reputability with the Division of Medicaid, Mississippi Department of Human Services, the Office of the Attorney General, Department of Mental Health, the Mississippi Department of Education, the Mississippi Department of Health, Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians and contractual agreements have remained in place with Baptist Children's Village, Mississippi State University, Casey Family Programs, and the University of Mississippi Medical Center. These cooperative arrangements are examples of how the MDCPS is partnering statewide to ensure services, funding, and efforts are not duplicated. MDCPS has updated the current MOU between the agency and the tribe.

The continuation of MDCPS's Joint Planning meeting has also created an avenue for all stakeholders to express any major concerns as well as be involved in agency planning. MDCPS also continues to utilize the Foster Parent Liaison as a means for communicating information with foster parents and lifting their concerns to executive leadership.

The agency currently contracts with the following federally assisted programs that serve children and families:

Provider	Brief Description of Services
Catholic Charities	Provides resettlement services to unaccompanied refugee minors placed in MDCPS custody. The URM program ensures eligible youth receive the full range of assistance, care, and services available to all foster children in MDCPS custody. Some of the services provided are family tracing and reunification, case management, English language training, and education supports. Assists with finding and licensing homes for non-therapeutic children who are legally free for adoption and older. Facilitates the MDCPS Kinship Navigator Program.
Catholic School Services	Provides resettlement services to newly arriving refugees and their families. Services provided include employability services, English language instruction, translation and interpretation, case management, information and referral services, and citizenship and naturalization preparation services.
Canopy (MS Children's Home)	Services provided through the subgrant are In-Home Services focused on assisting children and families improving parenting and family functions.
Jackson Housing Authority (JHA)	Manages Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers for youth in care.
Mississippi Families for Kids (MFFK)	Assists with finding and licensing homes for non-therapeutic children who are legally free for adoption and older, provides case management services for the Wendy's Workforce Development program that employs foster youth.
MS Band of the Choctaw Indians	MDCPS provided pandemic stipends to MBCI youth. Life Skills training will be provided in the upcoming quarter.
Southern Christian Services	Provide services centered program to strengthen area families and improve child, family well-being and reinforce family connections, assists with finding and licensing homes for non-therapeutic children who are legally free for adoption and older, provides post-adoption services including respite, crisis intervention and stabilization, mental health counseling, etc. to families who adopt from foster care, provides support services to youth in the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing program.

Provider	Brief Description of Services
Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District (Project CARE)	Provide services for comprehensive evidence-based child abuse and neglect prevention services via Project Care. Project Care is expected to provide Parenting Skills, Home Visiting, Respite Services, Interactive Activities, Case Management, and Public Awareness Outreach Education on child abuse and neglect prevention with this subgrant for Oktibbeha County residents.
Starkville Oktibbeha Consolidated School District (Parent Café's)	Provide services centered program to strengthen area families and improve child, family well-being and reinforce family connections.
Tennessee Valley Regional Housing Authority (TVRHA)	Manages Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing vouchers for youth in care.
Youth Villages	Services provided through the subgrant are In-Home Services focused on assisting children and families improving parenting and family functions. Provides support services to youth in the Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) housing program.

Foster and Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment, and Retention

Item 33: Standards Applied Equally. How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that state standards are applied to all licensed or approved foster family homes or childcare institutions receiving title IV-B or IV-E funds?

MDCPS is required to license all Expedited Relative homes within 90 days and non-Relative homes within 120 days. Throughout the licensing process, the Licensure Specialist and Supervisor staff the homes weekly and to discuss progress and potential licensing barriers are assessed. Non-Relative Foster Homes cannot be licensed with any policy exceptions. Expedited Relative homes are allowed exceptions to the agency's requirements in two areas:

The relative applicant can be less than 21 years old and 2) the applicant is not required to be legally married or divorced.

MDCPS Relative Foster Home and Non-Relative Foster Home policies are being revised to update the licensing process. The revised Relative Foster Home policy will eliminate the need for exceptions while making the licensing process less restrictive. The revised Relative Foster Home policy has been submitted to the Children's Bureau for review.

The Licensure Unit began utilizing the Structured Analysis Family Evaluation (SAFE) home study format. SAFE is the Consortium for Children's standardized, evidence based, and uniform home study methodology that is used to assess individuals applying to become a kinship care provider, a foster parent, an adoptive parent, and/or a guardianship provider.

SAFE home studies help ensure the children that are placed in MS are in a licensed home. The MDCPS Licensure Unit began implementation with all new expedited home study inquiries received beginning November 1, 2023. The Licensure Unit began the conversion process for all non-SAFE Two-Year Re-evaluations due beginning May 31, 2024. Within the next two years, all existing MDCPS licensed homes will have been converted to a SAFE Home Study. The SAFE Home Study process improves stability and safety of licensed foster homes by identifying barriers and concerns during the licensing process. The Licensure Specialist and Supervisor utilize the mitigation process built into SAFE to assess the identified concerns and barriers to inform decision-making related to the licensing of a home.

Family Based Placement Meetings have been implemented by the Licensure Unit. This began as a pilot program. The purpose of the Family Based Placement Meeting (FBP) is to assure there is continued assessment and action to remove identified barriers to licensing prospective expedited relative, kin/fictive kin, and child-specific homes. It is expected that use of the FBP protocol will resolve child safety or well-being concerns and assure appropriate follow-up actions and documentation of efforts to remove barriers to the licensure process within the 90-day time frame. FBP meetings are not required for every relative, kin/fictive kin, or child-specific placement, rather only for those where an expedited relative home placement has identified barriers to licensure.

Expedited home placements are tracked by the State Office Licensure Unit to assure consistency in addressing safety and non-safety issues and timeliness. The CQI Unit reviews every expedited home within 30 days once an action is taken as part of the third level review process. The Non-Relative homes receive a third level review by the Licensure Managers or designated Licensure Supervisors within 7 days of supervisor approval. At the conclusion of the third level review, the assigned Licensure Specialists and Supervisors are informed of deficiencies and provided with a deadline to complete any unresolved issues.

State Office Licensure Unit provides supportive services in the areas of foster board payments, all non- expedited foster parent applications, expedited and non-expedited licensure process training, and tracking all expedited relative placements for the state while agency field staff licenses the foster home. As of May 31, 2024, MDCPS has processed 1,633 non-expedited applications.

Month	July 2023	Aug. 2023	Sept. 2023	Oct. 2023	Nov. 2023	Dec. 2023
No. of Applications Received	153	181	130	142	146	127

Month	Jan. 2024	Feb. 2024	Mar. 2024	April 2024	May 2024	June 26. 2024
No. of Applications Received	142	192	128	143	149	105

MDCPS Licensure standards are applied to homes licensed by the contractual child placing agencies. The MDCPS Licensure Standards for foster homes closely aligns with the model home standards. The CB approved Mississippi's Title IV-E plan provision related to Section 471(a)36 addressing model licensing standards for foster family homes. All MDCPS non-relative and expedited homes are reported to Public Knowledge.

MDCPS conducts reviews of child placements and maintains documentation of the results. At the end of each quarter, the MDCPS evaluates quality by reporting to Public Knowledge the results of non-relative and expedited homes. The results of the 2023 quarterly reviews for non-Relative homes are as follows:

Reporting period	2 nd MSA Provision	Provision Description	Performance: 100%
July – September 2023	3.1	Quality Review of Non-Relative Foster homes	Review of records that were approved: 100% Quality of records reviewed: 57%

Provide a written summary of the findings including the strengths and the areas needing improvement, methodology, and description of the data presented (include the review tool used for measuring the provision): Data was collected and analyzed through the 2023 Non-Relative Master Smartsheet. This Smartsheet is managed by the Licensure Unit Deputy Director and the Bureau Directors/Regional Area Social Work Supervisor's for each side of the state. 179 non-Relative homes had action taken (approved or denied) during the 3rd quarter and all approved homes received a review prior to the Q3 reporting. The quality review is designed to be conducted 7-14 days after approval is made. All denied homes have relevant documents uploaded to an internal SharePoint file that is set up for every foster/relative home we assess.

57% (n=62) of the approved homes reviewed in Q3 2023 62 were found to have a comprehensive file. There were two (2) homes approved in error that were not included in these numbers. Fifty-one (51) homes were labeled Foster Homes and eleven (11) homes were labeled Child Specific/ICPC homes. Twelve (12) homes had issues that needed resolving

Reporting period	2 nd MSA Provision	Provision Description	Performance: 100%
July – September 2023	3.1	Quality Review of Non-Relative Foster homes	Review of records that were approved: 100% Quality of records reviewed: 57%

before the review was considered complete. Twenty-nine (29) of the Fifty-one (51) licensed foster homes were approved timely. 57 % were licensed timely.

In our 3rd quarterly 3.1, 3.3 a and b Memo, the total number of homes licensed in 3rd quarter is 83. For the rebuilding period, October 2021 to present, our “to date” total is 673.

Areas needing improvement: This quarterly report will be shared with all staff so they can see where the errors are occurring and continue to strive to reduce the number of errors. The ASWS needs to do a more thorough job of reviewing the file for quality and get necessary paperwork uploaded before approving the home. This will be addressed with each region where we have this issue. Training is being scheduled throughout licensure to address issues with documents not being uploaded to SharePoint prior to the home being approved. The Master Non-Relative Smartsheet has been filtered to give each Regional/ASWS their own listing so they can keep track the home from entry until completion. The Social Service Managers will address the continued issues with reviews in their monthly staffing with all ASWS’s and Regionals. Trainings are being scheduled throughout licensure to address issues with documents not being uploaded to SharePoint prior to the home being approved.

Strengths: We are not seeing as many homes that were approved when they should have been denied as previously reported. All ASWS’s are trained on this process, and we have seasoned supervisors who know how to properly staff and train their staff on this process. We have newer supervisors that are still learning the process and we are providing support and training. We should see an increase in their attention to quality before approving homes.

Reporting period	2 nd MSA Provision	Provision Description	Performance: 100%
October-December 2023	3.1	Quality Review of Non-Relative Foster homes	Review of records that were approved: 100% Quality of records reviewed: 61%

Provide a written summary of the findings including the strengths and the areas needing improvement, methodology, and description of the data presented (include the review tool used for measuring the provision): Data was collected and analyzed through the 2023 Non-Relative Master Smartsheet. This Smartsheet is managed by the Licensure Unit Deputy Director and the Bureau Directors/Regional Area Social Work Supervisor's for each side of the state. 149 non-Relative homes had action taken (approved or denied) during the 4th quarter and all approved homes received a review prior to the Q4 reporting. The quality review is designed to be conducted 7-14 days after approval is made. All denied homes have relevant documents uploaded to an internal SharePoint file that is set up for every foster/relative home we assess.

61% (n=59) of the approved homes reviewed in Q4 2023, 59 were found to have a comprehensive file. Thirty-eight (38) homes were labeled Foster Homes and twenty-one (21) homes were labeled Child Specific/ICPC homes. Twenty-one (21) homes had issues that needed resolving before the review was considered complete. Twenty-three (23) of the Thirty-eight (38) licensed foster homes were approved timely. 61 % were licensed timely.

In our 4th quarterly 3.1, 3.3 a and b Memo, the total number of homes licensed in 4th quarter is 62. For the rebuilding period, October 2021 to present, our "to date" total is 735.

Areas needing improvement: This quarterly report will be shared with all staff so they can see where the errors are occurring and continue to strive to reduce the number of errors. The ASWS needs to do a more thorough job of reviewing the file for quality and get necessary paperwork uploaded before approving the home. This will be addressed with each region where we have this issue. Trainings are being scheduled throughout licensure to address issues with documents not being uploaded to SharePoint prior to the home being approved. The Master Non-Relative Smartsheet has been filtered to give each Regional/ASWS their own listing so they can keep track the home from entry until completion. The Social Service Managers will address the continued issues with reviews in their monthly staffing with all ASWS's and Regionals. Trainings are being scheduled throughout licensure to address issues with documents not being uploaded to SharePoint prior to the home being approved.

Strengths: We are not seeing as many homes that were approved when they should have been denied as previously reported. All ASWS's are trained on this process, and we have seasoned supervisors who know how to properly staff and train their staff on this process. We

Reporting period	2 nd MSA Provision	Provision Description	Performance: 100%
October-December 2023	3.1	Quality Review of Non-Relative Foster homes	Review of records that were approved: 100% Quality of records reviewed: 61%
have newer supervisors that are still learning the process and we are providing support and training. We should see an increase in their attention to quality before approving homes. Strengths: We are not seeing any homes that were approved when they should have been denied as previously reported. All ASWS's are trained on this process have seasoned supervisors who know how to properly staff and train their staff on this process. We should see an increase in their attention to quality before approving homes. The Licensure Unit will continue to provide training to address issues that arise from approval errors.			

Non-relative homes are reviewed for documentation and quality by a third-level review team within the Licensure Unit, within 7 days of approval by the Licensure Supervisor. MDCPS has licensed 250 non-relative homes from July 2023 through May 2024:

- July 2023: 27 homes
- August 2023: 30 homes
- September 2023: 26 homes
- October 2023: 16 homes
- November 2023: 25 homes
- December 2023: 21 homes
- January 2024: 31 homes
- February 2024: 14 homes
- March 2024: 20 homes
- April 2024: 20 homes
- May 2024: 20 homes

Expedited Relative homes are allowed exceptions to the agency's requirements: 1) the relative applicant can be less than 21 years old, and 2) the applicant is not required to be legally married or divorced. Expedited homes are tracked by the State Office Licensure Unit to assure consistency in addressing safety and non-safety issues and timeliness. The Continuous Quality Improvement Unit reviews every home within 30 days once an action is taken to ensure a third level review is held. The agency reports these findings monthly and quarterly to Public Catalyst. The agency had action taken on 888 homes between July 2023 and May 31, 2024, and approved 342 of those homes.

- July 2023: 70 homes; 30 approved
- August 2023: 89 homes; 45 approved
- September 2023: 67 homes; 39 approved

- October 2023: 83 homes; 41 approved
- November 2023: 88 homes; 52 approved
- December 2023: 79 homes; 52 approved
- January 2024: 76 homes; 37 approved
- February 2024: 67 homes; 26 approved
- March 2024: 82 homes; 28 approved
- April 2024: 94 homes; 40 approved
- May 2024: 93 homes; 52 approved
- June 2024: homes; approved

Expedited Relative family cannot receive a board payment until their home is fully licensed. The County Worker assists the family with any needs that child might have while being licensed such as a clothing allowance and monthly allowance.

Recruitment:

The Licensure Unit provides foster home development goals that are directly related to the number of homes needed to meet foster child placements. During the Rebuilding Period of the Modified Settlement Agreement, the foster home development goal was to license 486 non-relative homes. The Licensure Unit licensed 477 non-relative foster homes during the Rebuilding Period, October 1, 2021 through January 31, 2023. Foster Home Development is assessed each month and reported to the monitors.

On April 1, 2022, the MDCPS Foster Parent Recruitment Unit (FPR) was developed. The unit consists of three Recruitment Supervisors and fourteen Recruitment Specialists positions. The unit's primary focus is to provide consistent and robust recruitment efforts and education throughout the state in order to build a diverse pool of foster families. In addition to recruitment, the MDCPS Foster Parent Recruitment Unit is responsible for providing Foster Parent Orientation to all applicants.

The Foster Parent Recruitment Unit Plan is being revised to focus recruitment efforts towards identifying and licensing diverse foster families that will accept siblings, teenagers, pregnant/parenting teens, and hard-to-place children/youth. Metrics are being developed to guide specific recruitment efforts and determine the effectiveness of recruitment activities.

Retention:

Retention efforts are aimed at improving communication, relationship building, and addressing concerns/complaints expressed by foster parents in a timely manner. MDCPS has increased the number of Foster Parent Liaisons from one position to three positions to better serve foster parents. The Foster Parent Liaisons respond to questions from foster parents regarding MDCPS policies and requests for assistance. They assist foster parents when

navigating the Foster Parent Grievance process. The Liaisons establish, conduct, and attend monthly Foster Parent Support Groups across their service areas. They offer support to MDCPS staff, foster parents, and foster parent applicants.

On March 30, 2023, the Mississippi Foster Parents' Bill of Rights was adopted by the Mississippi Legislature. MDCPS has adopted the Mississippi Foster Parents' Bill of Rights and Responsibilities that has been provided to all current foster parents and that is provided during the licensing process to all foster parent applicants.

The Foster Parent Grievance Policy has been established. The grievance process provides a platform for foster parents to make formal complaints. The Foster Parent Liaisons review the grievances. Once the complaint is assessed, the Liaisons route the complaints to the identified staff team to make them aware of the complaints and so they can work with the foster family towards resolution.

A Monthly Newsletter is developed by the Recruitment Unit Supervisors, and it is distributed monthly to foster parents. The newsletter includes important agency updates, Foster Parent Support Group information and schedules, and training opportunities.

MDCPS has a Resource Closed report that lists homes that were closed, the reason for closure, the initial license date, and closure date. However, the Agency does not have a way to assess the satisfaction of the foster parent. Please see the below table related to resource home closures for homes that were classified as Foster Homes, Adoptive Home Domestic, Relative Foster Homes.

MDCPS has implemented a feedback loop for foster parents called Above and Beyond and it allows foster parents to voice their positive feedback related to agency staff. MDCPS Recruitment Unit also has 3 positions for Foster Parent Liaisons that provide support to foster parents having trouble. The Liaisons communicate concerns from the foster parents to appropriate staff for resolution and follow-up. MDCPS has plans to implement a biannual survey for foster parents.

Resource Home Closures FFY 2024	Number Closed
Agency Decision	50
Facility Request	10
Family Request / No children place in the home	207
Family Request	165
Agency Decision / Agency Licensing Requirements / Family Request / No children place in the home	1
Agency Decision / Family Request / No children place in the home	7
Agency Decision / Family Uncooperative / No children place in the home	3

Resource Home Closures FFY 2024	Number Closed
Family Moved Out of State / Family Request / No children place in the home	3
Substantiated ANE	3
Agency Decision / Family Moved Out of State / Family Request	1
Agency Licensing Requirements / Family Request / No children place in the home	1
Agency Decision / Family Request	13
Family Moved Out of State	3
Agency Decision / No children place in the home / Substantiated ANE	6
No children place in the home	66
Agency Decision / No children place in the home	30
Agency Decision / Agency Licensing Requirements / No children place in the home	2
Agency Licensing Requirements	1
Agency Licensing Requirements / No children place in the home	2
Agency Decision / Facility Request / No children place in the home	1
Facility Request / Family Request	1
Agency Decision / Substantiated ANE	2
Family Moved Out of State / Family Request	2
Facility Request / No children place in the home	4
Agency Decision / Agency Licensing Requirements	2
Family Uncooperative	1
Agency Decision / Agency Licensing Requirements / No children place in the home / Substantiated ANE	2
Agency Decision / Agency Licensing Requirements / Family Uncooperative	1
Family Uncooperative / No children place in the home	1
Grand Total	531

Item 34: Requirements for Criminal Background Checks. How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning statewide to ensure that the state complies with federal requirements for criminal background clearances as related to licensing or approving foster care and adoptive placements, and has in place a case planning process that includes provisions for addressing the safety of foster care and adoptive placements for children?

The MDCPS Recruitment Unit educates applicants during orientation about this requirement and explains that the agency completes fingerprint checks on all household members that are 14 years of age and older. Information is provided regarding the documentation needed to complete the fingerprint checks.

MDCPS has made efforts to improve the Criminal Background process. The Fingerprint Unit was created to manage all criminal background and fingerprint checks. This task was previously assigned to the Licensure Unit. The Fingerprint Unit is responsible for obtaining the local

background checks, fingerprint checks, and the Child Abuse Central Registry checks for all foster parent applicants and all existing foster parents.

The assigned Safety or Well-Being/Permanency staff complete the local law enforcement, Background Screenings, and Child Central Registry checks as part of the expedited process. The Criminal Background Unit and Licensure Unit checks for Adam Walsh Act violations. If there are felony and/or misdemeanor charges on the fingerprint report, a justification letter is sent to the foster parent applicant or foster parent to obtain an explanation of the charges.

Local background checks, Central Registry Checks, and Background Screenings are completed at every two-year re-evaluation. Fingerprint checks are completed a minimum of every four years for existing household members aged 14 years and older. Foster parents are required to immediately report any relative household member that has been added to the home to the Licensure Specialist so the agency can complete timely background checks and fingerprint checks. All youth in the home must complete background checks and fingerprint checks when they turn 14 years of age. The Non-Relative and Relative Foster Home policies related to fingerprinting minors is under review and revision.

The table below contains fingerprint data collected during the program year.

Month	Non-Rel Resource Applicant	Relative Resource Applicant	Adoption	Youth in the home	Total	Adam Walsh Disqualifier
Aug 2023	86	162	0	22	270	1
Sept 2023	52	151	0	13	216	2
Oct 2023	107	116	0	14	237	0
Nov 2023	164	51	0	15	230	0
Dec 2023	128	45	2	7	182	1
Jan 2024	114	57	0	16	187	3
Feb 2024	138	61	0	14	213	0
March 2024	148	70	0	20	238	2
April 2024	137	58	0	7	202	2
May 2024	105	61	0	14	180	2

Month	Non-Rel Resource Applicant	Relative Resource Applicant	Adoption	Youth in the home	Total	Adam Walsh Disqualifier
Grand Total	1,179	832	2	142	2155	9

Item 35: Diligent Recruitment of Foster and Adoptive State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements. How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the diligent recruitment of potential foster and adoptive families who reflect the ethnic and racial diversity of children in the state for whom foster and adoptive homes are needed is occurring statewide? The Foster Parent Recruitment Unit currently uses internal data presented monthly. This data incorporates the Children in MDCPS Custody Map and provides areas of targeted and diligent recruitment throughout the state.

The Foster Parent Recruitment Unit currently reviews foster child data monthly. This data includes the Children in MDCPS Custody Map and CORE Reports to understand trends and inform diligent recruitment efforts throughout the state. The Recruitment Unit utilizes various forms of communication to connect with community members about the need for foster homes. Some of the forms of communication include speaking engagements at meetings and community events, promotional recruitment materials, interviews, and social media.

MDCPS seeks to identify placements for foster children and youth within their community. During the upcoming program year July 2024-December 2025, the Recruitment Plan has been revised to include specific tasks with metrics to be achieved monthly, quarterly, and annually.

Metrics are being implemented for Recruitment. The Annie E Casey foster home estimator formula was utilized to determine the number of foster homes needed. 541 homes were calculated as needed. There is an updated version of the Foster Home Estimator, and we are working to find ways to utilize it because it can provide more helpful information about the foster homes that we need to develop. The number of homes identified were based on projected needs. MDCPS has new standards that allow private providers to license both traditional and therapeutic foster care populations. Therefore, collaborative recruitment efforts will be established by MDCPS and partner agencies.

Item 36: State Use of Cross-Jurisdictional Resources for Permanent Placements. How well is the foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention system functioning to ensure that the process for ensuring the effective use of cross-jurisdictional resources to

facilitate timely adoptive or permanent placements for waiting children is occurring statewide? The ICPC continues to work with the local offices and other states to adhere to and promote the standard set forth in the Safe and Timely Act of 2006 to encourage timely home studies. The ICPC Division also has an ongoing collaboration with the Administrative Office of Court (ACO) Court Improvement Program for educational training and Collaboration with judges to work through permanency barriers. Additionally, ICPC works with the Association in the Process to introduce the "New Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children "to the legislative body within the state.

The ICPC Unit now consists of five staff members. The ICPC Unit hired two Social Service Specialists, one is tasked with working on the Residential ICPC Outgoing and Incoming caseload while the other works on the ICPC Outgoing caseload. At least one ICPC Staff Member is available during business hours to assist MDCPS staff, other agencies, attorneys, prospective placement resources, and any public inquiries on the ICPC process regarding placement in another state. The MS ICPC Division staff have been speaking at the Clinical Supervisor Training as well as working with the county locals to make the SSSI, SSII, and Supervisors more aware of the ICPC process. MS ICPC Division has monthly individual staff meetings at the state office. The MS ICPC office was having weekly meetings but due to the increased volume of incoming and outgoing cases, we decreased the meetings to once a month. MS ICPC Division staff has participated in April, May and June 2024 NEICE CMS/ MCMS Training through Zoom.

The primary focus of the training is on CPC documents I00A, 100B, ICPC regulation and articles. MS ICPC Division staff participates in NEICE CMS/ MCMS Training through Zoom, which is every month and provides updates on NEICE and how the system works on new updates in the future while also providing new ICPC Coordinator training on the NEICE system. MS ICPC Division is working with AAICPC on getting the ICPC staff in the 50 states on planning committees for the AAICPC 2024 Annual Business Meeting, Training Workshop and Child Welfare Conference. Currently, ICPC staff are encouraged to attend all monthly AAICPC conference calls which gives updates on processes or accomplishments that have taken place nationwide. These conference calls also place emphasis on new national initiatives, Executive Committee decisions, updates on the AAICPC National Conference, financial reports, state fees, updates on NEICE and other national committees or conferences that members of the AAICPC have participated in. ICPC department remains in partnership with MDHS, Division of Youth Services (DYS), Interstate Compact on Juveniles (ICJ) Private Adoption agencies, and attorneys for processing private adoptions.

The MS ICPC staff also serve on various committees under the Association of Administrators of the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (AAICPC). There are fifteen committees under the body of AAICPC. The committees in which the MS ICPC Division

participate includes the Annual Business and Conference Planning Committee, Data Collection Committee, New ICPC Committee, Nominations, Parental Placement Committee, Training Committee, and NEICE Committee. These committees require meetings in the form of teleconferences and webinars that range from bi-weekly to quarterly. Three members will participate as trainers in the Beginner's sessions. On August 22-23, 2023, two ICPC workers attended the 2023 MACCA Leadership Conference Self-Care at the IP Resort & Spa in Biloxi, MS. On November 6-8, 2023, three MS ICPC workers attended One Loud Voice/ A Program of Children's Advocacy Center of Mississippi in Biloxi, MS. The MS ICPC Division also attended the Forward Together Conference Illuminating Our Path. The Conference was held in the Mississippi cities Natchez (September 12-14, 2023), Southaven (October 10-12, 2023), and Meridian (November 14-16, 2023).

The 2023 Annual Business Meeting, Training Workshop, and Child Welfare Conference was held in New Orleans, LA on May 15 and 18, 2023. MS ICPC Division had three employees to attend. The first day of the conference was ICPC Training Introduction Part I Track I with the Beginner Track. The Second day of the Conference was on the ICPC advanced track. On the third day of the conference, there was an AAICPC Business Meeting Opening session. The conference closed on May 18, 2023, with an AAICPC Business Meeting and Blended Conference Sessions. AAICPC 2024 Annual Business Meeting, Training Workshop and Child Welfare was May 29-31, 2024, in St. Thomas, US Virgin Islands. The Division Director of Permanency Support Services attended the conference representing MS ICPC Division and was the MS ICPC Voting Representative for the ICPC Annual Business Meeting. The Annual Business Meeting, Child Welfare Conference and Training Workshop had different sessions:

Session I: Introduction to ICPC

Session II: Placement Planning

Session III: Placement planning and supervision.

The Annual Business Meeting, Child Welfare Conference and Training Workshop also did a session on Safe and Timely Act and Regulation 2, Private Adoption Guardianship and legal action and a session on regulation seven of the compact.

American Public Human Services Association (APHSA) is an organization that supports leaders from the state, county, and city human services agencies to advance the well-being of individuals, families, and communities nationwide.

The ICPS Division also works with the Attorney General's office when dealing with an ICPC case that is beyond the scope of the division's daily policies and procedures. Some of the attorneys and agencies that can be contacted for ICPC services are Young Wells Williams P.A, Attorney Craig Roberston, Kirsh, and Kirsh Adoptions, New Beginnings, Bethany Christian Services, Acorn Adoption, 200 million Flowers, Lifeline Children Services and Beacon House



Adoptions. MS ICPC Division aims to maintain a Professional and positive working relationship with private agencies and attorneys as the state works through the ICPC federal law to place children in and out of the 50 states. The ICPC Unit always has at least one ICPC consultant available during business hours to assist field staff as well as outside agencies, attorneys, prospective placement resources, and any public inquires on the ICPC process regarding placement in another state. The ICPC Division regularly seeks legal advice and assistance from the agency's legal department. ICPC requires legal guidance on cases to remain in compliance with state and federal law. The ICPC office also works with various adoption attorneys and licensed adoption agencies in Mississippi to help facilitate private adoptions for permanency. The Division also aims to maintain a professional and positive working relationship with private agencies and attorneys as the state works through the ICPC process.

One of the challenges that the ICPC department has is managing violations of the Compact when they are discovered by the ICPC Division. Some judges make orders to place a child in another state without collaborating with the MS ICPC department. This is a challenge because if a child is placed into another state without approval from that state, the placement is considered an illegal placement, and this will be a violation of Article III of the Compact. This does not lead to the subsequent discharge of the children from foster care. This means that the state in which the child is placed does not have any oversight responsibilities for the child placed in their state. MDCPS is responsible for making the required foster child contacts, establishing needed services, and for taking action if the placement is disrupted.

MS ICPC Division plans to address these challenges by providing this information in the Clinical Supervisory Training so that supervisors can relay the information to their workers to reduce the number of children placed without approval. Another challenge for the MS ICPC office is when some states ask for a visit during the summer. The visit is 30 days, and the child(ren) need to return after 30 days. Some states leave the child(ren) in the home after 30 days, making this placement a violation of the Compact regulation 9.

A consistent barrier is a lack of knowledge of the entire ICPC Process. The ICPC department currently has one vacant position, with the intent of being fully staffed (one more staff member) by the end of September 2024. Many agency workers are unaware of the rules and regulations of the Compact regarding the placement of children across state lines. They sometimes fail to consider the licensing process, the procurement of services for therapeutic placements with private agencies, IV-E verification for medical services, and what constitutes an illegal placement, etc. This happens because new workers are not training on the Compact process during their initial or ongoing training or when supervisors are not knowledgeable of the ICPC process to guide their workers. This is why the ICPC Division is planning to provide training to

the seven service areas to increase knowledge of the ICPC process, in the hope of preventing these barriers. ICPC staff provide training during each pre-service class. On-going training will be implemented during the 2024-2025 fiscal year.

The ICPC Division is identifying living situations with the help of the Licensure Division. This action supports children and their relationships making sure the ICPC request is completed as quickly as possible and holding a sense of urgency when seeking permanency for children; as well as the agency practice of valuing placements with connections to the child/youth and family first. Also, the Licensure Division is using a new program for home studies called SAFE Structure Analysis Family Evaluation. SAFE is the Consortium for Children's standardized, uniformed home study methodology that is used to assess individuals applying to become a kinship care provider, a foster parent, an adoptive parent, and/or a guardianship provider. SAFE home studies help ensure the children that are placed in MS are in a licensed home. MS ICPC office works with the other 49 states to make sure that our ICPC outgoing children are in an approval licensed home in the other states.

When incoming ICPC home study requests are received, data entry is completed in two separate systems: Smartsheet and the NIECE Database. Significant improvement has been seen in the ability to provide case management due to staffing increases. The increase in state office staff has been very beneficial in the intricate coordination of ICPC case work. Thanks to Mississippi being in the NEICE nationwide system, we can now process cases quicker, deliver them to participating states on the same day as well as receive approvals quicker. This can readily be seen in private adoption cases. Some cases have been received and approved in the same day. NEICE has also provided more quantitative and detailed reports on cases being processed by the ICPC Division. We are still in the process of utilizing all that NEICE offers as well as working to manage cases within the system, which can sometimes be a time-consuming task. NEICE has allowed for better accountability of caseloads as it documents when cases are entered. It has made it easier and more efficient in corresponding with participating states. It has been most effective in lowering costs for postage as well as for paper. The ICPC Division continues to work with RedMane Technology, LLC on the new PATHWAYS Mississippi system.

Due to the agencies MACWIS system being limited in how it can assist the ICPC Unit, a Smartsheet spreadsheet was created to better organize what tended to be a paper process. This Smartsheet has afforded a better grasp of assigned caseloads and the monitoring of functions to be conducted on each case. The spreadsheet's "filter" function is used so that staff can see specific cases that are assigned to them and makes it easier to identify what processes need to be completed on each case. The Smartsheet also allows access to the status

of a case and where each case is in the process of permanency for each child. It also allows for anyone in the ICPC Unit to get updates on all ICPC cases that have been entered. For example, the Compact Administrator position is not housed in the State Office, so they can also check the case status remotely. The ICPC Division is working with RedMane Technology LLC on the new system that we are excited about called PATHWAYS, Mississippi.

Other benefits of the Smartsheet include identifying active and non-active cases, case assignment, overdue cases, supervision reports, county worker assignment, and license and re-evaluation information. Many technological advances have been utilized to enhance our work process. We attend weekly individual staff meetings, via the TEAMS platform to review and update the Smartsheet for ICPC case management. The division developed a SharePoint link to create paperless, electronic case files. Staffing documentation is also housed in a SharePoint file under the Licensure Division. Moving to more electronic platforms has been beneficial for easily accessing ICPC case files. The ICPC Department would also like to expand the use of the NIECE Database system to the local level and possibly create an ICPC Liaison for each region. The Liaison would assist with distributing information to the locals and help compile documents for local staff.

PATHWAYS will connect with the NEICE database system, allowing MDCPS frontline staff access to ICPC case files. The benefit of the collaboration between the two systems is that all stakeholders can see data in real time. The approval/denial of an ICPC case, status report and supervisor reports can be seen and will be accessible. ICPC and RedMane Technology continue to meet weekly to develop the new tracking system.

As mentioned above, two tools are used to track ICPC cases to provide data:

NEICE and Smartsheet (July – September 2023): 200 cases handled for Regulation 7 parents, foster, public adoptions, private adoption, residential placement, and court jurisdiction only cases.

- Regulation 1 - 6
- Regulation 2 - Parents, Foster, Public Adoption, Court Jurisdiction - 160
- Regulation 4 - Residentials 10
- Regulation 7 - 10
- Regulation 12 - Private Adoptions – 14

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 7/1/2023 Date to: 9/30/2023

Regulation type: All

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, closed, pending, receiving



Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	5
Other	1
Relative (not parent)	1
Adoptive Home	16
Foster Family Home	54
Parent	3

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	3
Other	22
Relative (not parent)	1
Adoptive Home	15
Foster Family Home	54
Parent	25

NEICE and Smartsheet (October – December 2023): 190 cases handled for Regulation 7 parents, foster, public adoptions, private adoption, residential placement, and court jurisdiction only cases.

- Regulation 1 - 5
- Regulation 2 - Parents, Foster, Public Adoption, Court Jurisdiction - 144
- Regulation 4 - Residentials 26
- Regulation 7 - 5
- Regulation 12 - Private Adoptions – 10

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 10/1/2023 Date to: 12/31/2023

Regulation type: All

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, closed, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	18
Relative (not parent)	2
Adoptive Home	12
Foster Family Home	41
Parent	22

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	8
Relative (not parent)	17
Adoptive Home	11
Foster Family Home	44
Parent	15

NEICE and Smartsheet (January – March 2024): 240 cases handled for Regulation 7 parents, foster, public adoptions, private adoption, residential placement, and court jurisdiction only cases.

- Regulation 1 - 2
- Regulation 2 - Parents, Foster, Public Adoption, Court Jurisdiction - 154
- Regulation 4 - Residentials 24
- Regulation 7 - 10
- Regulation 12 - Private Adoptions – 14

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 1/1/2024 Date to: 3/31/2024

Regulation type: All

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, closed, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	12
Relative (not parent)	5
Adoptive Home	10
Foster Family Home	40
Parent	25

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	12
Relative (not parent)	31
Adoptive Home	25
Foster Family Home	36
Parent	8

NEICE and Smartsheet (April – June 2024): 203 cases handled for Regulation 7 parents, foster, public adoptions, private adoption, residential placement, and court jurisdiction



only cases.

- Regulation 1 - 3
- Regulation 2 - Parents, Foster, Public Adoption, Court Jurisdiction - 158
- Regulation 4 - Residentials 24
- Regulation 7 - 8
- Regulation 12 - Private Adoptions – 10

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024

Regulation type: REG 1 – Intact Family Relocation

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

No record found

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Foster Family Home	3

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024

Regulation type: REG 2 – Home Study Request

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Relative (not parent)	2
Adoptive Home	7
Foster Family Home	51
Parent	23

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Relative (not parent)	7
Adoptive Home	16
Foster Family Home	34
Parent	18

Cases by Type of Care



The report results are based on the following:
 Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024
 Regulation type: REG 4 – Residential Placement
 Type of Care: Residential Treatment Center
 Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	9

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Residential Treatment Center	15

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:
 Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024
 Regulation type: REG 7 – Priority Placement
 Type of Care: Parent
 Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

No record found

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Parent	4

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:
 Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024
 Regulation type: REG 7 – Priority Placement
 Type of Care: Relative (not parent)
 Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

No record found

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Relative (not parent)	4

Cases by Type of Care

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 4/1/2024 Date to: 6/20/2024

Regulation type: REG 12 – Private Adoption

Type of Care: All

Case status: Active, pending, receiving

Sending Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Adoptive Home	6

Receiving Cases

Type of Care	Total Cases
Adoptive Home	4

AAICPC Data Report

The report results are based on the following:

Date from: 7/1/2023 Date to: 6/20/2024

State: Mississippi

	Reporting Period			
	July – Sept 2023	Oct – Dec 2023	Jan – March 2024	April – June 2024
Home Studies Request In**	112	87	86	102
Home Studies Request Out**	69	68	72	85
Placements In*	42	33	36	28
Placements Out*	37	33	32	30
Private Adoptions In	5	3	10	4
Private Adoptions Out	9	7	3	6
Residential Request In	4	7	13	15
Residential Request Out	5	18	12	11

*Number of children placed during reporting month

** Parent/Foster/Relative/Public Adoption

Although this specific data has not been tracked in the past, starting in August 2024, this is a measurement that is monitored and reviewed by Leadership every two weeks.

IV. Plan for Enacting the State's Vision and Progress Made to Improve Outcomes

Plan for Enacting the State's Vision



As indicated in the 2020-2024 CFSP, MDCPS's five-year goals are guided by three priorities:

- a. Safety and Wellbeing: Mississippi intends to ensure the safety and wellbeing of its children by reducing the number of instances of child maltreatment.
- b. Prevention: Mississippi seeks to support families by providing the services and resources needed to help children remain safely at home.
- c. Permanency and Wellbeing: Mississippi seeks to achieve lasting permanency as rapidly and safely as possible for every child who must enter foster care. MDCPS leadership prioritizes an evidence-informed process to establish annual goals and objectives. Several 2023 goals, objectives, and strategies have been revised to reflect Mississippi's current performance and improvement activities.

Additionally, throughout the upcoming year, the Agency developed a system to identify and prioritize needs and strengths, research improvement strategies, and establish clear indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented initiatives. To support these efforts, MDCPS will work with the Capacity Building Center for States, Chapin Hall, Casey Family Programs, and other organizations.

There are overarching areas that are essential to supporting MDCPS's priorities, including workforce, CQI/data, and meaningful stakeholder engagement. Therefore, in addition to the goals and objectives listed below, MDCPS will continually work to enhance:

- a. A stable, qualified workforce, including the Agency's restructuring efforts, the Workforce Wellbeing initiatives, effective staff training, coaching and a more seamless connection between front-line staff and Agency leadership.
- b. Data Systems, Quality and Outputs to drive CQI: MDCPS has procured a vendor to support the development of a CCWIS Statewide Information System. A priority is to improve data quality, and the ability to disaggregate/drill down data to identify variability in performance (for example, does recurrence vary by age, race, county?) used to inform Agency decisions.
- c. Meaningful engagement of internal and external stakeholders, including youth, biological and foster parents, service providers, Courts, MDCPS staff, and others who support positive outcomes for children, youth, and families.

REVISIONS to GOALS, OBJECTIVES, and INTERVENTIONS

MDCPS's 2023 APSR Goals and Objectives were revised last year to reflect solutions to agency needs identified through an analysis of various forms of evidence and stakeholder feedback. The agency developed a system to identify and prioritize needs and strengths, research improvement strategies, and establish clear indicators to evaluate the effectiveness of implemented initiatives.

Throughout this next year, MDCPS will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs



and initiatives and adjust the goals and objectives as necessary. The CQI has made great strides in ensuring the programs and initiatives align with the agency's goals and feedback impacted, data driven decisions are made.

Child Safety and Wellbeing:

Goal 1: Mississippi will support the safety and wellbeing of its children by reducing rates of recurrence of child maltreatment.

Mississippi's recurrence of maltreatment rate of 13.7%, is higher (worse) than the national performance (9.7%). Therefore, to monitor implementation and measure impact, MDCPS will fine-tune data indicators throughout the implementation year.

Objective 1: Increase consistency in decision making from intake through investigation.

Mississippi will assess and continue to strengthen strategies designed to improve decision making in child welfare, including the following:

Centralized Intake and Assessment: Improve intake screening decision making

Rationale: Variation in screened-in reports and victimization is seen by age, race/ethnicity, and county. Currently, intake calls are triaged at the State level as they are entered into the system, then dispersed to the counties for the final decision to accept or document the report.

An

underlying factor to a variation in recurrence, investigation, and victimization rates is the current process of local decision making.

Initiative: MDCPS recognizes the importance of consistent, quality decision making at the front door – intake. In the upcoming planning year, MDCPS developed a Centralized Intake process, the Mississippi Centralized Intake and Assessment Center (MCIA). MCIA receives the report and determines the most appropriate course of action: accept, refer for investigation, screen it out, or refer directly to services.

Monitoring Progress and Impact:

- Regular tracking of recurrence, investigation, and victimization rates by county, age, and race/ethnicity.
- MDCPS, as a component of the Centralized Intake process, is continuing to develop unit-specific performance metrics.

Structured Decision Making (SDM): Improve safety and risk assessments

Rationale: The CFSR and the Agency's case review process, has identified Item 3, Risk and Safety Assessment and Management as an improvement area. Several strategies have been implemented to positively impact quality risk and safety assessments, including the revision of definitions of risk and safety for consistency, clarity, and common understanding. Also, MDCPS reinforced its expectations of case staffing tools to improve supervisors' ability to facilitate high quality case staffing.

Initiative: MDCPS will continue the process to fully implement Structured Decision Making (SDM) within the coming months to improve the consistency and validity of each decision throughout the life of the child welfare case. SDM, as mentioned above, supports decision making throughout the life of the case. This initiative supports the transition to a Centralized intake, described above, and supports specialized staff training in using the assessment results to link services to families to minimize trauma and reduce recurrence of maltreatment.

Measurable results of this work will not be immediate; however, MDCPS is carefully structuring and implementing interventions. The estimated full implementation timeframe is within months.

Monitoring Progress and Impact:

- Annually, every region throughout the State is involved in a comprehensive case review process using the federal On-site Monitoring Instrument (OSRI). The OSRI allows MDCPS to monitor performance consistently and objectively on Item 3.
- CFSR Non-Overlapping monthly meetings were established in collaboration with the Children’s Bureau. These meetings allow MDCPS to consistently discuss strategies and monitor performance.

Staff Re-structuring: MDCPS’s staffing pattern has been restructured into dedicated units which will allow for job specialization, training, and supervision. This creates more efficient and effective service provision, whereby staff will have specialized skills to assess and address the needs of children and families throughout each MDCPS decision.

Rationale: Based on an analysis of caseload reports and other data pulled from administrative data sources, there is variation in caseloads throughout the State. It is also noted that the majority of MDCPS staff carry mixed caseloads which can lead to multiple staff working on the same case. The restructuring of staff to reflect the child/family’s experience as they travel through the child welfare system, from “door to door” helps with the caseload variations.

Initiative:

Restructuring MDCPS staff allows the Agency to create a workforce of specialized staff – investigations, care management, etc., that receives role-specific training, coaching, and supervision. Specialization increases expertise throughout each practice area, resulting in improved decision making and ultimately improved outcomes.

A specialized, supported workforce is also expected to improve job satisfaction, thereby reducing turnover. MDCPS is continuing to work to decrease the space between upper-level positions and field positions.

Monitoring Progress and Impact:

- Agency caseload reports are monitored monthly.
- Workforce Wellbeing utilizes assessment tools to monitor job satisfaction and support staff.
- Qualitative data to assess performance will be regularly collected from stakeholder engagement groups, such as the Youth Advisory Council and the Foster Parent Feedback Group. Additionally, data collected from case-related interviews during the case review process will be utilized.

Prevention

Goal 2: Mississippi will support families in creating and maintaining safe, supportive environments so that children may remain safely at home when reasonable.

MDCPS has a foundation of prioritizing prevention over foster care. MDCPS approaches this prevention goal with a public health framework, striving for a social and physical environment that promotes the well-being of children, youth, and families. MDCPS recognizes that stakeholder engagement, case level family engagement, and data analytics and evaluation, are necessary to change the child welfare paradigm from reactive (providing supports after the event) to preventive.

Objective 1: Develop a continuum of effective in-home services to meet the needs of children, youth, and families.

- **Assess internal and external capacity and commitment to prevention**
- **Contractually knit together a continuum of in-home services**

MDCPS has developed and submitted a FFPSA Preventive Services Plan to the Children's Bureau. Additionally, MDCPS will work to develop a continuum of in-home services to address the risk and safety concerns of children, youth, and families. MDCPS has procured evidence-based intensive in-home services programs such as Intercept.

Via a Multi-Disciplinary Task Force:

Rationale: Mississippi engages and collaborates with several stakeholders to help achieve Mississippi's child welfare goals and will continue efforts to further enhance meaningful engagement.

Comprehensive stakeholder input is necessary to embark on a thorough needs assessment of existing services, existing gaps, and strengths of the in-home service array and to develop strategies to meet existing needs. By joining forces and pulling towards shared goals, the scope and effectiveness of services to address families' needs will improve, thereby supporting families' ability to achieve safe home environments.

Initiative: Mississippi has a wealth of service providers that effectively address the needs of families and children. A Task Force will be developed to assess and address service needs.

The Task Force will identify service gaps, accessibility issues, and other emerging trends and collectively seek to address barriers to a robust continuum of service provision. The Agency's plan is to ensure representatives from the Courts/Judicial community, service providers, other state agencies, foster parents, and youth advisory groups are part of the Task Force.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

- Minutes, preparation and tracking of Task Force goals

Via meaningful engagement of birth parents:

Rationale: Mississippi youth currently and previously involved in the child welfare system are members of an active Youth Council; foster/adoptive parents participate in MDCPS trainings, meetings, and conferences. However, there is a need to develop a formal opportunity for birth families to contribute and provide meaningful input into the development of Mississippi's array of services.

Initiative: MDCPS will continue to expand opportunities for birth families to provide input into services, policies, etc. Initiatives such as Project CARE mentioned in Section II to ensures birth families are active and engaged.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

Initial indicators such as process measures track the implementation of the birth parent groups, the level of participation and two-way communication.

Via contractual services:

Rationale: In 2020, MDCPS identified a gap with in-home services. The Agency facilitated funding, via an RFP, to begin addressing this service gap.

Initiative: In order to encourage the effective use of agency funds to meet children, youth, and families' needs, MDCPS monitors prevention services, which will be awarded as subgrants, via an internal auditor. MDCPS has initiated new procurements to diversify and build further capacity for prevention (primary and secondary) and in-home services. They include parenting and support programs, homeless family programs, home visiting programs, counseling and mentoring programs, and substance abuse for youth and adults. Purchased services include case planning, family contact, ongoing assessments and coordination of services, training of staff and documentation of activities, provision of or referral to services, transportation, and supervision and management of referred cases and outcomes.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

- Monitoring results will be shared and evaluated internally

Objective 2: Improve family engagement practice through focused staff training.

Rationale: Preventive services are most effectively delivered to families who are fully engaged in the risk and safety assessment process and are partners in developing a service plan. Item 3, Risk and Safety Assessment and Management is an improvement area identified by Mississippi's CFSR. On-going case review results, using the OSRI, have confirmed that family engagement is a contributing factor.

The OSRI case reviews also found that inconsistent contacts with parents was a contributing factor or barrier noted in the completion of comprehensive and ongoing assessments of the safety and risk factors.

Initiative: **Focused Staff Training and frequent practice opportunities to reinforce learning objectives:** MDCPS leadership and team leads are working with the Professional Development unit to re-vamp training.

Monitoring Progress and Impact:

- Training participation, training evaluation responses
- Case Review findings are improving for Item 3

Permanency and Wellbeing:

Goal 3: Mississippi will identify and support appropriate timely and lasting permanency for all children in foster care.

In 2019, nearly 2,200 children were placed in Mississippi’s foster care system. Within three years of a child’s admission to foster care, 76% left foster care to permanency. Nationally, approximately 75% of the children in foster care achieved permanency during the same period. For the children who entered foster care in 2019, and achieved permanency within three years, nearly half (1,069 children) were reunified with their families, 18% (387 children) were discharged to relatives, and 8% (175 children) were adopted⁴. MDCPS strives to support the best permanency outcome for each child, based on their individual and family circumstances.

The federal Children’s Bureau provides five CFSR permanency indicators. Of those, Mississippi is at or above the national rate in four of the five indicators.

MS Rate	National Rate	Permanency Outcome 1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situation.
41.2%	32.2%	Permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care (Higher is preferable)
45.3%	43.8%	Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12 to 23 months (Higher is preferable)
39.9%	37.3%	Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more (Higher is preferable)
4.5%	5.6%	Reentry to foster care (Lower is preferable)
4.81%	4.48%	Placement stability (Lower is preferable)
Rates represent Risk Standardized Performance for the most recent time period available. Source: Mississippi CFSR 3 Data Profile, February 2023, prepared by federal Children’s Bureau		

In addition to administrative data, cited above, Mississippi conducts case reviews on a sample of cases in every region using the federal CFSR case review instrument (OSRI). These results identify Permanency Outcome 1, as an area needing improvement.

Objective 1: Increase the number of children who exit to appropriate permanency, based on their individualized needs.

Support for Relatives/Kin as Placement and Permanency Resources

Rationale: Of all the children in foster care on September 30, 2019, approximately 31% were placed in a relative foster home (comparable to the national 32%). This represents a steady decline since 2015, 38% of the foster care population was placed in relative foster homes. When children are successfully placed with relatives, the potential for a permanent exit to the relative is likely.

⁴ Mississippi Supplemental Context Data, February 2022, provided by the Federal Children’s Bureau.

Initiative(s): MDCPS is prioritizing strategies to encourage relatives to engage in the foster care system.

Supporting Relatives as a Placement Resource: MDCPS is prioritizing efforts to support formal relative foster care using the following strategies:

- Enhance collaboration with the Kinship Navigator program.
- Revamp the waiver process for licensing relative foster homes. Updating the waiver process will reduce barriers that may exclude relatives from qualifying as foster parents, while making sure the foster home is a safe and stable placement for the child(ren).
- Utilize technology to locate and engage relatives as placement and/or permanency resources very early in children's foster care episode.

Supporting Relatives as a Permanency Resource: Develop a Guardian Assistance Program:

Rationale: As previously stated, Mississippi is below the national rate in one permanency metric. Children in Mississippi, who have been in foster care 1-2 years are slower to achieve permanency, than children in foster care nationally. It is generally understood that these children may have any permanency goal (reunification, exit to relative, adoption). Although additional research into disaggregated data is necessary, one theory is that this population of children may be placed with relatives and have not yet achieved permanency. A barrier to relatives committing to permanent custody may be the loss of financial assistance when they transition from foster parents to permanent custodians.

Initiative: MDCPS understands the priority of providing financial assistance to kin who accept permanent custodial responsibility for their relative's child(ren) after foster care. By developing a guardian assistance program (GAP) in Mississippi, it is estimated that approximately 200 children could be placed in a subsidized permanent custodial relationship with a relative. This will increase the number of children who exit to permanency while maintaining connections to family, without placing the stress of a financial burden on the custodial relative. MDCPS will draft policies and procedures, develop plans to educate judges and take other steps to implement a GAP. Mississippi is looking to model their program after a successful program in TN.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

Develop baselines and targets for the following metrics

- Number of relative foster homes licensed in a timely manner
- Number of children placed in relative foster homes
- Process indicators track guardianship assistance program development

Support for Timely Adoptions: Addressing TPR Backlog

Rationale: Administrative data shows that there are a significant number of children with a permanency planning goal of adoption who are not progressing through the process in a timely manner. MDCPS is continuing to work to reduce the barriers to TPR, on a global and case-specific level.

Initiative: MDCPS works at both the county and state level to collect the necessary paperwork and submit a comprehensive case history to the AGO for the filing of the TPR petition. This internal review identified several barriers and delays, some of which may be resolved internally, and some of which require cooperation with the judiciary to resolve.

In 2022, the Office of Legal Counsel began working with the Permanency Unit to assess cases where a child's permanency plan has changed to adoption but where the TPR packet has not yet been received at State Office for review and submission to the Office of the Attorney General. OLC and the Permanency Unit worked closely with the judiciary and attorneys across the state during MDCPS's successful Home for the Holidays campaign to streamline and expedite the path to permanency for children having a plan of adoption. The Home for the Holidays campaign went from October 15, 2022 through January 31, 2023, during which time 224 adoptions were finalized. Particularly, in the month of December 2022, this campaign resulted in a record number of adoptions, with MDCPS doubling the agency's average monthly number of adoptions.

Additionally, given the number of outstanding trials and cases waiting for petitions to be filed, MDCPS believed that there was a need for additional attorneys to try the existing cases and additional docket time (i.e., specially appointed judges). While MDCPS cannot appoint or pay salaries for special judges, MDCPS hired additional attorneys to try TPR cases.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

- MDCPS will continue to monitor the number of children awaiting a TPR hearing and a TPR filing.

MDCPS will measure progress by tracking and evaluating the number of days between the time a case plan changes to adoption through the date the TPR packet is submitted to the AGO for filing a TPR petition.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: to recruit permanency resources (esp. long stayers)

Rationale: On October 1, 2020, 1,200 children in foster care had been in care for 2 years or more. Of those, 46% (558 children) exited to permanency by September 30, 2021 (CFSR metric). Although Mississippi's performance is better than the national rate on this metric, it is important to continue striving to increase permanency for all children, and particularly children in foster care for two or more years. MDCPS has determined that one key barrier is the lack of appropriate permanency resources for can be challenging.

Initiative: MDCPS collaborates with Wendy's Wonderful Kids (WWK), a program of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption, to find permanent families for children in foster care. WWK provides local recruiters who utilize an evidence-based, child-focused model to find the right family for every child.

Monitoring Process and Impact:

- WWK and MDCPS monitor the number of permanent exits that occur because of the program's recruitment efforts.

• **Support for Timely Reunification**

Rationale: Reunification occurs when the family is prepared to safely welcome their children back home; if the family is not prepared, children may re-enter foster care, further contributing to the child's traumatic experiences. Mississippi prioritizes the need to support families throughout the life of the case, and this is evidenced by a re-entry rate that is significantly better than the national rate (4.5% re-entry rate vs. national re-entry rate of 5.6%).

Initiatives: Each of MDCPS's goals and objectives reflect strategies to support families in creating and maintaining safe, supportive environments so that children may safely remain or return home.

Monitoring Process and Impact: Refer to each goal's monitoring process and impact

Implementation and Program Supports:

MDCPS acknowledges that various supports are needed to support the successful implementation of the goals and objectives. Those supports are mentioned in the Assessment of Current Performance in Improving Outcomes section of the APSR. A few essential supports are below:

Fiscal Support: MDCPS will continue to rely on funding streams to support the organizational restructuring which includes hiring more staff to maintain the progress achieved and to continue to make progress. To further support the goals, MDCPS will procure services to assess practices and provide consultation as needed.

Technology Support: MDCPS will continue to focus on improving data quality, management, and literacy throughout the implementation of this CFSP/APSR, and as such, the CORE Reports will likely be revised.

Training and Coaching: MDCPS will continue to offer frequent practice opportunities to staff after focused training sessions to ensure the training and coaching is continuous. This will also allow the Office of Professional Development to identify areas of strengths and barriers to effective training. The addition of the Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports to the Executive Leadership team has already proven to be beneficial in providing improved targeted training.

Renegotiated Items from the CFSR PIP:

MDCPS submitted a renegotiation letter to CB on November 29, 2021. Based on the feedback received from CB, an updated renegotiation letter request was submitted on December 30, 2021. In CB's response to MDCPS's renegotiation letter request, changes to the following activities were approved:

Goal 4: Improve Service Array and Delivery Strategy:

Diversifying Intensive In-home Services

Activity 3: Develop a protocol or assessment for determining the appropriate referral among the pool of in-home services programs.

MDCPS is committed to applying a family-centered, culturally competent, strengths-based approach for prevention service planning. We recognize that family voice in service planning is critical for authentic family engagement and equitable and unbiased decision-making and, when done well, will result in matching prevention services to the families to best meet their needs. Families, in-home providers, and supervisors will collaborate to co-develop the child specific prevention plan, using findings from the assessment to frame and inform decision-making. In doing so, the family's prevention needs will be matched with the most appropriate prevention EBPs available.

The process for developing a child-specific prevention plan begins with the assessment of safety and risk completed during the investigation of the report. During that time, the MDCPS child safety specialist, in consultation with a supervisor, makes a determination regarding child safety. Caregiver protective capacities are also assessed to identify the family's specific needs and determine appropriate services to address them. This information is gathered and synthesized by the specialist, then staffed with a supervisor. If the case is opened for in-home services and imminent risk criteria are identified, or at the time that a youth in foster care is identified as being pregnant or parenting, the assigned specialist and supervisor will make a referral to the Prevention Unit. That unit will review the information provided with the referral and, if appropriate, refer the case to an appropriate EBP provider who will develop a child-specific prevention plan. The child-specific prevention plan will include documentation of the

identified need for services and the selected prevention services provided to the child and/or parent/caregivers to keep a child safely with the child's parent(s). The family's case goals, and other Title IV-B services provided to the family are also included in the child specific prevention plan, which will be incorporated and implemented as part of the child's case plan.

To facilitate the referral process, the Prevention Coordinators and Directors will be trained on all EBPs offered and will provide consultation to specialists and supervisors to ensure the appropriateness of referrals. They will also manage relationships and ensure regular communication with contracted providers. Ongoing case management for families receiving prevention services will be provided by contracted provider partners in conjunction with MDCPS. Monthly reports from the providers and regular contacts with the family allow routine informal assessment of progress and the opportunity to obtain feedback on the efficacy of the services. The prevention plan will be reviewed formally at 6- and 12-month intervals. As part of this process, the specialist will meet with the family and service provider to discuss progress toward service plan outcomes and the need for any adjustments to the plan. If the 12-month review indicates the need for continued EBP services, candidacy will be redetermined and another prevention service plan developed.

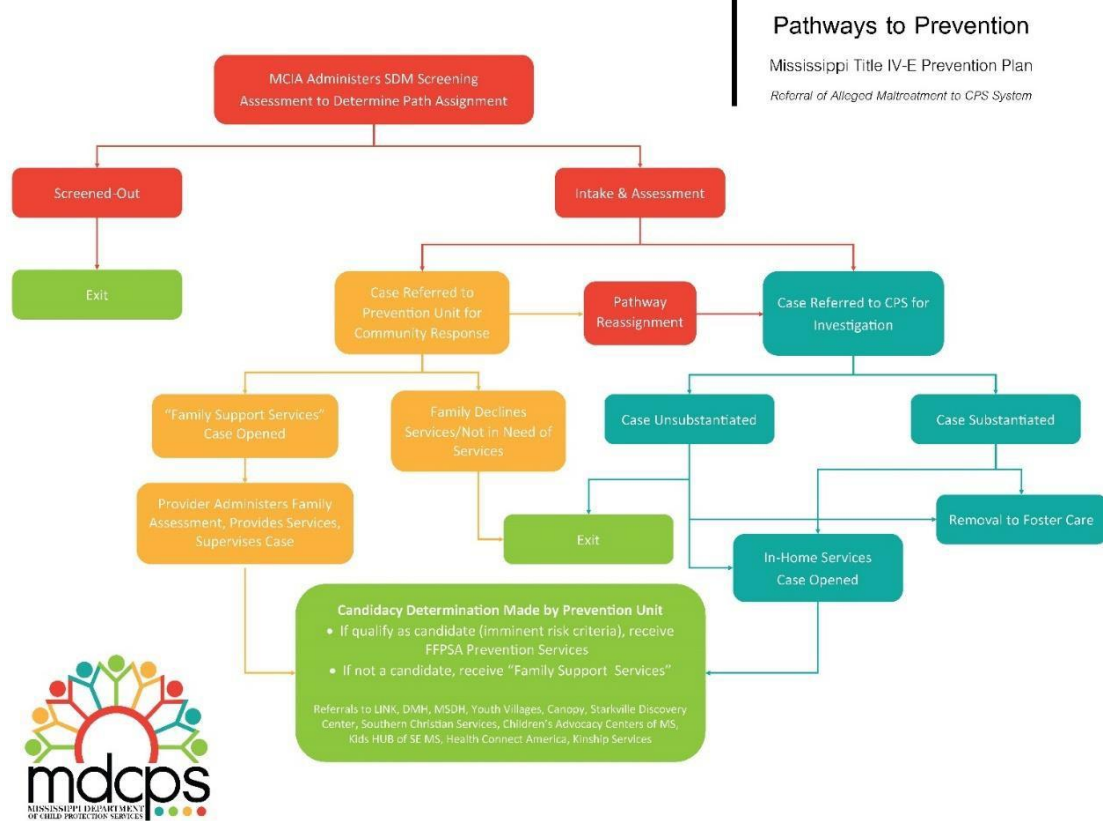
Mississippi is developing a plan to fully automate the child-specific prevention plan, including tracking start- and end-dates as well as which EBP was administered. This will enable easier data tracking and more efficient case management in the future. Current MACWIS technology expansion is on hold due to the enhancement to CCWIS/Pathways, which is being planned with these capabilities in mind.

In addition, MDCPS investigators, in consultation with their supervisors, will determine the level of risk and, in so doing, begin the process of determining eligibility for Title IV-E prevention services for those who exhibit imminent risk. This approach is consistent with current casework practice for in-home service cases and, with the addition of the Community Response pathway, will result in the case flow depicted in the diagram below.

Activity 4: Train internal and external stakeholders on the new in-home services array

MDCPS will determine training effectiveness through ongoing organizational health assessments, surveys, focus groups, evaluations, and any available outcome data.

MDCPS's Practice Model Learning Cycle (PMLC) reinforces the foundation of practice. Developed in 2010, the PMLC updated in FY 2016 to reflect MDCPS's commitment to a trauma



focus. The six components of the practice model are Involving Children and Families in Case Planning, Assuring Safety and Managing Risk, Strengths and Needs Assessment, Individualized Case Planning, Mobilizing Services Timely, and Preserving and Maintaining Connections. The PMLC includes content on trauma-focused child welfare practice within the context of the six practice model components. Practice changes resulting from the PMLC are anticipated to include greater consistency across the state in terms of applying the practice model components as exhibited through enacting the key behaviors defined and reinforced throughout the PMLC.

In its contracts with EBP providers, MDCPS will include terms to ensure that all staff administering Title IV-E prevention services have satisfied training requirements and fulfill other qualifications required by the model program, including that programs and services are offered in accordance with a trauma-informed framework. Through its contract monitoring efforts, the agency can be better assured that the providers can deliver effective service interventions to improve outcomes for children and families.

Activity 5: Develop a manual of in-home service interventions.

The Prevention Unit will develop an in-home service manual for all programs once services are completed. The manual will be completed upon approval of the agency's Pathways to Prevention

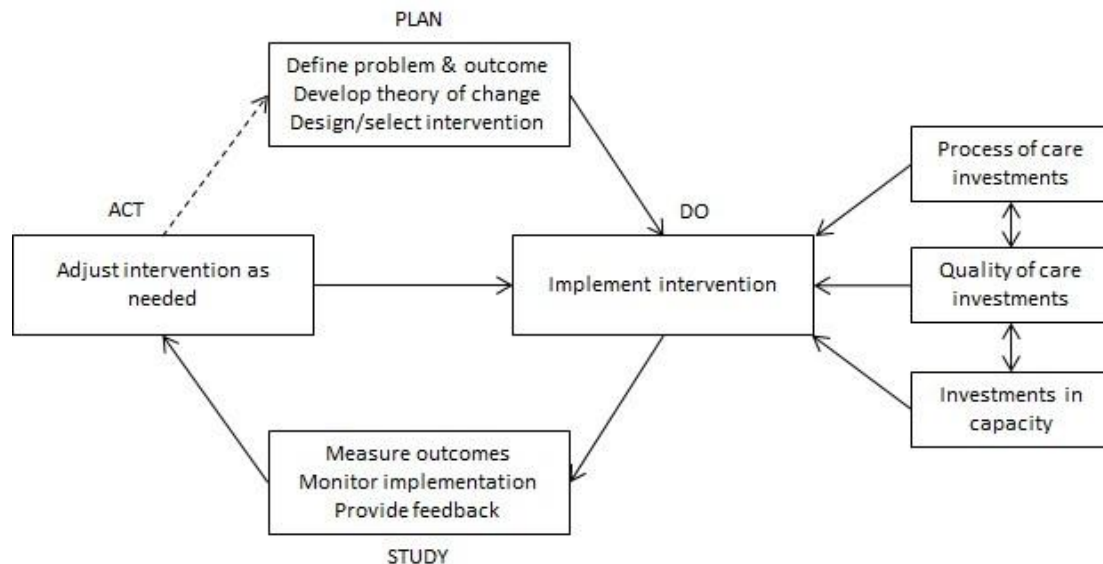
V. Quality Assurance System

MDCPS recognizes the critical role that an inclusive CQI process plays in improving child welfare outcomes. A priority this year has been to assess the agency's CQI process, and infrastructure, including meaningful internal and external stakeholder engagement and data development. In spring 2022, the Joint Planning Meeting was re-branded and called the Mississippi Conference on Children and Families, with a focus on "What Matters Most: Children, Families, and Agency Personnel." The MCCF meeting provided an opportunity for a diverse group of stakeholders to discuss pressing and emerging issues in our child welfare system. i.e., contracting with RedMane Technology, LLC, described below. The CQI Steering Committee was developed in Spring of 2023 in conjunction with Capacity Building Center for States that explores various elements of the statewide system with the goal of developing a robust CQI Plan in conjunction with the Data Quality Plan. A Data Lead position has been added to the CQI Steering Committee that will serve as a liaison between Data Governance Council and the State's CQI system. Also, CQI actively participates in the Data Governance Council to support the shared decision making between Information technology, CQI and data quality strategies. The Agency is still currently assessing CQI Processes and how the PDSA model can be adapted to Mississippi's child welfare system. MDCPS will continue its work with the Capacity Building Center for States by holding monthly meetings with the Steering Committee and developing tasks for each committee to complete during each monthly meeting. The agency is currently compiling CQI Self-Assessment to gauge current functioning of the CQI System. Each Steering Committee was tasked with creating a small work group based on different units across the State to include internal Stakeholders perspective of our existing CQI system. The agency will continue to work with the Center for States by April 30, 2024.

The graphic below is a PDSA model copyrighted by Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago; it illustrates the critical need to pay attention to each step of implementation. MDCPS Steering Committee is in the process of drafting the agencies PDSA Model. The model is expected to be approved by August 2024 and including the agencies CQI Plan in January 2025.

The Basic CQI Cycle

CQI is a method for problem solving that has been applied across fields for nearly a century. As a result, there are a number of different models that describe the CQI process. All of them, however, boil down to the same four fundamental phases: Plan, Do, Study, Act. In a child welfare context, these stages unfold as follows:



© The Center for State Child Welfare Data

Although MDCPS is still in the process of implementing a formal CQI process, the Agency is able cite several examples where the critical PDSA principles are part of regular practice – particularly, the development of logic models and theories of change have been used to plan practice improvement strategies.

Infusing Stakeholder Engagement throughout CQI

MDCPS is prioritizing how performance is analyzed and addressed in a manner that promotes meaningful stakeholder engagement and feedback. To achieve this, the Agency will develop two Forums:

1. **Stakeholder MCCF Meeting:** This external stakeholder team will meet quarterly to discuss and strategize high level agency priorities, including agency-wide performance data which will be shared and discussed. These meetings will tentatively begin in October 2023.
2. **An internal CQI team comprised of key program areas within MDCPS:** This CQI Team will be charged with facilitating a shared, agency wide PDSA process, which will begin with reviewing a variety of quantitative and qualitative performance evidence, including administrative data, case review results, input from stakeholders and persons with lived experience. The internal CQI team will collectively explore factors that contribute to current performance and develop theories of change. The CQI Unit developed a SAP Documentation Framework to implement

statewide. The development of the framework is to ensure that documentation is captured consistently throughout the State. The framework focuses on Safety, Permanency and Well-being within the family unit.

The CQI Steering Committee is comprised of safety, permanency, and well-being, deputy-level staff as well as some front line/supervisory staff who will bring various levels of experience to support an application of the data to “on-the-ground” practice. The CQI Steering committee is committed to the duty of a thorough statewide assessment of the Agency capacity and abilities and leads CQI Sub-Teams in the assessment of the state. From input from multiple CQI Sub-Teams, the CQI Plan will be developed that encompasses internal and external stakeholders. For example, front line and supervisory staff may be called upon to provide input into underlying factors that impact performance and/or to brainstorm potential solutions from an on-the-ground perspective.

The CQI Steering Committee has envisioned CQI sub-committees. These CQI Sub-Committees will bring in a variety of clinical and supportive staff as well as external stakeholders to provide input through various avenues (i.e.: surveys, topical focus groups, “listening” meetings, etc.).

As part of the new CQI Plan, Deputy-level staff who frequently participate in external stakeholder meetings, are positioned to bring to the group, pertinent information received from external stakeholders, and in turn, bring planning information back to those stakeholder groups. Both teams will work collaboratively with the new MDCPS Communications to support effective internal and external communication.

In addition to the adoption of a PDSA CQI model, MDCPS continues to enhance the components of a quality CQI/QA process, as defined by the federal guidance document, ACYF-CB-IM-12-07.

Quality Data Collection

MDCPS has contracted with RedMane Technology, LLC to assist with moving the child welfare system of record (MACWIS) towards CCWIS compatibility. The expectation is that the system will be user friendly for the caseworkers to enter quality case information and will output accurate, complete, and timely administrative data reports to be used for day-to-day case management as well as in the agency’s CQI process to analyze process and outcome performance.

MDCPS has prioritized the need for accurate, timely data. The Data Quality Plan (DQP) will be a foundational planning artifact for MDCPS data quality initiative. The Agency continues to work closely with RedMane Technology, LLC to diligently improve CCWIS data quality going forward by focusing initially on the development of the following areas:

- A framework for master data management to establish and purvey master reference files (single



source of truth, no duplicated persons, etc.) for MDCPS subjects.

- Real-time data quality and timeliness measures and developing timely processes also to reconcile inconsistencies.
- Daily processes to identify data errors that eluded data capture edits or were sourced from external data, etc.

MDCPS established the Data Governance Council (DGC around June 2022). The council, primarily made up of members of the Data Management Team, worked on Data Governance activities such as identifying data quality issues, research around effective data governance, identifying terms to be defined in a data dictionary, and research of Master Data Management tools. In an effort to strengthen the DGC, it was restructured in March 2023, to include cross functional representation from the various departments within MDCPS. The DGC is responsible for governing, improving, and developing data quality policy and standards. The responsibilities of the DGC also include, but is not limited, to focusing on data quality priorities identified in the Data Quality Plan Biennial Review; creating, reviewing, and improving rules for data standards, quality, and security; and interacting with other agencies about data exchanges and sharing of data that will benefit staff with data about clients that exists elsewhere.

Additionally, MDCPS has begun developing strategies to build an Agency-wide understanding of the seven federal CFSR indicators. MDCPS's performance on the national indicators, as referenced in Section III, Update on Current Performance, is at or above the national risk standardized performance in three of the national indicators:

- Permanency in 12 months for children entering foster care.
- Permanency in 12 months for children in care 24 months or more
- Reentry to foster care.

Outcomes below national risk standardized performance are:

- Permanency in 12 months for children in care 12-23 months
- Recurrence of maltreatment
- Maltreatment in care
- Placement stability

To improve understanding of these indicators throughout the state, a series of CFSR Data Indicator Workshops will be recommended to key internal and external stakeholders.

When a network of community members and organizations share an understanding of the desired outcomes and how they are measured, they can collectively have a greater impact on improvement. Therefore, the CFSR Data Indicator workshops will be offered to not only MDCPS

staff, but also to external stakeholders. These workshops will be provided via a collaboration between MDCPS (various Units) and the Capacity Building Center for States. Data workshops are most effective when they are personalized for the attendees, therefore, multiple workshops will be offered, beginning with administrative staff at MDCPS and members of the CQI Team. Capacity will be built within MDCPS to enable the Agency to deliver tailored workshops to other audiences, such as the judicial community, service providers, etc.

Case Record Review Data and Process

MDCPS has a robust case record review process that is described in Section III, Item 25: Quality Assurance, which, according to ACYF-CB-IM-12-07, is “...critical [that] State CQI systems... “Have an ongoing case review component that includes reading case files of children...” p. 5.

Analysis and Dissemination of Quality Data

MDCPS is in the process of increasing its capacity to track, organize, process, and regularly analyze information from various sources of data, including administrative data, case review findings, and feedback from stakeholders.

Additionally, MDCPS is working closely with the Capacity Building Center for States to develop processes specifically, processes related to 1) acquiring, analyzing, and applying data and other evidence to day-to-day practice and 2) dissemination and feedback from stakeholders such as courts, service providers, tribes, and partners with lived experience.

Feedback to Stakeholders and Decision-makers and Adjustment of Programs and Process

MDCPS provides a consistent feedback loop with Stakeholders through various MDCPS led events and committees that allow Stakeholders the opportunity to provide the agency with feedback to improve outcomes for Mississippi children and families. Although several forums and

groups described in Section II serve as opportunities to provide feedback to stakeholders. The formation of the CQI Steering Committee utilizes stakeholder groups, such as the Youth Advisory Council, the Foster Parent Feedback Group, and the Mississippi Conference on Children and Families as valuable contributors to CQI diagnostics, planning, and strategy implementation.

Feedback to stakeholders is a key CQI component. According to ACYF-CF-IM-12-07, it is “...a critical component to driving change within the organization and is key to improving outcomes for children and families. (ACYF-CB-IM-12-07, p. 7).

VI. Update on the Service Descriptions



Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program (Title IV-B, Subpart 1)

In the 2020-2024 CFSP, the State identified that 100% of these funds would be for board payments of children that are not IV-E eligible. APSR funds for 2023 continued to be used for board payments for children that were determined not to be IV-E eligible. MDCPS has not seen a decrease in the need to use this category for board payments. The penetration rate is tied to the agency's approved cost allocation plan. MDCPS is developing a new plan for submission. From the end of the last state fiscal year to now, MDCPS has seen almost a three percent increase in the penetration rate. This has impacted the drawing down of federal funds by increasing the federal portion by a similar amount. By having more federal funds utilized, MDCPS can maximize federal funding and potentially free up general funds that can be used to enhance and further other areas within the agency.

Services for Children Adopted from Other Countries (section 422(b)(11) of the Act))

MDCPS has expanded the Post Adoption Support Services Subgrant to include two providers instead of one. MDCPS has partnered with Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth and Catholic Charities. These post-adoption services consist of counseling, mental health treatment, family preservation and stabilization, crisis intervention and management, peer support, and respite care. Information regarding the post adoption services available to families who have adopted and children who have been adopted from other countries was added to the MDCPS agency website under the Programs tab, and *Foster Care* section.

MDCPS continues to partner with Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth's (SCSCY) Adoption Permanency Division (APD) to provide post adoptive services to this population. Currently, SCSCY-APD provides the following post adoption services to adoptive families:

- Case Management – assessment to determine needs & support in meeting those needs.
- Crisis Stabilization – support in handling any crisis (24 hours a day, 7 days a week)
- Information & Referral – to provide information and referrals to adoption competent services as well as follow-up services.
- Advocacy – to advocate for the adoptive family and their adopted child.
- Respite Services – planned, short term break offered once a month to families as requested and approved.
- Short-term Groups – for training and information for those individuals waiting to adopt.
- Therapy- to support children and families in long-term healing for those who have been adopted or are in the adoption process. (Jackson location or throughout MS by Telehealth)
- International adoption - providing additional services to include families who have adopted through international adoption.

To raise awareness, SCSCY-APD engaged in the following activities:

- Mailing or emailing marketing materials to adoption specific businesses/organizations, such as law firms and organizations that specialize in adoption. APD is also educating family physicians and school counselors regarding its services.
- Focusing its time and energy on high population counties and cities in the state. This listing is updated periodically using US Census data.
- Targeting marketing services in areas of the state where respite providers are needed, for example, in the Delta area of Mississippi.
- Presentations to Adoption & Foster Parent Support Groups.
- Participating in Multidisciplinary Assessment and Planning (MAP) Team meetings

Children adopted from other countries are eligible to utilize post adoption services that are provided through Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth's Adoption Permanency Division (APD). APD continues to raise awareness of this service by mailing or emailing marketing materials to adoption specific businesses/organizations, such as, law firms and organizations that specialize in adoption. APD also educates physicians and school counselors regarding these services.

Funds are distributed through a sub grant that is renewed annually. The funds for the current sub grant are allocated for the period of October 1, 2023, to September 30, 2024.

During this reporting period, there were no children or families adopted from other countries that utilized adoption services.

Services for Children Under the Age of Five (section 422(b)(18) of the Act)

MDCPS will procure a Request for Proposal targeting services for birth to five years of age. The goal of this project is to establish the effectiveness of services and the continuum of care for serving young children (birth to five) and their families in preventing entry into foster care by providing preservation and/or increasing timely reunification services. The program is preferred to be an evidence-based program which provides parents with practical strategies to build strong, healthy relationships with their children, manage children's behavior and prevent future problems from developing.

MDCPS will be seeking proposals for services of the targeted population birth to five years old of age. The goal of this project is to establish additional services in the continuum of care for the purpose of serving young children (birth to five) and their families. Services should be aimed

at increasing opportunities for reunification and timely permanency. Services will also include support to pregnant women within 28 to 40 weeks of their pregnancy who are exhibiting unsafe behaviors that could be detrimental to the mother and child. These services should target preventing entry into foster care by providing preservation interventions. The program is preferred to be an evidence-based program which provides parents with practical strategies to build strong, healthy relationships with their children, manage children's behavior and prevent future problems from developing.

This proposal should be submitted within the next month. Family Preservation, Reunification and Support Services continues to be provided to families as well.

Description of Services

Services for Zero to Five should include connections for parents to resources that will help them sustain safe stability and continuous support. Services should include trauma information interventions that will address/increase parenting skills and family engagement.

- Additional interventions should include:
- Assisting in solving family issues
- Identify substance abuse issues and refer for treatment
- Identify and refer to treatment for mental health, domestic violence and/or anger management related issues
- Help identify personal, vocational, and educational goals
- Assess and assist in building protective capacities to sustain after services

Candidates should propose a 0-5 program that offers Reunification services specifically designed to address the developmental needs of infants, toddlers and young children while supporting the concrete needs of their parent(s) and caregiver(s). The program should clearly articulate the capacity of the organization to accomplish the proposed services, including but not limited to:

- Recent and long-term experience with children's services
- Strong expertise in evaluation and design of survey instruments
- Knowledge of integrated service systems for children
- Strong facilitation skills.

Efforts to Track and Prevent Child Maltreatment Deaths

All child deaths that are suspected to be the result of abuse or neglect must be reported to MDCPS's Child Abuse Hotline. This information comes from many sources including law enforcement, the medical examiner's office, hospitals, medical staff or any other with knowledge or suspicion of a

child abuse related death. The Mississippi Centralized Intake and Assessment (MCIA) unit maintains the Child Abuse Hotline which collects initial information regarding the child's death and enters it into the MACWIS system. Following the initial report, an investigation is assigned to the Special Investigation Unit to assess for maltreatment that may have resulted in the fatality. During the investigation, all the child's death information that has been collected and reviewed is entered into MACWIS. This information is stored and reported to NCANDS annually.

MCDPS continues the efforts to track and prevent child maltreatment deaths by requiring all child deaths that are suspected to be the result of abuse or neglect to be reported to MDCPS's Child Abuse Hotline. The MCIA unit maintains the Child Abuse Hotline which collects initial information regarding the child's death and enters it into the MACWIS system. Following the initial report, an investigation is assigned to the Special Investigation Unit to assess for maltreatment that may have resulted in the fatality. "During the investigation, information related to the child's death that is collected, reviewed and obtained from participating in the postmortem examination, reviewing the initial coroner's report and final autopsy is entered into MACWIS, including a disposition of the alleged maltreatment."

The Reporting Unit continues to submit NCANDS reports, work with field staff to improve data quality, and work staff to identify and correct issues in MACWIS related to NCANDS reporting. NCANDS federal report for FFY2023 was submitted on 01/31/2024 and accepted on 03/13/2024.

The Reporting Unit communicates with field staff through emails, phone calls and Microsoft Teams to provide training on how to correct the data issues in MACWIS. Currently, there is no plan of correction.

See Citizens Review Panels/*The Mississippi Child Death Review Panel* section for additional discussion.

MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF)

As additional funding through Title IV - B and E under the Consolidation Appropriations Act is available to us, we are currently discussing with Senior Leadership our options for this funding which will be allocated for this fiscal year.

MDCPS utilized Division X funding by providing concrete support services. These concrete support services are based on need and provided to families that make appropriate requests. PSSF Funds are divided into various units in the agency. Prevention receives PSSF Funds for Family Preservation, Family Reunification, and currently the agency is using funds for Family Support. A portion of the funds are currently being utilized to assist families that need concrete services as stated below. During the program year MDCPS faced the challenge of not having respondents to the RFP for concrete services. In turn the agency developed a

short-term program to utilize PSSF funds and assist families throughout the state.

MDCPS attempted to procure a community provider to accept referrals and to assist families and children with resolving crisis and utilize appropriate and necessary services to remain safely together or to reunify with family members. MDCPS recognized that several families were experiencing needs related to financial support, housing, and transportation during the pandemic. MDCPS established a process by which county staff would submit referrals to families at risk of being separated due to a concrete need or families whose barriers to reunification are related to short-term temporary concrete needs. The process allowed the MDCPS Prevention Unit to directly assist families with short term needs that included but was not limited to housing deposits, furniture, food, transportation, and clothing for children. The MDCPS employee initiated the referral and was responsible for meeting with the family and working with them to establish a plan for sustaining once the short-term support has ended. MDCPS staff were made aware of this being a time limited support and based on funding availability.

PSSF Services

in-CIRCLE Family Support Services Program through Youth Villages and Canopy continue to provide services for families, and Youth Villages provides services strictly through Intercept Services funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) beginning October 1, 2023. All referrals from PSSF transitioned to Intercept Services. Canopy Children's Solutions utilized state general funds to provide services. Both vendors continue to provide Family Preservation Services as defined in "Title IV-B, SUBPART 2 – Promoting Safe and Stable Families" regarding pre-placement preventative services designed to help children at risk of foster care placement to remain safely with their families. However, the expanded definition of Reunification Services within the *in-CIRCLE* program and the blended funding provided to each vendor continue to offer different definitions for each vendor, but both fit within the PSSF definition structure. Canopy's definition of Reunification Services and those cases they served meet both the Time-Limited Family Reunification Services definition and the Family Preservation Services definition under PSSF of service programs designed to provide follow-up care to families to whom a child has been returned after a foster care placement. There is no 15-month time limit as in the definition required to meet criteria under the definition for Family Preservation Services and Time Limited Family Reunification Services. Originally, Canopy was providing in-home services under PSSF; however, with the expansion of services, Canopy then was funded through PSSF and State General Funding. Currently, Canopy is now solely funded through State General Funding while Youth Villages is paid entirely through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA).

in-CIRCLE continues to be an intensive, home and community-based family preservation,



reunification, and support services program for families with children who are at risk of out-of-home placement. It was designed and implemented to help break the cycle of family dysfunction by strengthening families, keeping children safe, and reducing foster care and other forms of out-of-home placements. The primary goal of the program is to remove the risk of harm to the child rather than removing the child by (1) reducing unnecessary out-of-home placements, (2) preventing and/or reducing child abuse and neglect, (3) improving family functioning, (4) enhancing parenting skills, (5) increasing access to social and formal and informal concrete supports, (6) addressing mental health and substance use issues, (7) reducing child behavior problems, and (8) safely reunifying families.

(1) Families with children birth to 18 who were under the care and jurisdiction of MDCPS, who were at-risk of being removed from the family and placed in foster care, group care, psychiatric hospitals, or juvenile justice facilities, or who had been removed and for whom reunification was an appropriate option.

(2) Families with pregnant mothers who are at high risk of the child being removed due to substance use issues once the child is born.

Referrals to the program continue to come from the court system or MDCPS staff who identified the family and child(ren) as appropriate for and in need of program services. MDCPS currently have two staff serving as in-CIRCLE Prevention Specialists, one for the Western part of the state and one for the Eastern part of the state. A Prevention Team Lead provides oversight to the 2 staff Specialists over the program. The duties of the two (2) Prevention Specialists have not changed, and consist of the following:

- Review referrals from CPS, Courts, and Judges' staff to determine eligibility for in- CIRCLE or Dorcas by reviewing the online form (Smartsheet), attachments, etc., and reviewing the case in MACWIS.
- Assess families for alternative services.
- Review current case files to determine if cases are handled appropriately in MACWIS.
- Assist with drafting updated policy.
- Meet with the in-CIRCLE staff; attend home visits as needed.
- Provide technical assistance/training as needed.
- Revise packet for staff on the in-CIRCLE referral process as needed.
- The Prevention Team Lead is responsible for managing the Program through tracking and assigning referrals, maintaining programmatic data, correcting, and requesting any missing documentation from the Providers through Smartsheet and supervising the two Prevention Specialists. Smartsheet is a web-based software service application that is used for collaborating with Providers to manage the in-CIRCLE program. Information is also assessed and compiled from Smartsheet along with the caseload data from the states' two contractual Providers to generate weekly and monthly reports to senior and executive leadership for review and feedback. The Prevention Team Lead is also

responsible for reviewing child fatality reports to determine if they had received *in-CIRCLE* services. The referral process for the *in-CIRCLE* Program consists of the following procedures:

- *in-CIRCLE* referrals are submitted through Smartsheet. Referral sources complete the information on the web-based form and uploaded in an In-Home Participation Form. Smartsheet provides a secure method of distribution of referrals to the Providers. All Providers have access to their specific referrals via a secure email and password protected process through Smartsheet.

Applications are reviewed for suitability for the Program by the in-state Prevention Specialists and then forwarded to Providers for consideration for services. Once a valid referral is made, the family is contacted by program staff within 48-72 hours and will have direct contact within 3 days. If deemed an emergency, the family is visited as soon as possible, but within 24-48 hours. Once a Provider receives the referral, attempts are made to contact the family to set a schedule of service delivery. If after contact are made and it is deemed that the family is not in need of the intensity of services provided by the *in-CIRCLE* program, Providers worked with MDCPS and the family to make a more appropriate referral to a community resource that would better suit the needs of the family. Some alternative referrals include referrals to MYPAC (Mississippi Youth Programs Around the Clock) services, Navigating Families to Success (LINK), local mental health professionals, and community mental health or substance use disorders treatment facilities.

- **Assessment Phase-** During the initial visit, any immediate crisis will be diffused, and the family functioning assessment process begins. The *Program* worker(s) assess family functioning and develop an assessment report within 48-72 hours of referral. Once the family functioning assessment is completed, a Family Service Plan (FSP) is developed with and for the family within seven (7) working days of Intake. During this assessment, however, any needed crisis services deemed necessary to protect the child(ren) is to be provided by appropriately licensed and/or credentialed program staff. Once completed, a copy of the family functioning assessment is submitted to MDCPS. A Family Service Plan (FSP) is developed for each family and includes at a minimum the following:
 - o Family outcome goals
 - o Strategies and procedures for achieving the goals.
 - o Specific therapeutic, social, and psychological services to be delivered, including intensity, provider(s), tenure, etc.
 - o Specific parenting, social, employment, educational, home economic, and other identified concrete supports to be provided, including method for acquiring, provided by whom, intensity, etc.
 - o Responsibility of parties

- o Methods for measuring impact of each service and support, as well as progress toward overall goal
- o Timeframe for completion-once completed, a copy of the FSP is submitted to the MDCPS.
- **Program Components and Strategies-** The primary intervention components of the program is engaging and motivating family members, conducting holistic, functional assessments, developing outcome-based goals, using evidence-based practices and interventions, teaching skills to facilitate behavioral change, and developing and enhancing ongoing community supports and resources. The core strategies to be utilized are:
 - o **Crisis Management** – program staff are to intervene as soon as possible (within 24 hours of referral) if the family is deemed to be in a crisis.
 - o **Accessibility** – Services are provided in the family’s home and community, at times convenient to families. Appropriate staff are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for crisis intervention.
- **Flexibility** – Intervention support strategies and methods are tailored to meet the needs, values, and lifestyles of each family, as well as, to provide a wide range of services/supports, such as meeting basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter, home economics and management, job readiness, parent education, substance abuse issues, medical care, and navigating public services system to individual and family therapy, individual and family case management, and crisis intervention.
 - o **Time limited and low caseload** – Families receive 8-12 weeks of intensive interventions with the intensive level of care, a minimum of eight service hours per week will be provided to each family including home visits, telephone contacts, transporting and accessing concrete services along with community support. *Program* staff (teams) serve a limited number of families at a time. The family can continue to receive services and support up to another 12 weeks (period) with reduced intensity if deemed necessary for child safety and family preservation by program staff and MDCPS. Finally, program staff can maintain a casual, professional relationship with families in a soft support stage for up to 1 year from the time of entering the program to check on from time to time or to receive a call seeking advice or information. Under certain circumstances, a family can be referred to a more intense stage if in the opinion of the program and MDCPS staff involved it is necessary for child safety and family preservation.
 - o **Family-centered assessments and service planning** – Assessments were strengths-based and family-focused. Plans were individualized with measurable goals, developed collaboratively with the family, and in sync with the MDCPS plan for the family.
 - o **Research-based practices** – Program staff use evidence-based interventions, such as (but not limited to) motivational interviewing, behavioral parent training, cognitive-

behavior therapy strategies, wraparound, and relapse prevention. Family members are taught a variety of skills, including child behavior management, effective discipline, positive behavioral support, communication skills, problem-solving skills, mood management skills, safety planning, and routine daily planning.

- o **Community engagement and resource building** – Appropriate program staff encourage and facilitate the family’s involvement and engagement in the community for continued relationships and supports, and help families assess their formal and informal support system, develop, and enhance ongoing resources needed to facilitate and maintain change after program is concluded.
- o **Collaboration with Families First for Mississippi Programs** – Where available and appropriate, program staff utilize the family-supporting services provided through the Families First for Mississippi Centers, or similar entities, throughout the state.
- o **Termination of Program Services and Supports-** When the family is ready to function safely on their own, based on family functioning evaluation scores, FSP goal accomplishment, and consensus of MDCPS and program staff, a termination summary report is submitted to MDCPS and to the court, if applicable, providing an assessment of the family functioning and outcomes of FSP goals. Peer support for the family is still accessed at this time, when possible. When convinced that program efforts are not enough to ensure sufficient family functioning and child safety, program staff submits a termination report to MDCPS and court, if applicable, providing evidence of a lack of family effort, capacity, and/or willingness to implement the elements of the FSP which may result in termination of parental rights.

Intercept is on the list of programs to be reviewed next by the Title IV-E Prevention Services Clearinghouse. Intercept is an integrated and systemic approach to in-home parent skill development that offers a variety of evidence-based practices to meet the individualized needs of a family and child. It adheres to Family First criteria as an in-home parent skill-based program for children of any age—infant to age 18, including expectant and parenting foster youth. Intercept is appropriate for families with children of all ages who have serious emotional and behavioral problems or who have experienced abuse and/or neglect. The program specializes in working with children who are at high risk of entry or re-entry into foster care by helping families retain children in their custody (prevention and reunification).

Placement: Intercept reduces the chances of out-of-home placement by 53% following a maltreatment investigation. The effect of Intercept is sustained at six and 12 months after Intercept services end.

Permanency: Compared to a matched comparison group, after controlling for how long they were in care, the odds of achieving permanency were approximately 24% higher for the Intercept group.

As a core element of Intercept, Family Intervention Specialists use GuideTree™, our proprietary and comprehensive system pairing the guidance of a Licensed Program Expert during regular consultation with a robust online resource containing hundreds of evidence-based, evidence informed, and other best practice interventions. This system helps staff to conceptualize the causal structure and the drivers of a youth’s referral behavior, and focuses on safety, so youth and families reach their goals. In conjunction with GuideTree, Family Intervention Specialists meet with families a minimum of two to three times weekly depending on the need and provides families in crisis with 24/7 support.

**Youth Villages Intercept
(July 1, 2023 – June 22, 2024)**

	Number Children served	Number Families served	Population served	Geographic area served
Family Preservation/Reu nification/ Support Services	270	130	Statewide	Statewide
TOTALS	270	130		

With the Intercept Program, MDCPS has been able to serve approximately 270 families this reporting period (July 1, 2023 – June 22, 2024) through funding through the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA). Since the program began October 2022, the number of children served for both Family Preservation/Family Reunification services is 3,159 children and families are 792 as of June 22, 2024.

**Canopy in-CIRCLE
State General Funds
(June 1, 2023-June 22, 2024)**

	Number Individuals served	Number Families served	Population served	Geographic area served
Family Preservation/Reunification / Support Services	1840	802	Statewide	Statewide
TOTALS	1840	802		

With the *in-CIRCLE* Program, MDCPS has been able to serve approximately 802 families this reporting period (June 1, 2023 – June 22, 2024). Since the program began October 2017, the

number of children served for both Family Preservation/Family Reunification services is 16, 617 children and families are 4,580 as of June 22, 2024.

Dorcas is another In-Home Service provided to the families of MDCPS with no cost offered through Baptist Children's Village. Their data of families served is below:

Dorcas
(July 1, 2023 – June 22, 2024)

	Number Children served	Number Families served	Population served	Geographic area served
Family Support Services	281	108	Statewide	Statewide
TOTALS	281	108		

Demographic Information on Referrals: Families are single: African American Females (majority), Caucasian, Hispanic/Latino, Asian, Native American, etc.; head of household, with children under the ages of 10.

1. What we have learned: Most of the families are in metropolitan areas.
2. Families are limited in their support, education, finances, etc.
3. It may be more than one initial report made prior to services or removal.
4. An increase of substance abuse referrals.
5. Increase in domestic violence referrals.
6. Multiple types of issues, i.e., abuse, neglect, behavioral issues, etc.
7. Increase of support needs
8. Past Trauma

The data continues to assist us to address issues and be included in the service array as we see the need for more services that are not just geared towards abuse and neglect.

Some demographic information is gathered through our referral and assessment process, but it has not been analyzed for disproportionalities or disparities as of now, but it is something MDCPS is willing to explore in future evaluations of the program.

MDCPS has a process and outcome-based evaluation of the In-Home Services Programs completed by each Provider. Five methods were used to identify and determine the level of program effectiveness: family interviews, key informant surveys, NCAFAS Assessment Comparison, Discharge Analysis, and Child Tracking Data Comparison.

Using a validated number of families successfully discharged from In Home Services Programs from July 1, 2023 to June 22, 2024, the data revealed that the success of children remaining in their homes safely were:

- a. One hundred Percent (100%) of children served by Canopy.
- b. Eighty-nine Percent (89%) of families served by Youth Villages.

This data reflects that both Providers are effective at meeting the program goal of keeping children safely in-home and out of custody for at least one year after discharge. Additionally, recommendations for modifications to the Program included increases in mileage/travel stipends for families and an increase in the amount of discretionary funds families can be provided through the program. These Recommendations will be considered as MDCPS continues to assess and make improvements to the current service array.

MDCPS is currently able to see that the success of the program hovers at 94.5% of children remaining safely in their homes without further disruption.

Updates to Adoption Promotion and Support Services

The Department continues to contract with Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth and Catholic Charities, Inc. to expand and improve upon the post adoption services that are currently available to adoptive families. Both providers offer an array of post adoption support services to ensure the needs of adoptive families across the state are being met.

The Permanency Support Services/Adoption Unit incorporates equity for all children ensuring that pre and post adoption services are available to all children and families that have been adopted through foster care. Currently, the Permanency Support Services/Adoption Unit collects data through the monthly reports submitted by Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth and Catholic Charities, Inc. Data is also collected in the MDCPS Footprints system and pulled from CORE.

The PSS/Adoption Unit worked with the MDPCS Communications Team to raise awareness of the services provided to this population via MDCPS social media platforms. The Permanency Support Services and TPR and Adoption Unit provided services to children, families, and individuals.

- a. Adoption Finalizations: During July 2023 – June 2024, 550 adoptions were finalized and 33 of those adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.
- b. Post Adoption Services: During July 2023 – June 2024, SCSY-APD served 1,178 families by providing direct and indirect services.
- c. TPR Packets Submitted to State Office: 721
- d. TPR Packets Submitted to the Attorney General's Office by State Office: 682
- e. Children Legally Free for Adoption: 628

Services Provided under PSSF Adoption Promotion and Support Services

Promoting Safe & Stable Families 2022 – Adoption (PSSF 2022)	
Obligation Date: September 30, 2023	Liquidation Date: December 30, 2023
EXPENSES	COST
Post Adoption Subgrant (Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth's)	\$600,000.00
Post Adoption Subgrant (Catholic Charities, Inc.)	\$262,499.00
TOTAL	862,499.00
PSSF Adoption Promotion 2022	\$862,499.00
BALANCE	\$0.00

Adoption Finalizations

Permanency Support Services/Adoption Unit's (PSS/AU) adoption finalization goal for SFY 2024 is 600. PSS/AU continues to partner with the adoption clinic at Mississippi College School (MC) of Law to finalize adoptions for families adopting through MDCPS.

Quarter 1: 103 adoptions were finalized and 6 of those adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.

Quarter 2: 150 adoptions were finalized and 8 of those adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.

Quarter 3: 122 adoptions were finalized and 8 of those adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.

Quarter 4: 165 adoptions were finalized and 11 of those adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.

During this reporting year, 550 were finalized and 33 of these adoptions were finalized by MC School of Law.

SFY 2024 by Service Area and Quarter

Service Area	Quarter 1 July 2023 – Sept 2023	Quarter 2 Oct 2023 – Dec 2023	Quarter 3 Jan 2024 – Mar 2024	Quarter 4 April 2024 – June 2024	Yearly Total
1	4	6	5	8	25



Service Area	Quarter 1 July 2023 – Sept 2023	Quarter 2 Oct 2023 – Dec 2023	Quarter 3 Jan 2024 – Mar 2024	Quarter 4 April 2024 – June 2024	Yearly Total
2	21	25	19	22	87
3	14	13	3	17	47
4	12	19	9	27	74
5	5	10	13	17	45
6	13	36	18	35	102
7	34	42	46	48	170
Total	103	151	113	174	550

Post Adoption Services

Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth's (SCSCY) Adoption Permanency Division (APD) continues to provide MDCPS' adoptive families with the following post adoption services: counseling; mental health treatment, family preservation and stabilization, crisis intervention and management, peer support, and respite. Services are available 365 days a year, 24 hours a day to ensure that families receive the supportive services they need. The quarter breakdown below represents the number of families served during SFY 2024.

Quarter 1: APD served 139 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Quarter 2: APD served 589 families by providing direct and indirect services. The number of families during this quarter increased due to the numerous adoption celebrations that occurred across the state during the months of November and December.

Quarter 3: APD served 229 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Quarter 4: APD served 113 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Catholic Charities, Inc. (CC) continues to provide MDCPS' adoptive families with the following post adoption services: respite, therapeutic counseling, support groups, training, and general assistance.

Quarter 1: CC served 28 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Quarter 2: CC served 39 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Quarter 3: CC served 21 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Quarter 4: CC served 20 families by providing direct and indirect services.

Both Southern Christian Services for Children & Youth's (SCSCY) Adoption Permanency Division (APD) raise awareness of post adoption services by mailing post adoption support information to families who have adopted, attending various community events across the state, and hosting informational/recruitment sessions to market respite services. MDCPS also includes

post adoption support information in a “Congratulations” packet that is sent to families after adoption finalization.

Recruitment of Adoptive Families

During this reporting period, the Permanency Support Services/Recruitment Unit (PSS/RU) continued to focus on adoptive parent recruitment through Heart Gallery promotions. The agency also hosts various recruitment events across the state.

Heart Gallery (Physical Display)

The previous items for recruitment for the Heart Gallery were rebranded to reflect MDCPS' new logo. Therefore, the Heart Gallery display did not have activity during August – October 2023.

Location		Dates
The Mall at Barnes Crossing Tupelo, MS		November 2023 - June 2024 A permanent Heart Gallery physical display was created
New Horizon International Church Jackson, MS		December 2023 - January 2024
Fostering Hope/Communities of Hope Foster Care Event Gulfport, MS		February 22-23, 2024
Foster Parent Classes Crossgates Baptist Church Brandon, MS	Humphreys County Courthouse Belzoni, MS	March 6-29, 2024
MS Sports Hall of Fame & Museum Jackson, MS		June 1, 2024 Promotional items provided to Foster Care Recruitment Staff for an event

Heart Gallery and Adopt US Kids (Website)

AdoptUSKids mission is to raise public awareness about the need for foster and adoptive families for children in the public child welfare system and assist US states, territories, and tribes to recruit, engage, develop, and support foster and adoptive families. AdoptUSKids educates families about foster care and adoption and gives child welfare professionals information and support to help them improve their services. They also maintain the nation’s only federally funded photo listing service that connects waiting children with families.

During this reporting period, 348 inquiries came from the MDCPS Heart Gallery website and 145 inquiries through the Adopt US Kids Resource Tracking Tool to MDCPS. 26 children were adopted during this reporting period (*MDCPS does not receive/monitor this information*).

Adoption Collaborations



Permanency Support Services/Adoption Unit continues to partner with the Office of the Mississippi Attorney General and with the Adoption Clinic at Mississippi College’s School of Law to complete TPRs, adoption finalizations, and secure new birth certificates for families adopting through MDCPS.

Termination of Parental Rights/Adoption Permanency Review

The Office of Permanency continues to facilitate the monthly review of children that have a permanent plan of adoption. These reviews continue to provide State Office, Frontline/Adoption staff, and the Office of Legal Counsel the opportunity to review each case, identify barriers, and develop case specific strategies to overcome each barrier to ensure that children move toward permanency in a timely manner.

Children Not Legally Free for Adoption (# of cases reviewed)

July 2023: 691	August 2023: 678	September 2023: 683
October 2023: 634	November 2023: 653	December 2023: 634
January 2024: 611	February 2024: 633	March 2024: 647
April 2024: 629	May 2024: 659	June 2024: 668

Children Legally Free for Adoption (# of cases reviewed)

July 2023: 389	August 2023: 379	September 2023: 397
October 2023: 425	November 2023: 429	December 2023: 432
January 2024: 420	February 2024: 441	March 2024: 446
April 2024: 469	May 2024: 456	June 2024: 428

Filing of Timely TPR Referrals

MDCPS agrees with the CFSR rating for this item as an area needing improvement. The Office of Permanency conducted a qualitative review for the period of January 1 – December 31, 2023. Results from this review found that 31% of the applicable cases rated a complaint (674 children with timely TPR referrals or timely ASFA documentation out of 2,207 children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in care prior to or during the calendar years 2022 and 2023). It was noted that MDCPS requires much needed improvement in filing timely TPR referrals and notating initial/subsequent ASFA exceptions.

TPR Referrals for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2022– 6.3.b.2 – 281 Timely TPR Referrals (Numerator)/1,079 Total Population (Denominator)

TPR Referrals for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2023– 6.3.b.2 – 297 Timely TPR Referrals (Numerator)/1,128 Total Population (Denominator)

ASFA Exceptions for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2022– 6.3.b.2 - 66 Valid ASFA Exceptions (Numerator)/1,079 Total Population (Denominator)

ASFA Exceptions for children who reached 15 of the most recent 22 months in 2023 – 6.3.b.2 - 30 Valid ASFA Exceptions (Numerator)/1,128 Total Population (Denominator)

The method of analysis was related to provision 6.3.b.2. A termination of parental rights (TPR) referral shall be made on behalf of a child before the child has spent more than 15 of the most recent 22 months in foster care unless an available exception pursuant to the federal Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) has been documented by MDCPS in the child's case record. After the initial ASFA exception, MDCPS may continue the exception for only one additional six-month period unless continued invocation of the exception is reviewed, approved, and documented semi-annually by the RD assigned to the county of responsibility for the child.

This quality assurance process has been established within the permanency support unit as part of the Olivia Y. CQI plan to ensure proper tracking, reporting and accountability to this provision. MDCPS details a process of leveraging timely termination of parental rights through court engagement and collaboration to ensure timely permanency for all children in care in the CFSR PIP.

The data presented was collected from MACWIS by the Data Reporting Unit and analyzed by the Office of Permanency.

The barriers and compelling reasons observed for not filing/referring a TPR packet to the AG's office in a timely manner include: (1) the county not submitting the packet to State office in a timely manner; or (2) a TPR packet may contain deficiencies that must be corrected on the county level before the packet can be referred to the AG's office.

A process is being built within the new Pathways system that will trigger alerts at certain parts of the TPR process for the reviewing and tracking of timely TPR packet submission and/or ASFA exceptions. The Office of Permanency is working through policy and procedure revisions that are intended to improve the timeliness and accuracy of the TPR and ASFA Exception process.

TPR SharePoint Library

The TPR SharePoint Library continues to be utilized by field staff to submit TPR referrals to the Permanency Support Services/TPR Unit (PSS/TPRU). PSS/TPRU continues to electronically receive and review TPR referrals through the library. PSS/TPRU prepares and submits TPR referrals to the Attorney General's Office (AGO) through the AGO's electronic TPR Portal.

The Permanency Support Services/TPR Unit incorporates equity for all children by collaborating with direct service staff to ensure that TPR referrals are made timely on behalf of children who have spent 15 of the most recent 22 months in care, unless an ASFA expectation has been documented in the child's case record. The MSA 6.3.b.2 data file is used to

determine how well the agency is meeting this requirement. The Footprints system is also used to collect and review data pertaining to the timely filing of TPR referrals.

TPR Referrals Submitted to State Office: 721 individual children

July 2023: 47	August 2023: 73	September 2023: 60
October 2023: 63	November 2023: 48	December 2023: 73
January 2024: 69	February 2024: 48	March 2024: 71
April 2024: 57	May 2024: 78	June 2024: 34

TPR Referrals Submitted to the Attorney General's Office: 682 individual children

July 2023: 51	August 2023: 48	September 2023: 59
October 2023: 64	November 2023: 52	December 2023: 59
January 2024: 84	February 2024: 34	March 2024: 76
April 2024: 48	May 2024: 68	June 2024: 39

Children Legally Free for Adoption: 628 individual children

July 2023: 46	August 2023: 64	September 2023: 54
October 2023: 48	November 2023: 54	December 2023: 42
January 2024: 72	February 2024: 53	March 2024: 42
April 2024: 43	May 2024: 81	June 2024: 29

Service Decision-Making process for Family Support Services (45 CFR 1357.15(r))

MDCPS continues to work with Evident Change on developing and implementing the Structure Decision Making Process (Community Response). Community Response (CR) is a method of differential response that allows the MS Department of Child Protection services to partner with community providers in completing family assessments at risk of child maltreatment and intervene when appropriate with a combination of community-based services and intensive in-home services. Community Response is an alternative pathway that allows the Prevention Unit to coordinate response for families at risk of child maltreatment rather than the traditional investigative response. The goals of Community Response are to maintain children in their homes and communities when safely possible and strengthen families by providing preservation resources from community-based entities.

As with investigations, Community Response is initiated through the Mississippi Centralized Intake Assessment Hotline. The focus remains the safety and well-being of the child and promotes permanency. There is not a disposition of "substantiated" or "unsubstantiated". Community involvement and connecting a family to informal, supportive resources in their local communities are crucial aspects to a successful intervention for all types of CR cases.

A Community Response Policy has been developed and drafted. A final copy upon approval will

be provided.

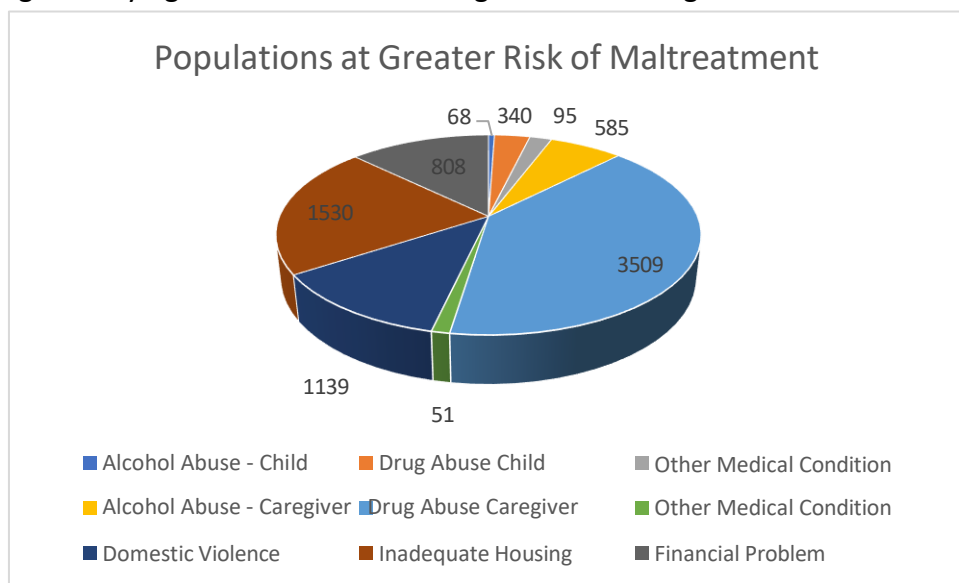
Division X Supplemental Funding from the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act

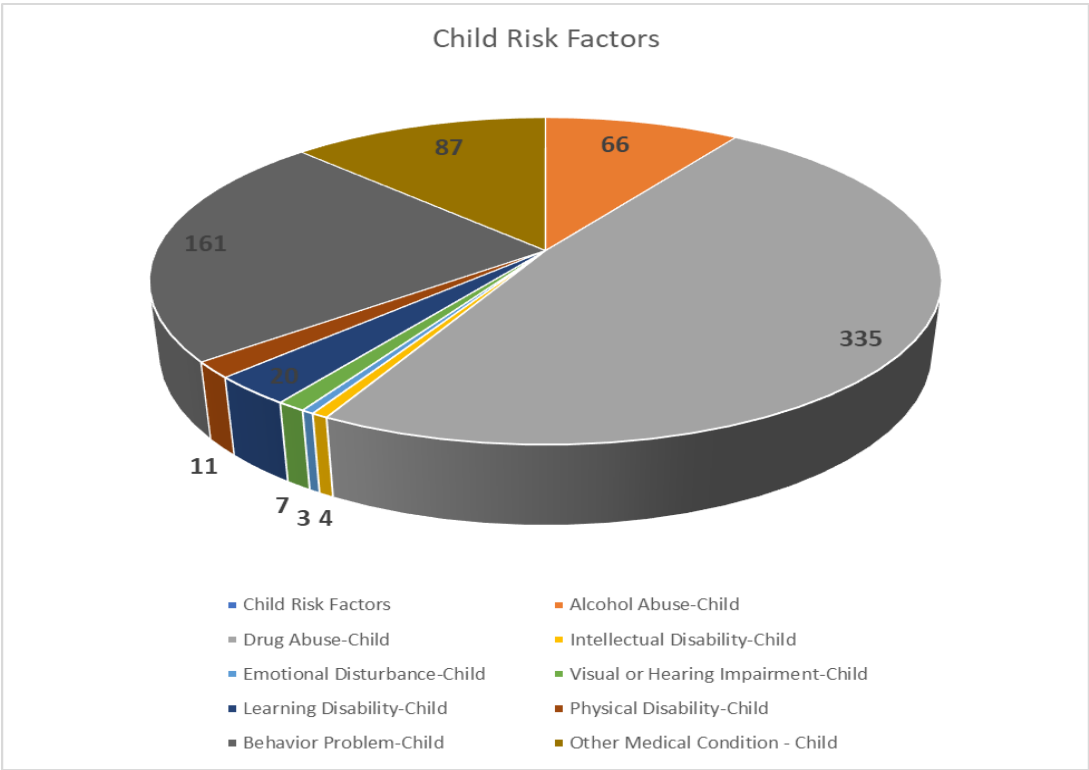
Service Decision-Making process for Family Support Services (45 CFR 1357.15(r))

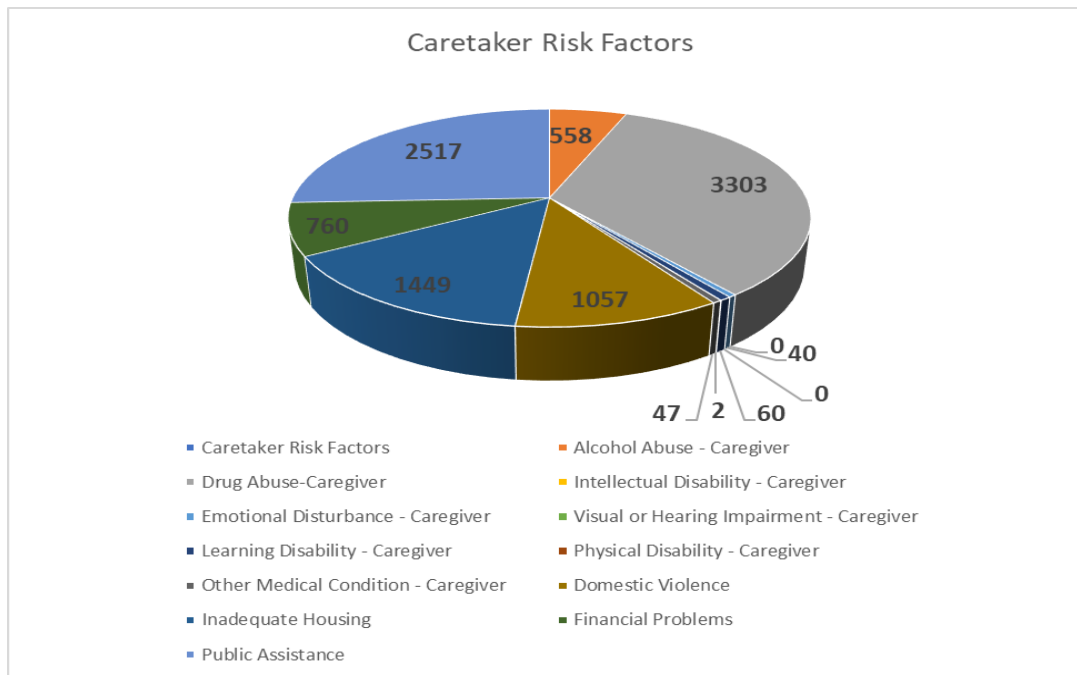
Please see section regarding MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) (title IV-B, subpart 2) which identifies how the state addressed the Family Support Services component of the PSSF program. Specific percentages of title IV-B, sub-part 2 funds are identified in the CFS 101-Part 1.

Populations at Greatest Risk of Maltreatment (section 432(a)(10) of the Act)

Of the children that were substantiated for abuse and neglect in FFY22, MDCPS saw the following underlying conditions contributing to abuse or neglect:





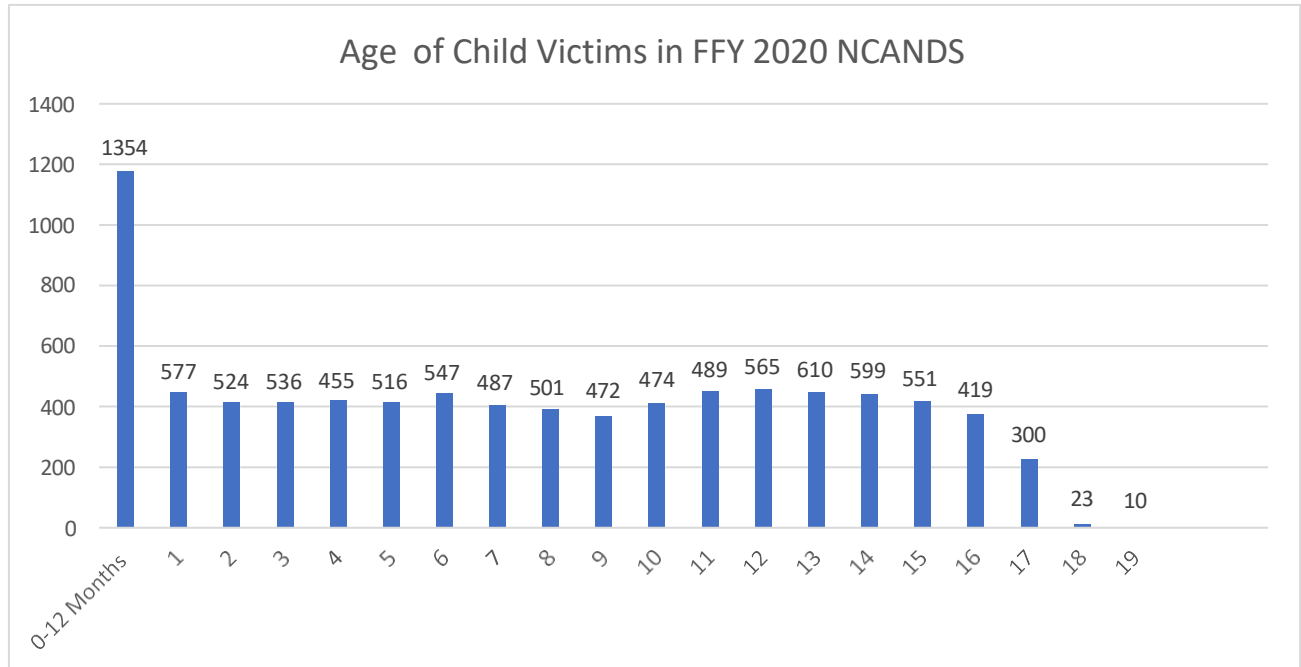


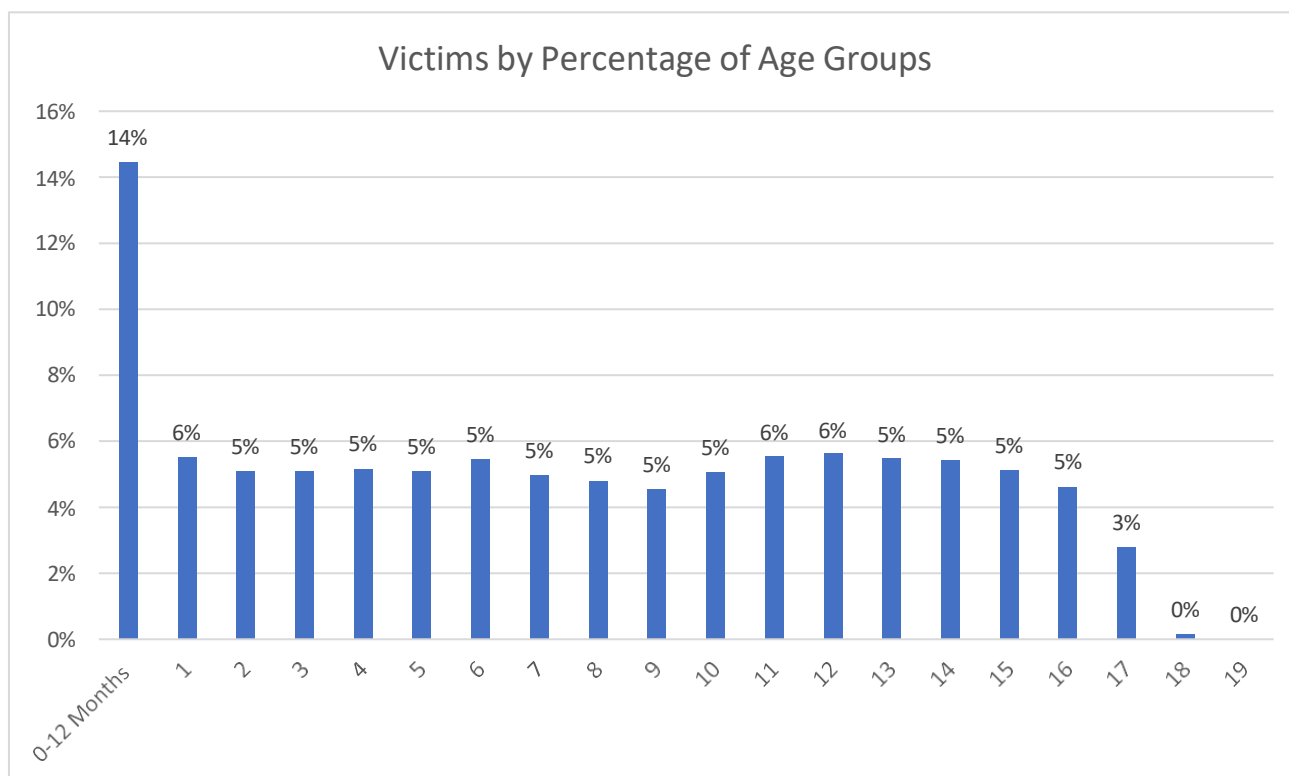
Services will be targeted to these populations in the upcoming year using any available service options that apply. CARA response and referrals to appropriate resources will be used when appropriate for infants affected by caregiver substance abuse. New procurements for diversified in home services will also be used to target services to these populations. MDCPS plans to expand the current in-CIRCLE program by issuing procurements for both intensive and less intensive versions of the services. MDCPS Prevention Services will also continue community-based prevention efforts and collaborations with community partners such as SIDS Alliance, MS Department of Mental Health, MS Department of Health. Prevention Services will also continue to look for opportunities to connect with new community partners and engage in innovative community-based prevention efforts.

Using the FFY 2022 NCANDS data file, MDCPS identified the populations at greatest risk of maltreatment as youth who are under the age of 12 months old (see chart below). Of the total number of victims in the file (10,010) with at least one substantiated maltreatment, 1,354 (14%) were 0-12 months old at the time of the maltreatment report. According to the data, youth ages 2 years old – 10 years old and 13 -16 years old are maltreated at relatively the same rate. Youth ages 17 and older are maltreated less frequently than any other age group which may conceptually relate to the operational definition of a “child” for the purposes of MDCPS’ child welfare system or may reflect enhanced protective capacities of older youth.

Using the FFY 2022 NCANDS data file, MDCPS identified the populations at greatest risk of maltreatment as youth who are under the age of 12 months old (see chart below). Of the

total number of victims in the file (8,527) with at least one substantiated maltreatment, 1,260 (15%) were 0-12 months old at the time of the maltreatment report. According to the data, older youth ages 12 years old – 15 years old experience maltreatment at a higher rate than younger youth ages 1 – 6 years old. Youth ages 17 years old and older are maltreated less frequently than any other age group which may conceptually relate to the operational definition of a “child” for the purposes of MDCPS’ child welfare system or may reflect enhanced protective capacities of older youth.





CARA response and referrals are currently being used when appropriate for infants affected by caregiver substance abuse with no additional safety concerns to address the needs of the caregiver and the infant to reduce the risk of abuse or neglect occurring. MDCPS completes assessments of the family to establish service needs. Services providers that MDCPS has collaborated with and referred populations at greater risk of maltreatment to are Healthy Families MS, Baptist Children’s Village Dorcas program, in-CIRCLE provided by Canopy and Youth Villages. Services will be targeted to these populations in the upcoming year using any available service options that apply to the needs of the child or caregiver. New procurements for diversified in home services will also be used to target services to these populations. MDCPS plans to expand the current in-CIRCLE program by issuing procurements for both intensive and less intensive versions of the services. MDCPS Prevention Services will also continue community-based prevention efforts and collaborations with community partners such as SIDS Alliance, MS Department of Mental Health, Southern Christian Services for Children and Youth, MS Department of Health. Prevention Services will also continue to look for opportunities to connect with new community partners and engage in innovative community-based prevention efforts. These services have enhanced enhance the stability and safety for children and care givers.

I. Kinship Navigator Funding (title IV-B, subpart 2)

Catholic Charities continues to be grantee for the Kinship Navigator program. Due to the

increase of families being served, a portion of the Children's Trust Fund is also being utilized to fund the program. The primary purpose of the Kinship Navigator program is to enhance the stability, safety, and well-being of youth at risk of non-relative placement by supporting Kinship care. Kinship caregivers engaged in the program will receive assistance and support in areas including, but not limited to: (1) Provide caregivers with information, referrals, and advocacy services, (2) Provide linkages to needed legal services and legal informational factsheets on whether the state has health, educational consent laws, or other legal assistance for Kinship caregivers accessing government programs, (3) Assist caregivers in utilizing existing community resources and support systems, including educational, health, mental health systems, (4) enhancing parenting skills, and (5) Improve family resources (e.g., basic needs items, money to pay for bills, tutoring resources, recreational activities, scholarships, etc.) At a minimum, Kinship Navigators provide caregivers with information, referral, and connection services to meet immediate needs.

Types of Navigation services include:

- Providing caregivers with donated goods (e.g., diapers, other household goods).
- Finding and connecting families to existing resources (e.g., food assistance, utility assistance, childcare, mental health services).
- Organizing immediate transportation to connect families with services and assist families in identifying longer term solutions.
- Partnering with caregivers in interacting with the school system (e.g., Individualized Education Plan (IEP) process).
- Assisting caregivers in understanding the local dependency court process for establishing a legal relationship with the child.
- Assisting caregivers when applicable in working with child welfare/protection services and their processes.
- Connecting caregivers to access TANF/TANF-Child only benefits, health insurance, or other assistance/benefits available.
- Being a source of advocacy to caregivers and providing support services (e.g., attending court, child and family team, and school IEP meetings).

Monthly Caseworker Visit Formula Grants and Standards for Caseworker Visits

MDCPS used the Monthly Caseworker Visit Grant to improve the quality of caseworker visits by utilizing the funds to provide resources that will assist the caseworkers with performing their job duties and supporting the day-to-day operations of the agency.

Funds for monthly caseworker visit funding are still being utilized to help cover caseworker travel and other expenses related to caseworker visits.

MDCPS submitted the FFY 2023 Annual Caseworker Visits data to the Children's Bureau in

December 2023.

For the period October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023 (FFY 23), MDCPS's performance was:

The total number of visits made by a caseworker monthly to children in foster care during a fiscal year must not be less than 95% of the total number of such visits that would occur if each child were visited once every month while in care – 93.03%. The state will begin providing more training to ensure compliance.

The percentage of visits that occurred in the child's residence is at least 50% of the total number of monthly visits made by caseworker to children in foster care during a fiscal year 87.07%.

Additional Services Information

Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payments (section 473 of the Act)

During the APSR period under review, Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Payment Funds were used for the following projects:

- Guardian Ad Litem and Court Fees
- Adoption Finalization Fees (billed by attorneys - \$1,000 per child/per finalization)

MDCPS expects to provide to children and families the following services using Adoption and Legal Guardianship Incentive Funds in FFY 2024:

- Child Specific Recruitment for Adoptive Placements & Permanent Connections (The Department is currently exploring ways to utilize the Adoption Match Program by Adoption Share to increase prospective adoptive family resources in the state and ensure appropriate matches/placements.)
- Adoption Competence/Trauma Training for Adoption Staff
- Digitizing and organizing of adoption files for the purpose of long-term storage and future access
- Post KinGAP Services to include respite, fictive kin/relative guardianship support groups, and training

Adoption Savings

MDCPS is diligently working to establish a state-funded KinGAP program, federally funded KinGAP program, and a short-term assistance program for legal guardians who do not meet the eligibility requirements for either program (i.e., non-licensed, court-ordered, etc. placements). The Department intends to use the Adoption Savings funds to do the following related to KinGAP:

- To fund the state funded KinGAP assistance payments to legal relative guardians
- To fund Mississippi's contribution of federally funded KinGAP assistance payments to legal relative/fictive guardians



- To fund the short-term assistance program (connected to the Kinship Navigator Program) for legal relative guardians
- To fund three Social Services Program Coordinator/KinGAP Coordinator positions to manage the caseload of the program
- To fund one Social Services Supervisor/KinGAP Supervisor position to supervise the program

MDCPS anticipates the implementation timeframe for the state-funded and federally funded KinGAP programs to be in the 4th quarter of FFY 2024 or the 1st quarter of FFY 2025. As of the date of this submission, MDCPS has drafted policy and procedures for the programs mentioned above and worked with MDCPS System Administrators to build functionality in the current and future data management systems to support the needs of the program.

In addition, MDCPS will continue to use Adoption Savings funds to provide quality pre- and post-adoption support services to prospective adoptive families who have committed to adopting the children in their home or adoptive families who have finalized adoptions. Support services include respite care and specialized training opportunities such as TBRI, transracial adoption, and cultural awareness to ensure placement stability in adoptive homes.

The agency will continue to explore additional uses for Adoption Savings funds to strengthen children whether they remain with their families of origin or embraced by adoptive families – and to support the Adoption Specialists/Supervisors who support them. The Department is not experiencing challenges in accessing and spending Adoption Savings funds, and it does not wish to change its Adoption Savings methodology.

Family First Transition Act Funding Certainty Grants

MDCPS has not yet utilized its FFPSA transition grant funds. In October 2020, MDCPS solicited subgrant proposals from therapeutic group home providers to distribute transition grant funds to cover the costs of transitioning providers to compliance with the Act's QRTP standards. Ultimately, MDCPS decided to forego making an award under that solicitation and set forth a plan to use the transition act funds to pay supplemental rate to providers with the intent that those providers use that supplemental rate to comply with the QRTP standards under the Act. After further review by the new General Counsel, MDCPS determined that not all providers who would receive funding would be willing or able to convert their facilities and services to meet QRTP standards. MDCPS is working with Mississippi Association of Child Care Agencies (MACCA) to determine which providers have an interest in QRTP compliance.

FFPSA Transition Grants may be used for any purpose specified in title IV-B of the Act, the portions of the Act authorizing the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program (title IV-B, subpart 1) and the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (title

IV-B, subpart 2). Funds may also be used for activities directly associated with implementation of FFPSA. In addition, for jurisdictions that previously operated title IV-E child welfare waiver demonstration projects under the authority of section 1130 of the Act, the FFPSA Transition Grants may be used for activities previously funded under such projects to reduce any adverse fiscal impacts associated with the end of the waiver demonstration projects and the transitioning of project activities to other funding sources. The FFPSA Transition Grants will be awarded in fiscal year (FY) 2020 but will remain available to grantees for expenditure through the end of FY 2025.

MDCPS is also preparing a Request for Quotes related to the QRTP level of care, as part of a broader plan to implement tiered care levels and performance-based contracting. Once responses to RFQ are received, MDCPS will be better situated to determine the level of interest and the capacity in the state for facilities to provide congregate care that meets QRTP requirements.

John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood (the Chafee Program) (section 477 of the Act)

The Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood, including the Education and Training Voucher (ETV) Program, provides flexible funding to promote and support youth who have experienced foster care at age 14 or older in their transition to adulthood.

Services

MDCPS and its Chafee partners work to increase the well-being of young people 14-21 years old as evidenced by stable housing, educational success, financial stability, safety, and permanency and supportive connections. The Independent Living Program (ILP) helps adolescents acquire basic life skills in their progress from dependency toward self-sufficiency. All youth ages 14-21 can participate in independent living activities regardless of the youth's permanent plan. Youth in care ages 14 to 21 are eligible to receive Independent Living Services, based on the youth's individual Transitional Living Plan (TLP). The Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indian (MBCI) youth are eligible for independent living services based on the same criteria for MDCPS youth in care. Youth are eligible for independent living services based upon the following criteria:

- Youth in care, ages 14 until their 21st birthday, are eligible for all IL services except for the criteria placed on the Education and Training Voucher program.
- Youth who leave custody, ages 18 to their 21st birthday have access to a Transition Navigator and are eligible for community-based referral services until their 21st birthday; and,
- Youth who enroll in post-secondary education and vocation program are eligible to receive

Education and Training Voucher (ETV) services until their 26th birthday or for 60 months.

Guiding Principles

- Achieve positive results for youth through purposeful, high-quality services.
- Promote MS Youth Voice by engaging youth people in the development, implementation and refinement of our work and practicing a youth-driven approach to service delivery.
- Cultivate collaboration relationships within and among our partner organizations and with other community organizations to maximize our ability to collectively support youth.
- Use data to measure progress and improve services; and
- Foster a culture of accountability throughout the organization for providing high-quality services that produce results for youth people.

Youth Transitions Support Services Organizational Structure

YTSS currently has 17 staff including two (2) Social Services Program Team Leads. The YTSS Director left the agency Spring 2024 and the Assistant Deputy Commissioner has assumed job duties and responsibilities until the vacancy is filled.

YTSS Bureau Director: The YTSS Bureau Director is responsible for overseeing the operation of Youth Transitions Support Services. Both Social Services Team Leads are directly under the Bureau Director's leadership. Other responsibilities include but are not limited to overseeing the Chafee budget, service contact management, policy development and implementation, data analysis for program/service improvement, MSA reporting, federal reporting, community/provider engagement, and other duties as assigned. The MDCPS YTSS Bureau Director left the agency Spring 2024. The Assistant Deputy Commissioner is making appropriate adjustments regarding required job duties and responsibilities and training two new hires while transitioning occurs to replace the former YTSS Bureau Director.

Social Services Program Leads (Northern Region and Southern Region): The Social Services Program Leads are responsible for overseeing daily operations of the Independent Living Program. The Program Lead supervises each Region's SSPC/TNs. In these roles, the YTSS Program Leads provide training and coaching to TNs, collect program/service data for review, develop training curricula to improve program practices, work closely with field supervisory staff to assist TN training/coaching case workers regarding Independent Living.

Social Service Specialists/Coordinators referred to as Transition Navigators: Transition Navigators are responsible for the following to include but not limited to: ensuring case workers integrate Independent Living Plan (ILP) specific services into practice with youth, provide technical assistance around developing youth engagement strategies, offer technical

assistance to frontline staff around implementing appropriate services, complete the Youth Appraisal with youth in care aged 14 and older, assist workers to provide direct ILP services to youth ages 14-21, complete monthly reporting requirements, attend court proceedings, case manager staff meetings, family team meetings or any other meeting as it relates to the youth's ILP, make ILP stipend request, build community resources and make referrals to community resources based on a youth's identified needs.

The current organizational structure provides capacity for the following staff: one Bureau Director, two Social Services Team Leads, and 26 Social Services Specialists/Coordinators (SSPC)/Transition Navigators (TN).

Objectives and Initiatives

Significant Meetings and Training by the Program Area

Independent Living Training for MDCPS new hires by YTSS Transition Navigator was completed during this APSR reporting period. The following is discussed during training: overview of ILP structure, map of contacts for ILP within the state, ILP mission and goal, ILP service availability.

2023

July 26
August 3
August 31
October 5
November 2
December 31

2024

January 11
February 14
March 6
April 2, 19
May 8, 9, 23
June 5, 26

Youth Transition and Support Services Division met as a group on September 28 and 29, 2023, and April 19, 2024, for the group staff meeting. The meeting discussion included reminders for both old/new staff about Leave, Timesheets, Travel Submissions, Skills Group scheduling, Meeting deadlines, Stipend Request Requirements, NYTD surveys, and the Youth Advisory Council. Also covered was ETV processes, upcoming In-Service Meetings, Youth Appraisal updates, file checks for documents, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion research by M. Davenport.

Along with New Hire Trainings, YTSS Social Service Team Leads began doing in-service trainings dedicated to the needs of frontline staff. In-Service trainings discuss topics such as Transition Navigator coverage, Chafee stipends/allowances, Skills classes, Education and Training Voucher Program, MSA documents to youth prior to release and any other individual service area need for information. In-Service Trainings were conducted as follows:



- October 18, 2023-Service Area 1
- October 19, 2023-Service Area 7
- October 25, 2023-Service Area 2
- October 27, 2023-Service Area 7c
- October 30, 2023-Service Area 2 East
- December 11, 19, and 20, 2023-Service Area 6
- January 23, 2024-Service Area 7d
- February 2, 2024-Service Area 7c
- February 7, 2024-Service Area 3c
- March 11, 2024-Service Area 6c
- March 15, 2024-Service Area 5d
- May 11-Service Area 6C
- June 26-Service area 6A

Housing

Foster Youth to Independence (FYI)

	July – Sept 2023			October – December 2023		
	Tennessee Valley Regional Housing Authority	Jackson Housing Authority	Mississippi Regional Housing Authority	Tennessee Valley Regional Housing Authority	Jackson Housing Authority	Mississippi Regional Housing Authority
Youth Currently House	7	9	1	7	9	1
Waiting List	3			3		
Vouchers issued and youth looking for housing		4	3		4	3
Youth scheduled for intake		2			2	

	January – March 2024			April – June 2024		
	Tennessee Valley Regional	Jackson Housing Authority	Mississippi Regional	Tennessee Valley Regional	Jackson Housing	Mississippi Regional

	Housing Authority		Housing Authority	Housing Authority	Authority	Housing Authority
Youth Currently House	7	8	1	1	2	
Waiting List	4			1	1	1
Vouchers issued and youth looking for housing		11	2			

Education and Post-Secondary Education

The Bill Kinkade Fostering Access and Inspiring True Hope (FAITH) Scholarship for foster/former foster youth began in August 2023 for the 2023/2024 academic year. The implementation phase of the scholarship proved challenging. MDCPS certified more than 200 youth for the scholarship. A small workgroup began meeting September 7, 2023, to discuss challenges and determine gaps and needs for students who get the scholarship. An additional meeting on September 22, 2023, included the Mississippi Community College Board Director in previous discussion. A contract was awarded to Youth Villages to provide Supportive Case Management to youth who are receiving the FAITH scholarship. Topics of discussion included:

1. A need for an orientation for students to inform them about FAITH and how the scholarship works along with general information on attending post-secondary education such as financial aid, on campus housing, meal plans, health and meal facilities, as well as extra-curricular activities to provide social well-being.
2. Including Student Affairs as support for FAITH students
3. Determining if campus health facilities accept Medicaid
4. Determining which campuses provide transportation.

Family Unification Program (FUP)

Mississippi Regional Housing Authority VIII received funding for the Family Unification Program on December 19, 2023, for approximately \$357, 000. This program can also be used to house at-risk or homeless youth.

Diversity and Equity (LGBTQIA+, Youth of Color, etc.)

In October 2023, the Department begin evaluating the need for programming that focused on meeting the unique needs of special populations in foster care in Mississippi (i.e. children of color, LGBTQIA+, etc.). The intern begins by identifying/recruiting youth ages 14 and older who identified with these populations and were willing to share their experiences in care to inform the future work accomplished through this project. To date, five youth have volunteered to take part in this important work. Future goals of the project include evaluating the impact of existing agency policies/practices, implementing population-specific

competency training for staff, building peer support groups, and reimagining foster care policies and practices for these populations. Additionally, create a suggestion pathway for youth strictly for the YTSS Division.

The intern has a made connection with a subject matter expert to assist in paving a pathway forward for policy research and best practices. Prior to beginning actual work with the previously mentioned cohort, the intern will consult with the subject matter experts regarding next steps.

Youth Engagement

Youth Advisory Councils

July 2023: On July 12, 2023, youth were selected to represent the Youth Advisory Council at the 2023 Summer Youth Retreat. Youth guided on how to speak in front of a group. Youth state that one of the topics of discussion should be how to get youth together more often.

August 2023: Youth advisory members attended the 2023 Summer Youth Retreat to guide other youth in discussions in topics of concern from previous meetings. Topics discussed during the meeting included:

- Separation from siblings
- Meeting other foster youth
- Not knowing what is going on with their case

MDCPS is addressing the above by:

- Discussing having a sibling retreat
- Discussions of how to plan consistent youth gatherings
- Providing additional training to include TBRI training to staff
- MS incorporated into law effective July 1, 2023 that youth should be present and adequately represented during court hearings

September 2023: There were attempts to schedule a September Youth Advisory Council meeting, however, due to schedule conflicts, youth could not meet. However, meetings did take place October – November 2023, February 2024, and May – June 2024.

MDCPS has not moved on the recommendation for sibling retreats at this time but there has been ongoing conversation to explore how to make this happen.

The YTSS team has also discussed having more youth retreats throughout the state in different areas of the state (i.e. north, central, and south Mississippi) to allow more youth the opportunity to attend. These retreats can be day events and will focus on socializations and support for the youth. YTSS staff have not had TBRI training but have had other online trainings through cornerstone that are required agency wide for all staff.

2024 Youth Capitol Day

Mississippi foster youth partnered together with MS Youth Voice to storm the Mississippi Capitol on February 23, 2024, to learn about how individual lived experience can influence policy making in Mississippi. The day started with lunch at the Capitol Club where foster youth learned about how policy is made and what each youth's experience could contribute to a better Mississippi Child Welfare system and supports from other community stakeholders. After lunch, youth gathered at the Capitol Rotunda to speak with various MS legislators about bills and some laws that were influenced by youth experiencing the foster care system. One law mentioned was the FAITH scholarship for foster/former foster youth which incorporated youth being able to sign a lease at age 18 instead of 21. After mingling with legislators, youth sat in the House Gallery recognition by all legislators in session.

Skills Classes - 142 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

July 2023 Social Development - Learn how to know and understand the concept of self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-identity; understand how behaviors influence social interactions, and understand how to relax or take personal time in a healthy environment. 107 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

August 2023 Employment - Learn how to understand why employment is important, know and understand the rights and responsibilities of an employee, be able to conduct effective job searches, be able to complete a simple job application, be able to build a resume, learn the basic skill needed for an employment interview. 93 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

September 2023 Money Management - Learn how to develop a realistic budget, open a checking and savings account, shop for small and large purchases, understand the concept of credit, basic terminology of filing income taxes.

October 2023 Self-Care - Understand the importance of good hygiene and staying healthy, importance of emotional health, risks of drug and alcohol abuse, effects of peer pressure on drug and alcohol abuse, and the legal implications of drug and alcohol abuse. 137 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

November 2023 Housing - Understand how to identify housing options, challenges with sharing housing with one or more persons, understanding a lease and different housing programs. 64 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

December 2023 Communication - Learn how to understand the basic elements of Communication, including verbal and nonverbal communication, know and understand the importance of effective listening. 73 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated

Service Area location.

January 2024 Social Development - Youth learned about self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-identity along with how behaviors influence social interactions. 61 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

February 2024 Senior Informational - Our Seniors heard about ETV, the new FAITH scholarship for Mississippi foster/former foster youth, the upcoming Senior celebration, the upcoming college prep retreat, and resources for aiding in filling out financial aid and college planning. 17 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

March 2024 Employment - Youth learned how to understand why employment is important, be able to build a resume, be able to conduct effective job searches, be able to complete a job application, and learn interview skills. 135 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

Summer 2023 Youth Retreat

YTSS hosted the annual summer youth retreat from August 1-August 4, 2023, at Tanglewood Campground for in-care youth ages 17 and older where thirty (30) youth attended.

Youth arrived on August 1, 2023, at approximately 1:00 pm for registration and check-in. After the youth and staff meet and greet, youth enjoyed dinner followed by an evening of activities such as Jumbo Jenga, Jumbo Connect Four, Ping Pong, Pool, and Human Tick Tack Toe. August 2nd and 3rd were filled with panel discussions, skills workshops, driving simulation activities, youth advisory discussions, and a motivational speaker. Youth continued the evening with fun activities and ended the final evening with Kountry Karaoke. Agenda included.

ETV informational Session

A virtual Education Training Voucher (ETV) informational session was held for all interested youth on July 28, 2023. Topics of discussion included:

1. What is ETV?
2. How can ETV be used?
3. ETV Eligibility
4. Required Enrollment Documents
5. Information on the FAITH scholarship
6. Information on Get2College

Commissioner Council for Change

The Commissioner's Council for Change met on November 20, 2023, with the following attendees:



Andrea Sanders, Commissioner
Devon Loggins, Deputy Commissioner of Clinical Supports
Shaquita Mallett, Assistant Deputy Commissioner
Kimberly Smith, YTSS Social Services Manager
Youth, M. Forrest from Forrest County
Youth, B. Kerr from Pike County
Youth, S. Beckley, from Itawamba County
Youth A. Jordan, from Lafayette County
Youth J. Lopez, from Hinds County
Youth, K. Nutt, from Lauderdale County
Youth, N. Bean, from Marshall County

Topics of Discussion involved how things are going currently in their foster placement, one aspect of care that could positively impact the MS foster care experience, and if youth thought that coming into care was a good decision.

All youth were mostly pleased with their current placement, however, more than half of youth felt like caseworkers were not readily available and felt this change could positively impact their foster care experience. One youth emphasized that her caseworker was wonderful and corresponded with her timely. One youth recommended that they need venting sessions without fear of MDCPS staff, foster parents, or facility staff thinking that they needed some sort of intervention...all they need sometimes is just to be allowed to have a bad day and vent. Currently, MDCPS is working to get TBRI training for all direct service staff and providers.

One youth recommended better connection to real resources that led to action for parenting youth. This youth was an expectant mother and did feel like she was getting educated about parenting, but she was ready to have her own home and move the education to action. Youth was still in custody through the birth of her child to stabilize her footing and line up education, employment, housing, and transportation pathways.

The YTSS team has been working to have more skills groups geared toward topics relevant to the needs of the youths. We are also utilizing community resources to host trainings and classes for the youth. We have the FYI program that can assist with housing needs. Our team has partnered with WIN Job Centers, GED Programs, colleges, and trade programs. Other agency partnerships include Opportunity Passport (savings matching program that can assist with housing, transportation, and/or education).

One youth requested that stipends/allowances get to them quicker. The agency is soon getting a new CWIS system that will aid in this challenge.

Overall, youth felt that coming into custody was the best decision at the time and know that they will be taken care of while in custody even though they experience challenges as stated above.

Partnership Collaboration

Housing and Transportation Committee

Youth Transition Support Services Social Service Manager met each quarter (July 14, August 11, and September 6, 2023) with partners from Southern Christian Services, Youth Villages, First Place for Youth and Hope Rising to discuss challenges with the Foster Youth to Independence Program and other housing gaps. There were no official partnerships between HOPE Rising and MDCPS, however, they did collaborate heavily with all Child Welfare stakeholders. The Housing and Transportation Committee will no longer be coordinated by HOPE Rising. Challenges include:

1. Timelines for youth to become approved and financed by HUD for single voucher applications. HUD's timeframe for voucher approval can take up to 30 days with an additional 60 business days turnaround time for funding award to the PHA. This is a federal policy.
2. Gaps in housing between FYI approval or ineligibility for the program. Currently, Southern Chrisitan Services and Youth Villages have some funding to help youth temporarily, but finding permanent affordable housing remains a challenge.
3. Staff Capacity, however, the division plans to fill vital roles then issue contracts for additional independent living services through ARPA funding.

Additional announcements:

Effective July 1, 2023, all youth (not just foster/former foster youth) can lease homes, apartments, etc. at age 18. Additional outreach by MS Home Corporation planned.

Youth Transition Support Services Social Service Manager met on December 5, 2023, with partners from Southern Christian Services, Youth Villages, First Place for Youth and Hope Rising to discuss challenges with the Foster Youth to Independence Program and other service gaps. The main topic of discussion was what type of services are an immediate need for foster/former foster youth. The top three services discussed were case management for students with the FAITH scholarship and ETV, supervised independent living placements, and Independent Living skills for foster youth.

The agency plans to use Chafee and ARPA funds to request bids or proposals for supported case management for education and employment, supervised independent living, and

Independent Living Skills in the beginning of 2024. Future goals are to award contracts for Supervised Independent Living, Supportive Case Management, and Transportation and Driving Pilot program on or before August 31, 2024 using ARPA funding.

Workforce Development

Youth Transition Support Services Social Services Manager began meeting to support a new workforce endeavor for supported employment and supported education for youth with serious mental illnesses in April 2023. Quarterly meetings occurred July 12, August 31, and September 27, 2023. Topics of discussion included:

1. Funding streams for either supported work or supported education-currently eligibility appears to exclude some foster youth, but funding used to provide case management would be strictly for foster youth. This can occur even without this initiative but will work to receive referrals for foster youth from other partner agencies as the program is implemented. The MS Dept of Employment Security may be able to bridge the gap between populations depending on their own eligibility criteria. MS Dept of Mental Health will also look into Medicaid funding.
2. Supported employment is already implemented with MS Dept of Mental Health in MS Pine Belt area. Will send current program operating policy for review.
3. Announcement that Mississippi was awarded the Transfer Transformation Initiative Grant to increase access to Supported Employment for transition age youth. This funding will flow through Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics.
4. Review of Work group members, goals, and strategies.

YTSS Social Service Manager met with Lynda Stewart from MS Department of Mental Health on December 14th to discuss an upcoming proposal request from MDCPS on supporting foster/former foster youth with employment. This would not just be for youth with SMI but would include any age-appropriate youth who wished to pursue employment rather than post-secondary education. Ms. Stewart will send information on their supported employment /education request that they have published in the past for reference and review. MDCPS continues to communicate with MS Department of Mental Health. However, there are no updates at this time.

Achieving Success- Strong Housing Solutions for Transition Age Youth

The Youth Transition Support Service Social Service Manager attended the Youth Villages, Achieving Success- Strong Housing Solutions for Transition Age Youth, conference February 27-29, 2024, in Miami, Florida as a presenter to speak about Housing partnerships that MDCPS has developed. Other speakers at the conference included youth with lived experience, child welfare agencies, housing authorities, and community stakeholders.

Throughout the time, all entities discussed and brainstormed individual programs, best practices, and ideas to take back to prospective states and partnerships to move the needle in housing options for foster/former foster youth.

Jim Casey and MDCPS Partnership

Extended Foster Care

Quarterly meetings took place with Mainspring consulting (Barbara Langford) to continue work on a Fiscal Tool so that MDCPS can discuss implementation of a future Extended Foster Care program.

1. The July 27, 2023, meeting included MDCPS and First Place for Youth to determine the first small workgroup meeting agenda.
2. On August 8, 2023, all small workgroup partners attended to include Southern Christian Services, Youth Villages, Children's Foundation, and youth with lived experience attended to discuss Key Design Questions and next steps.
3. The September 18, 2023, meeting included continued discussion on Key Design Questions, additional administrative costs, and next steps.
4. Partners met via Zoom on November 21, 2023, to review the Fiscal Analysis that Mainspring developed for the agency on Extended Foster care. The analysis included all Fostering Connections eligibility requirements with privatized case management and supervised independent living. MDCPS would continue the Case review process and placement process. The fiscal impact is as follows:

Fiscal Impact of Expanding Eligibility for Extended Foster Care

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Estimated Costs	\$3,862,802	\$6,583,654	\$7,427,594
Estimated Title IV-E Revenue	\$1,363,985	\$2,309,378	\$2,622,557
Estimated Current Spending on EFC	\$1,810,517	\$2,590,776	\$2,850,862
Net Fiscal Impact for MS CPS	\$688,300	\$1,683,500	\$1,954,175

Fiscal Impact of Extending Adoption Assistance

	Year One	Year Two	Year Three
Estimated Costs	\$86,400	\$220,800	\$364,800
Estimated Annual Title IV-Revenue	\$66,761	\$170,612	\$281,881
Net State Fiscal Impact	\$19,639	\$50,188	\$82,919

MDCPS Leadership will schedule to meet and discuss feasibility and next steps.

Continuous Accountability and Learning (CAL)

See included agenda for topics of discussion for March 2024 CAL call. In Q4, Mississippi Site Leads, First Place for Youth and MDCPS is scheduled to attend a partnership learning workshop in Nashville, TN.

Engagement with MS Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI)

YTSS attempts to conduct Independent Living Services with the MS Band of Choctaw Indian Tribe at least once per month. Below are the skills taught and number of participants that attended skills training.

July 2023- No skills classes as transportation were challenging since youth were out of school.

August 2023 - No classes due to MDCPS Summer Youth Retreat.

September 2023 - Lesson: Money Management-Learn how to develop a realistic budget, open a checking and savings account, shop for small and large purchases, understand the concept of credit, basic terminology of filing income taxes 12 youth participated in this skills class.

October 2023 Self-Care-Understand the importance of good hygiene and staying healthy, importance of emotional health, risks of drug and alcohol abuse, effects of peer pressure on drug and alcohol abuse, and the legal implications of drug and alcohol abuse. 8 youth attended.

November 2023 - No classes due to Thanksgiving Holidays.

December 2023 Lesson: Communication- Learn how to understand the basic elements of Communication, including verbal and nonverbal communication, know and understand the importance of effective listening. 0 youth showed up for the skills class.

January 2024 Lesson - Social Development-Youth learned about self-esteem, self-awareness, and self-identity along with how behaviors influence social interactions. 7 youth participated either virtually or at a coordinated Service Area location.

February 2024 Senior Informational - Our Seniors heard about ETV, the new FAITH scholarship for Mississippi foster/former foster youth, the upcoming Senior celebration, the upcoming college prep retreat, and resources for aiding in filling out financial aid and college planning. No youth participated in this skills lesson.

March 2024 Lesson: Employment - Learn how to understand the basic elements of Communication, including verbal and nonverbal communication, know and understand the

importance of effective listening. 4 youth showed up for the skills class.

YTSS staff see and interact with MBCI staff while conducting skills. There have been no challenges mentioned other than scheduling around various events. YTSS schedules according to MBCI's availability. Skills groups are held monthly. The groups are offered in person and virtually. Registration is not required. Youths can provide feedback regarding topics discussed.

Annual Credit Reports

Batch files for each Credit Bureau are requested on or around the 10th of each month for foster youth ages 14-20. MDCPS remains on target for annual credit report requests and reviews with youth who have negative account information listed on any of the three credit bureau credit reports. YTSS Social Service Manager and the Internal Audit Director met with the national Office of the Inspector General on October 6, 2023, to discuss Mississippi's survey answers and process changes. During the survey, the agency was in the middle of re-implementation and re-evaluation of annual credit reporting. The interview was very enlightening from both agencies with questions from the OIG staff about the challenges that Mississippi experiences with the national Credit Reporting Bureaus, Experian, Equifax, and Transunion. Start-up with the credit bureaus proved difficult, however, MDCPS rarely has issues once re-establishment of portal use occurred.

NYTD

Mississippi finished Baseline 2023 B reporting period on September 30, 2023. The survey file was submitted to ACF NYTD portal prior to November 15, 2023, with 100% compliance. 2024A Surveys are in progress. Mississippi finished Reporting period 2024 A for Follow-Up 21 youth with a scheduled file submission to ACF in Quarter 4.

Division X Additional Funding from the Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act

YTSS implemented the distribution of the Division X funds in May 2021 by issuing direct stimulus payments to all youth in care as well as providing a technology stipend to all youth in care to purchase computers, tablets, phones, hot spots, software, hardware, etc. The agency is also issuing need-based payments to former foster youth via outreach through social media and an online application process in addition to issuing direct stimulus payments to youth who exited foster care at or after the age of 14 and are not yet 27. The agency found that by using social media platforms to provide funding availability, as well as additional resources provided vital information so that youth felt included in MDCPS activities. The Youth Transition Support Services Independent Living Tab of the MDCPS website has been

revamped to include extensive information about independent living which will include links to available employment opportunities with MDCPS. The agency advertised and made attempts to recruit former foster youth to work in the Youth Transition Support Service Division. So far, the YTSS has made one (1) offer to former foster youth who did not accept the position.

Due to old systems, current challenges include timeliness of payments reaching the youth, however MDCPS plans to kick off its CCWIS project in the fall of 2024.

- The Division X Pandemic Relief Funds are being distributed via check at the county level to youth in care and youth who are out of care that complete the application process.
- Youth in care ages 14 and 15 received a \$1,000.00 technology stipend and a one-time direct payment of \$600.00. This includes the URM youth in MDCPS custody.
- Youth in care age 16 and up received a \$1,000.00 technology stipend and a one-time direct payment of \$1,200.00. This includes the URM youth in MDCPS custody.
- Youth who exited care at or after the age of 14 and are not yet 27 received a direct stimulus payment of \$1,200 and additional funds for housing (rent, deposits, down payments, mortgage payments, etc.) transportation (down payments, care payments, insurance, maintenance, repairs, etc.), education, childcare, healthcare, utilities, groceries, and personal needs through the online application process.
- Applications are verified for eligibility by YTSS staff through a case search in MACWIS.
- Once eligibility is verified requests are sent to the field staff to enter in MACWIS for payment

The process to distribute funds is as follows:

- A MACWIS Service request is entered by a county worker
- The service request is approved by the worker's supervisor
- The service request is approved by YTSS
- The bookkeeper issues a purchase order in MACWIS
- Funds are deposited in the county bank account for the purchase order
- A check is written to the youth or provider by the county bookkeeper
- The check is mailed to the youth, or the youth is contacted to pick up the check from the county office based on what the youth indicated on their application
- 367 youth in care age 14 & 15 have received pandemic stimulus funds
- 479 youth in care age 16-20 have received pandemic stimulus funds
- YTSS has processed 1,922 applications for Pandemic Funds
- 1,112 former foster youth have received Pandemic Fund payments

- The number of staff dedicated to this project and the method of payment have been barriers to the timeliness of fund distribution.

YTSS implemented the distribution of the Division X funds in May 2021 by issuing direct stimulus payments to all youth in care as well as providing a technology stipend to all youth in care to purchase computers, tablets, phones, hot spots, software, hardware, etc. The agency is also issuing need-based payments to former foster youth via outreach through social media and an online application process in addition to issuing direct stimulus payments to youth who exited foster care at or after the age of 14 and are not yet 27. The agency found that by using social media platforms to provide funding availability, forms, as well as additional resource links provided vital information so that youth felt included MDCPS activities and available resources. The Youth Transition Support Services Independent Living Tab of the MDCPS website has been revamped to include extensive information about independent living to include resource links including links to available employment opportunities with MDCPS. We have not encountered any barriers other than the timeliness of payments reaching the youth.

Update: Total youth served with Division X funding is 3,510. This number includes URM youth, MBCI youth, and MDCPS youth.

The Department used Division X funds to address housing needs for youth in-care and out-of-care. Housing assistance was offered up to \$7500 per young adult towards rental deposits, rental assistance, utility deposits, utility assistance, and emergency short-term hotel stays. Rental assistance was the most requested housing assistance category. These requests included assistance to catch up on rent, to pay several months of rent in advance, and to pay rental deposits and the first couple months of rent. Additionally, the Department assisted young adults who were couch surfing and homeless with emergency hotel placements until long-term housing could be secured.

Through offering this assistance, the Department further recognized the importance of instilling basic life skills such as understanding a lease, maintaining housing and utilities, budgeting, not financially over-committing oneself, etc. The Department intends to implement more intense life skills training on these topics in the third and fourth quarters of the calendar year 2022. Credit unions, community banks, and other community-based organizations who offer these types of training have been contacted.

The agency is partnering with local and regional housing authorities through the state to secure FYI housing vouchers for youth in care or out of care and homeless. Memorandums of Understanding have been secured with several housing authorities and private child welfare

providers to offer housing options and support to youth. See the *Partnership* section of the APSR for more information on these partnerships.

Approximately \$689,000 remains in Division X funding. The remaining funds will be used to support MDCPS, URM and MBCI youth. The Department continues to use the funds to meet the needs of its 14 and older population in care to recently include driver's license, vehicle purchases, vehicle payments, and vehicle insurance. The Department will issue another round of stimulus checks to youth in-care 17 and older. This will cost approximately \$542,000. Additionally, several opportunities have been provided to prevent social isolation and engage youth. These opportunities have been in the form of regional youth advisory councils held in April, May of 2022, a Graduation Ceremony for MDCPS Seniors held June 10, 2022, and the Commissioner's Council for Change scheduled to be held July 11, 2022. Youth Retreats and Camps were held in October 22-24, 2021, April 8-10, 2022, June 18-23, 2022, offering a variety of activities and life skills training over the course of a few days and nights. Youth can earn stipends at these events to apply towards their personal budgets.

Update: The award to MDCPS for Division X Chafee funding was \$3,352,706.00. MDCPS expended \$3,336,051.36.

Independent Living Support Services/Stipends

1. Life Skills Training Stipend: A \$25.00 stipend can be earned for the completion of two (2) Online or Face-to-Face Skills Classes. Face-to-Face skills classes are taught by Transition Navigators or a contracted agency. The Transition Navigator will document earned skills classes and will notify the COR Worker that the youth has accumulated the required classes. The Worker will submit the request to the Independent Living Coordinator through MACWIS under State Funds. This stipend will be issued directly to the youth.
2. Teen Advisory Board (TAB) Participation Stipend: A \$25.00 stipend can be earned for participation in monthly scheduled YAC activities. Up to a \$75.00 stipend can be earned for participation in the quarterly meetings. Up to \$100.00 can be earned for attending the Commissioner's Youth Counsel for Change. The Navigator will document satisfactory participation in the training and will notify the COR Worker. The Worker will submit the request through MACWIS under State Funds. This stipend will be issued directly to the youth.
3. Senior Year Stipend: A \$600.00 stipend is available to help defray senior/final year expenses for youth receiving a diploma, GED, or a Certificate of Attendance at the close of the school/program year in which the stipend is requested. The youth shall also be a participant in Independent Living Program activities. This stipend should be requested by the Transition

Navigator during the youth's senior year, then entered in MACWIS, by the COR Worker under State Funds. Payment may be issued to an individual/party, including the youth. A statement from the youth's school verifying enrollment, as a senior/final year with anticipated graduation/completion being that same academic/program year, must be filed in the paper case record in the county. Typical senior/final year expenses include, but not limited to, pictures, invitations, cap and gown, prom attire, senior trip expenses. As an advance, a general statement of upcoming expenses may be provided to support the Senior Yr. Stipend.

4. High School Graduation/GED/HSE Stipend: A \$200.00 Graduation Stipend is available to all youth in custody who receive a high school diploma or successfully complete a GED program. A copy of the diploma or GED Certificate must be filed in the paper case record in the COR office. This stipend can be accessed from the appropriate MACWIS screen. This one-time stipend should be issued to the youth as a graduation gift to spend as the youth wishes. A signed receipt from the youth must be sent to the bookkeeper in the COR.
5. College Stipend: A \$600.00 (1st year of college) College Bound Stipend is available to youth in care who plan to attend a post-secondary education program. A \$250.00 College bound stipend can be requested each year thereafter until their senior year to assist youth with initial college registration needs. This stipend is requested by the Transition Navigator, then approval is sent to the COR for entry in the appropriate MACWIS screens after the COR Worker receives verification that the youth has been accepted in a post-educational program. This stipend must be issued to the vendor(s). A reimbursement payment may be issued to an individual/party, including the youth, in the event a purchase was made, and proof of payment was rendered. An itemized receipt must be presented to the COR bookkeeper before a check can be issued. All purchases must be receipted, and all receipts kept in the COR office. Allowable purchases are items needed to furnish a residence (on or off campus) such as, but not limited to bedspreads, curtains, rugs, refrigerator, microwave, trunk, bookcase, small appliances, computer, furniture items, and books/resource materials.
6. Start-Up Stipend: A \$1,500.00 Start-Up Stipend is available to youth who leave care after turning age seventeen (17) and who have participated in the available Independent Living Program activities. This stipend may be requested during the six months prior to release from custody and up to the six months following release from custody. Youth who have been approved for Foster Youth to Independence Program or an MDCPS approved Independent Living Placement, shall have the option to utilize this one-time stipend upon approval. This stipend must be issued directly to the vendor(s). Payment may be issued to an individual/party including the youth. Acceptable purchases may include any items associated with the establishment of a home such as, but not limited to rent deposits, utility deposits, dishes, cooking utensils, appliances, linens, furniture, cleaning supplies, curtains, and rugs. The Transition Navigator should request this one-time stipend then send approval to the COR to enter services

in the appropriate MACWIS screens. A youth released from custody at age 17 or older and already has a job may use a portion of this stipend to assist in the purchase or repair of a vehicle, if the vehicle is needed in the youth's job and if the youth already have the minimal essential items needed to live independently. This youth must show proof of having a driver's license and State required liability insurance.

7. Personal Enhancement Stipend: The Personal Enhancement Stipend is available to youth who need additional financial assistance with secondary educational needs, extracurricular activities, and college prep activities. Education needs are defined as but are not limited to tutoring; GED prep; ACT prep; and/or additional academic opportunities beyond school curricula. Extra- curricular activities include but are not limited to fees for sports; fees for school clubs; participation in other extracurricular activities. College prep activities include but are not limited to housing fees; college/post-secondary education application fees; or college/postsecondary education registration fees. This stipend was developed to fill the financial gaps for youth needing additional funds to participate in school activities and to continue their education beyond high school or GED. The amount of this stipend is based on the need. A maximum of \$1000.00 will be allowed per request per FFY.

8. Peer Mentoring Stipend: A \$25.00 Peer Mentoring Stipend is available to young people participating as a program peer mentor to younger youth in care. A peer mentor must see their mentee in-person at least twice a month to earn the stipend. Mentors are identified through the Teen Advisory Board. Mentor/mentee interaction happens as a part of Teen Advisory Board activities. This stipend was developed to encourage youth participating in Teen Advisory Board to become mentors.

9. Youth Conference/Retreat/Summer Camp Stipend: A youth may receive a maximum cash stipend of \$500.00 with actual amounts determined by the Assistant Deputy Commissioner and Director of YTSS for successful completion or participation in youth conferences, retreats, or summer camps. The amount determined will be based on application approval, length of event and need for supplies. This stipend may be issued in advance for certain events dependent on the need for items to overcome any challenges for participation. This stipend will be requested by the Transition Navigator then approval sent to the COR for entry in MACWIS.

Support Service/Stipend July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023	FY 2022 # Youth	FFY 2022 Amount Disbursed
IL Aftercare	0	0
IL College Bound Stipend	48	\$31,494.62
IL College Graduation Stipend	0	0
IL Contract Services	0	0
IL Educational Training Voucher	339	\$685,227.97
IL GED/Certificate of Attendance Stipend	2	\$400.00
IL High School Graduation Stipend	68	\$13,600.00

Support Service/Stipend July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023	FY 2022 # Youth	FFY 2022 Amount Disbursed
IL Initial Pre-Assessment Stipend	0	0
IL Personal Enhancement Stipend	491	\$491,673.78
IL Senior Year Stipend	52	\$30,964.05

Support Service/Stipend July 1, 2023-June 30, 2024	FY 2024 # Youth	FFY 2024 Amount Disbursed
IL Aftercare	0	0
IL College Bound Stipend	26	\$15,527.78
IL College Graduation Stipend	0	0
IL Contract Services	0	0
IL Educational Training Voucher	172	\$187,907.22
IL GED/Certificate of Attendance Stipend	0	0
IL High School Graduation Stipend	47	\$9,400.00
IL Initial Pre-Assessment Stipend	0	0
IL Personal Enhancement Stipend	63	\$23,324.10
IL Senior Year Stipend	25	\$14,576

Pending:

In review of data from reports pulled for the reporting period, the following observations and additions have occurred.

- Since payment of funds to youth is lengthy, stipends that show requested or approved in the MDCPS case system (MACWIS) but not paid have not been included in the above chart.
- The following services/stipends do not appear to have been utilized and will be reviewed for potential coding errors, removal or recategorized: IL Aftercare, IL Contract Services, Initial Pre-Assessment Stipend. A college graduation stipend is not a stipend that we have utilized. Stipend requests are initiated by the transition navigator (i.e. high school graduation stipend). There have not been any major challenges noted regarding tracking the stipend request. The team can track all stipend requests by entering them on an Excel spreadsheet and this spreadsheet is also used to track payments made and those that still need to be made.

Data Collection and Collaboration

The State began offering independent living services to youth ages 14 and up in-house through the newly developed Youth Transition Support Services (YTSS) on June 1, 2018. This allows the agency to improve the outcomes for youth transitioning out of care and broaden the service array available to youth based on individualized needs. NYTD outcomes will directly affect our ability to indicate any gaps in services for youth while in care, during their transition

out of care, and once they are out of care by implementing updated policy and procedures identified through the completion of the NYTD survey.

The data captured through NYTD is presented to agency leadership, the Youth Advisory Council and to community partners as evidence to support ongoing planning to implement services based on lived experience of youth. The data captured through NYTD allows YTSS to identify gaps in services and preparation for youth that could potentially mitigate the adverse outcomes youth are experiencing after their release from care. Feedback from youth, partners and other Child Welfare agencies include having an individual with lived experience administer the survey, conduct regular outreach such as monthly check-in calls or birthday cards containing cash to youth to assist in establishing rapport and maintaining contact with youth.

Due to division turn-over and IT turn-over, Mississippi has struggled with survey administration processes and even incurred non-compliance with participation rates in reporting periods 2021B, 2022A, and 2022B.

Positives

- Participation Rate Non-compliance has decreased since 2021B
- YTSS now has a dedicated TN assigned to NYTD
- MDCPS is in compliance with 2023A Baseline

Challenges:

- Although in-care youth should be accessible, contact information for former foster youth has not been adequately stored or maintained to conduct survey administration. Division leadership is in current review of being able to pull email addresses through the youth appraisal in the form of a report from the MDCPS CORE reports.
- While NYTD data has been collected and utilized on several levels, the concern for accurate information remains. Navigation of errors, reports, etc. remains cumbersome.

NYTD will continue to be a focus for both division leadership and staff as the data is vital in tailoring services for both in-care and former foster youth. Technical assistance will continue to be requested as the division learns systems and best practices for outreach and survey administration. MDCPS also plans to assess if NYTD can be outsourced to a local community agency that can specifically focus on the importance of the survey and survey findings.

Coordinating Services with “Other” Federal and State Programs for Youth

The Independent Living program continues to coordinate efforts by collaborating with First Place for Youth and Jim Casey and government agencies such as the Mississippi Department of Human Services, Institution of Higher Learning (IHL), Community Colleges, Mental Health, and Medicaid



are engaged to ensure processes to receive services are clear and manageable for youth transitioning out of custody. Non-profit agencies that focus on education, employment, housing, and various needed services are engaged to ensure youth have connections to community-based organizations that can assist them during transition. Participating non-profit agencies are:

Placement and Adoption

Methodist Children's Home: Congregate care/transitional living facilities.

Mississippi Families for Kids (MFFK): assists with finding and licensing homes for non-therapeutic children who are legally free for adoption and older, provides case management services for the Wendy's Workforce Development program that employs foster youth.

Wendy's Wonderful Kids: MDCPS established partnership with the Dave Thomas Foundation to bring the Wendy's Wonderful Kid's program in-house. This unique partnership will fund adoption professionals to serve children and youth at risk of aging out of foster care without a family, including teenagers, children with special needs, and siblings.

Mississippi Governor Reeves announced the expansion of the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption's signature program, Wendy's Wonderful Kids, which focuses on finding adoptive homes for children within the Mississippi foster care system. The foundation, originally founded by the fast-food tycoon Dave Thomas, is set to provide \$1.7 million as well as their training program to the MDCPS. The partnership funds 10 experienced adoption professionals to serve children who are at risk of foster care without a family.

Access to Medicaid for Former Foster Youth

The Mississippi Division of Medicaid provides mandatory coverage for former foster care youth who are under age twenty-six (26) if the child was in foster care and Medicaid upon reaching the age of eighteen (18) or prior to age 21 when released from foster care. Continued Medicaid coverage is certified by the Division of Medicaid in coordination with MDCPS. YTSS was recently provided a Medicaid Fact Sheet for youth transitioning out of MDCPS custody from the Mississippi Division of Medicaid. The Fact Sheet also includes a support email for transitioning youth that may have questions or experience challenges with coverage after custody exit. YTSS will continue to discuss Medicaid options with in-care youth and will incorporate information from the Fact Sheet in youth interactions. The Fact Sheet is also posted on the Youth Transition Support Services page of the MDCPS website, sent to partners, and will be sent out agency wide for all staff members to reference and disseminate as needed.

Collaboration with Unaccompanied Refugee Minor Programs (URM) for Chafee Services and Education and Training Vouchers



MDCPS/YTSS works with MDCPS Hinds County staff and Catholic Charities to ensure URM youth are aware and offered YTSS and ETV Program opportunities and services. MDCPS works closely with unaccompanied refugee minors in the Education and Training Vouchers Program. MDCPS staff works closely with Catholic Charities' Unaccompanied Refugee Program to ensure that youth are aware of the program and application process.

Education and Training Vouchers (ETV) Program (section 477(i) of the Act)

There has been no eligibility requirement updates, policy updates or financial disbursement updates for ETV since the 2024 APSR Update. Below is the same information submitted in the 2024 APSR Update.

Youth Transition Support Services (YTSS) is responsible for enrolling, approving, and tracking current and former foster youth receiving Educational Training Voucher (ETV) funds. This number may increase or decrease from year to year based on the following factors:

- Youth attending accredited post-secondary educational programs.
- Youth's ability to maintain a 2.0 GPA necessary for eligibility.
- Youth completing the enrollment process required to receive funds.
- Youth who are eligible to receive ETV funds based on the federal guidelines.

Yearly ETV enrollment for this reporting period can be found in the ETV (Attachment C). YTSS provides support services to assist youth achieving educational success based on each youth's identified individual needs.

One of the requirements for foster/former foster youth is to apply for the Education Training Vouchers (ETV). Besides conducting individual and group outreach activities to in-care youth about the program, this has established an additional outreach avenue to promote the program to former foster youth enrolling in ETV. The ETV Enrollment application has already been drafted for Academic Year 2024/2025 and was released to the YTSS Transition Navigators in the 4th Quarter.

YTSS has added additional education resources to include an educational resource to answer questions about Financial Aid for Post-Secondary Education written by Intelligent.com Higher Education Team. This resource addresses why financial aid matters, work-study options, how federal grants can help pay for college and a link to the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The resource also lists additional resources such as StudentAid.gov and the U.S. Department of Education.

The YTSS Division has also created a letter to assist foster/former foster youth in confirming their foster care status for enrollment in a post-secondary educational/vocational pathway. We began consistently providing this letter to youth in March 2023.

ETV Policy

MDCPS/YTSS policy has been updated to extend eligibility to youth who experienced custody based on the following criteria:

- Youth who have left custody at the age of 16 years or older, and not yet reached 21 years of age.
- Youth who were reunified on or after reaching age 16 and have not yet attained 21 years of age.
- Youth who were adopted on or after reaching age 16 and have not attained 21 years of age; and
- Youth who participated in the ETV Program prior to their 23rd birthday.

Youth participating in the ETV Program prior to their 23rd birthday is eligible to continue receiving ETV funds until their 26th birthday or for a maximum of 60 months. A month is calculated at 30 calendar days. The months of enrollment do not have to be consecutive. Failure of a class or semester will still be counted for use of ETV funds. Youth who have not participated in the ETV program prior to their 23rd birthday will not be eligible for ETV funds.

A. The following are eligible for ETV funds.

1. Youth currently in custody.
 2. Youth who have left custody at the age of 16 years or older and have not yet reached 21 years of age.
 3. Youth who were reunified on or after reaching age 16 and have not yet attained 21 years of age.
 4. Youth who were adopted on or after reaching age 16 and have not yet attained 21 years of age; and
 5. Youth who participated in the ETV Program prior to their 23rd birthday.
- B. Youth must have a high school diploma, GED, or a certificate of attendance to receive ETV funds.
- C. Youth must maintain a minimum GPA of 2.0 to continue receiving ETV funds. Youth who are unable to receive Pell Grants or subsidized loans because of GPA will not be eligible for ETV funds.

ETV Financial Disbursements

Youth are eligible to receive up to \$5,000.00 per federal fiscal year for post-secondary education advancement. Payment of tuition takes priority over non-tuition post-secondary

cost. Youth must present proof of tuition payment or loan approval before ETV funds are released. Youth who apply for ETV funds during the enrollment period specified by MDCPS/YTSS will be eligible to the maximum ETV amount. Youth who enroll after the specified enrollment period ends may receive a decreased amount of ETV funds, based on Chafee ETV availability.

Division X Supplemental/ETV Funds

The distribution of the Division X ETV funds began October 1, 2021, after youth have enrolled in the ETV Program and for youth who requested pandemic funds for education and meet the Division X requirements. Division X ETV funds will be distributed through the county offices as follows:

- The Transition Navigator submits an ETV request for eligible youth.
- If approved, the approval is sent to the Transition Navigator, then to the county worker
- A MACWIS Service request is entered by a county worker.
- The service request is approved by the worker's supervisor.
- The service request is approved by YTSS.
- The bookkeeper issues a purchase order in MACWIS.
- Funds are deposited in the county bank account for the purchase order.
- A check is written to the youth or provider by the county bookkeeper.
- The check is mailed to the youth, or the youth is contacted to pick up the check from the county office based on what the youth indicated on their application.

The Department offered and continues to offer Education assistance through Division X Funding. This assistance included paying GED fees, past due tuition bills, students' loans that resulted from a youth attempting to pay past due student debt and stay in school, etc. Additionally, the agency provided funding to youth for necessities such as desks, desk chairs, school clothing, and left-over cost of attendance fees that may not have been covered through state and federal financial aid grants and previous allotments of ETV.

Chafee Training

Chafee training continues to be provided by the Transition Navigator in their services areas directly to the frontline staff, supervisors, and Regional Directors either monthly or as needed to ensure the youth receive the supports and services necessary for a successful transition out of foster care. Designated YTSS Transition Navigator staff provide Chafee training during Pre-Service for new hires and Supervisors on an on-going basis.

The YTSS Independent Living Division plans to begin assessing gaps in independent living services especially as it relates to racial and gender equality to establish additional training needs.

Consultation with Tribes (section 477(b)(3)(G) of the Act)

A partnership between the MDCPS and the MBCI was developed and Choctaw youth were eligible to receive Division X Pandemic Relief Funds through the John H. Chafee Program administered by the MDCPS Youth Transition Support Services (YTSS) as well as ongoing services and funds provided by MDCPS YTSS began in June of 2021. As mentioned, stimulus payments along with technology stipends were issued to all eligible youth. Through this partnership, YTSS will make all services, programs, initiatives, and stipends available to eligible Choctaw youth as outlined in the MDCPS policy. The processes for documentation and fund requests are being developed by MDCPS leadership to ensure compliance with all federal requirements. The MBCI will be included in the annual MDCPS joint planning session and the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) to provide the needed services and programs specific to tribal youth through a youth driven model. Eligible tribal youth will receive individualized services from the Transition Navigator assigned to their region.

The Transition Navigators assigned to region IV-N and IV-S make monthly contact with the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI) to offer supports, life skills training and services to youth in care age 14 and older that are provided through MDCPS. The services available to the MBCI are as follows:

- Youth Appraisal completion to identify needs.
- Community based resources
- Stipends
- Youth Advisory Council participation
- Educational stability support
- ETV Enrollment

The MBCI are provided the opportunity to request services, resources, and supports through direct communication with the Transition Navigators assigned to their area. The MBCI was also provided the information regarding the Chafee Division X funds application process and the availability of funds for current and former foster youth.

VII. Consultation and Coordination Between States and Tribes

As mentioned earlier, the MDCPS collaborated with Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians to finalize the MOU in October 2020 for the ongoing coordination of engagement between the two entities (see Attachment F). A copy of the state's 2025 APSR final report will be available on MDCPS's website. The MDCPS website is: <https://www.mdcps.ms.gov/about/federal-reports>. Additionally, an electronic copy of the State's 2025 Final Report will be emailed to MBCI's designated contact.

Tribal On-going Collaboration

MDCPS and the Choctaw tribe meet quarterly to discuss any issues or concerns and share information and resources. Representatives from MDCPS and the tribe are invited to attend the quarterly meetings. Representatives from MDCPS include a staff attorney, the Eastern Region Office Director; and field staff from the Eastern Region, including Regional Directors, Regional Social Work Supervisors, and Area Social Work Supervisors. Representatives from the tribe include a staff attorney from the Office of the Attorney General, individuals from the Children and Family Services Program, and individuals from the Department of Early Childhood Development.

ICWA sets out federal requirements regarding removal and placement of Native American children in foster or adoptive homes. ICWA aims to preserve tribal culture and safeguard the rights of Native American children to their heritage.

MDCPS consults with tribe representatives, Hanna Charlie, Regina Shoemake, Deannie King, Kayla Waiter, Shanita Morr, Holly San, and Brittany Haitkman. Transition Navigators were onsite at the main campus at least monthly to administer services and consult with tribe members.

Agenda items discussed included:

- o Face-to-Face meetings with Tribal Youth each month scheduled around Tribal staff and youth availability. Transition Navigators are scheduled to be onsite at the main campus at least monthly to administer the same services available to youth in MDCPS custody and consult with tribe members regarding any gaps in or additional needed services.

Skills Groups

January 10, 2024: Communication Skills

February 7, 2024: Housing

March 6, 2024: Money Management

April 3, 2024: Employment

May 2024: No Show

June 12, 2024: Daily Living

VIII. CAPTA State Plan Requirements and Updates

Attachment D - 2025 CAPTA State Plan

IX. Updates to Targeted Plans within the 2020-2024 CFSP

Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan (*see attachment*)
Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan (*see attachment*)
Disaster Plan (*see attachment*)
Training Plan (*see attachment*)



X. Statistical and Supporting Information

Information on Child Protective Service Workforce:

The chart reflects the education, qualifications, and training requirements that are established by the state for child protection service professionals, including requirements for entry and advancement in the profession, including advancement to supervisory positions. A minimum of 270 hours pre-training and 40 hours ongoing training (annual) is required for each position. An additional 40 hours of Clinical Supervisory Training is required for Social Services Team Lead (County or Unit Supervisor Level I/II) and Social Services Supervisor (Regional Level Supervisor):

Statistical and Supporting Information

Position	Function	Minimum Qualifications
Social Services Specialist I	Wellbeing and Permanency Specialist Level I	BS/BA in related field
Social Services Specialist I	Wellbeing and Permanency Specialist Level II	BS/BA in related field + 1 year of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Wellbeing and Permanency Specialist Level III	MS/MA in related field or BS/BA in related field + 2 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Wellbeing and Permanency Specialist Level IV	MS/MA in related field + 2 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Specialist I	Adoption Specialist Level I	BS/BA in related field
Social Services Specialist I	Adoption Specialist Level II	BS/BA in related field + 1 year of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Adoption Specialist Level III	MS/MA in related field or BS/BA in related field + 2 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Adoption Specialist Level IV	MS/MA in related field + 2 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Specialist I	Licensure Specialist Level I	BS/BA in related field

Position	Function	Minimum Qualifications
Social Services Specialist I	Licensure Specialist Level II	BS/BA in related field + 1 year of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Licensure Specialist Level III	MS/MA in related field or BS/BA in related field + 2 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Licensure Specialist Level IV	MS/MA in related field + 2 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Specialist I	Continuous Quality Improvement Specialist Level I	BS/BA in related field
Social Services Specialist I	Continuous Quality Improvement Specialist Level II	BS/BA in related field year + 1 year of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Continuous Quality Improvement Specialist Level III	MS/MA in related field or BS/BA in related field + 2 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Continuous Quality Improvement Specialist Level IV	MS/MA in related field + 2 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Safety Specialist Level I	MS/MA in related field or BS/BA in related field + 2 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Safety Specialist II	MS/MA in related field + 2 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Specialist II	Safety Specialist III	MS/MA in related field + 4 years of experience or BS/BA in related field + 6 years of experience
Social Services Team Lead	County or Unit Supervisor Level I	MS/MA in a related field + 4 years of experience or BS/BA in a related field + 4 years of experience

Position	Function	Minimum Qualifications
Social Services Team Lead	County or Unit Supervisor Level II	MS/MA in a related field + 4 years of experience or BS/BA in a related field + 4 years of experience
Social Services Supervisor	Regional level supervisor	LSW + 6 years of experience OR LSW and MSW + 3 years of experience

In accordance with the state's 2nd MSA, which went into effect in 2019, MDCPS caseworkers shall receive a minimum of 20 hours of in-service training, and all supervisors shall receive a minimum of 12 hours of in-service training. Also, beginning in 2019, MDCPS caseworkers shall receive a minimum of 40 hours of in-service training each year, and all supervisors shall receive a minimum of 24 hours of in-service training each year. MDCPS caseworker supervisors, within 90 days of hire or promotion, shall receive a minimum of 40 hours of training, directed specifically at the supervision of child welfare case workers. The MDCPS workforce is comprised of 1,721 employees. Demographically, the makeup of the workforce is as follows:

Race	Number of MDCPS Employees	Percentage of MDCPS Workforce
American Indian	3	Less than 1%
Caucasian	448	26%
Hispanic	7	Less than 1%
African American	1,257	73%
Asian	4	Less than 1%
Other	2	Less than 1%
Sex	Number of MDCPS Employees	Percentage of MDCPS Workforce

Male	121	7%
Female	1,600	93%

According to 2nd MSA and STRO, 90% of MDCPS caseworkers will have caseloads which do not exceed the caseload standards set forth below. Individual MDCPS caseworkers with generic caseloads shall not carry a mixed caseload that exceeds 100% capacity. Also, 85% of MDCPS supervisors shall be responsible for no more than five (5) caseworkers.

MDCPS caseworkers carry a specialized caseload for example Wellbeing Specialists carry in-home and foster care cases, Safety Specialists carry investigation cases, Licensure Specialists carry licensure cases and Adoption Specialist carry adoption cases.

The chart below shows the case weights of the direct services used to calculate caseload compliance:

MDCPS Caseload Standards:

Role	Standards	Weight Per Case - 100% Capacity
Child Protection (Investigations Level 2 and 3)	14 Investigations	0.0714
Ongoing Foster Care (Placement Responsibility & Service)	14 children	0.0714
Ongoing Foster Care (Placement County of Responsibility)		0.0357
Ongoing Foster Care (Placement County of Service)		0.0357

Role	Standards	Weight Per Case - 100% Capacity
In-Home Cases (Protection Responsibility & Service, Prevention Responsibility & Service, and Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC Incoming))	17 families	0.0588
In-Home Cases (Protection or Prevention County of Responsibility)		0.0294
In-Home Cases		0.0294
(Protection or Prevention County of Service)		
Adoption (Adoption County of Service)	15 Children	0.0667
New Application Licensing (Resource Inquiry, Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) and Foster Home Study)	15 Homes	0.0667
Renewal Licensing (Foster Home Supervision and Foster Home Renewal)	36 homes	0.0278

For most of the reporting period, the Intake staff were employed through a contract which provided staffing for the centralized intake services of MDCPS with direct supervision and training by MDCPS employees. In May of 2022, the process was initiated to hire full-time Intake Specialists as MDCPS employees. Intake staff already performing intake duties through

the contractor were invited to apply. As the full-time intake positions are filled with MDCPS employees, the contractor will continue to supply the staffing for part-time staff working overnight hours, weekends, holidays, and any other time when additional coverage is needed. Since January 2023, 13 full time Intake Specialists and 1 full time Intake Supervisor have been hired to staff MCIA.

Mississippi Centralized Intake and Assessment (MCIA) staff responsibilities include receiving, assessing, screening, documenting, and disseminating reports of child abuse and neglect called in to the hotline or received through electronic web reporting. Assessment was added to the name of the department to reflect the focus on more detailed assessment for the screening of intakes through. This approach will prepare intake staff for the enhancement of intake duties to include assessment and screening decisions at the point of intake as the department work through procuring a Structured Decision-Making Tool. The development of this protocol began in May 2022.

Staff hired under the contract as Intake Specialists are to receive 40 hours of classroom training and 40 additional hours of on-the-job training or until the Intake Specialist can exhibit the competency required. On-the-job training and coaching by individual supervisors are important components utilized as Intake Specialists encounter new situations and learn the application of policy and screening decisions for those situations. Focused ongoing small-group trainings resumed in May 2022 to provide refresher trainings on specific topics.

The contracted Intake Specialists can advance by applying for MDCPS employee Intake Specialist positions and can apply for supervisory positions within MCIA. Intake Specialists can also apply for other positions with MDCPS for which they meet the qualifications.

The minimum education and qualification requirements mirror the qualifications of other Social Service Specialist I position within the agency. The minimum education qualification requirements for supervisory intake positions mirror the qualifications of other Social Service Team Lead positions within the agency.

A. Juvenile Justice Transfers:

Division of Youth Services (DYS) is the division that administers probation, aftercare services, and institutional programs for juveniles who have been adjudged delinquent in Mississippi Youth Courts or are at risk of becoming delinquent. The data sources for this information continues to come from MYCIDs, MDHS, Division of Youth Services (DYS)'s Oakley Youth Development Center (OYDC), and the Community Services Crossover Case Reporting Form. Data input for MYCIDs consists of the following staff:

- For delinquency cases, information is input by the DYS worker or Intake Officer.
- For truancy and educational neglect, information is input by the School Attendance Officer or Intake Officer.



- For abuse and neglect cases, the MDCPS case worker begins inputting data into MYCIDs within 24 hours of the initial investigation and must submit a completed report within 30 days to the courts and the court designee.

Youth released from the custody of OYDC are placed on parole for 6 months; however, the parole can be extended for an additional 6 months regardless of foster or adoptive placement.

B. Education and Training Vouchers:

See Attachment C for Mississippi ETV awards from July 1, 2022, through June 30, 2023, and July 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024.

C. Inter-Country Adoptions:

There were no children, adopted from other countries that entered state custody in FY 2024 because of the disruption of a placement for adoption or the dissolution of an adoption.

D. Monthly Caseworker Visit Data:

MDCPS submitted the FFY 2023 Annual Caseworker Visits data to the Children's Bureau in December 2023. The information below was submitted in the report.

For the period October 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023 (FFY 23), MDCPS's performance was:

The total number of visits made by a caseworker monthly to children in foster care during a fiscal year must not be less than 95% of the total number of such visits that would occur if each child were visited once every month while in care – 93.03%.

The percentage of visits that occurred in the child's residence is at least 50% of the total number of monthly visits made by caseworker to children in foster care during a fiscal year must occur in the – 87.07%.

XI. Financial Information

1. Payment Limitations

A. Title IV-B, Subpart 1

The MDCPS utilized FY2005 Child Welfare Services (CWS) funds to assist the State in providing the following:

1. Adoption Assistance Payments: \$1,589,638 (FFP)/ \$529,879 (**State Match**)
2. Foster Care Maintenance Payments: \$2,179,983 (FFP) / \$726,661 (**State Match**)

The total expenditure for FY 2005 Title IV-B, subpart 1 was \$3,769,621.



B. Title IV-B, Subpart 2

The FY2020 state and local share expenditure amounts for the purposes of Title IV-B, Subpart 2 was \$2,385,717. In addition, the FY 1992 base year amount for the Title IV-B, Subpart 2, Promoting Safe and Stable Families grant required to meet the non-supplantation requirements in Section 432(a)(7)(A) of the act for the State of Mississippi was \$900,347. Title IV-B, Subpart 2, funds will be allocated as follows: 20% Family Preservation, 25% Family Support, 20% Time Limited Reunification, and 25% Adoption Promotion and Support.

MDCPS will make every effort to ensure a minimum of 20% will be allocated to Family Support Services and Time-Limited Reunification; however, the number of clients served for each category is dependent upon the number of referrals received from the local field offices which are based on the needs of the children and families within their local communities. As a result of the referral-based system, client needs tend to fluctuate from year to year and MDCPS cannot determine what those needs will be in advance. Based upon prior year trends, MDCPS anticipates an increased demand for Family Preservation Services which could reduce the demand for clients in need of Family Support Services and Time-Limited Reunification Services.

All programs receiving Promoting Safe & Stable Families funding are at or above the 20% requirement. Administrative costs are set at the 10% requirement. For Chafee, foster payments are not being paid from this funding source allowing us to stay below the 30% cap described.

2. Current Year Funding – 2021 Reallotments

The MDCPS is currently not requesting any reallotments.

3. FY 2022 Budget Request

The MDCPS has no changes currently.

4. FY 2019 Title IV-B Expenditure Report

The MDCPS has no changes currently.

5. Expenditure Periods and Submission of Standard Form 425

All requested SF-425s were provided to CB on July 22, 2021.

CARES Act Supplemental Funds

The MS Cares Act award was used to cover COVID related purchases for the agency to continue operations during the pandemic. This included PPE and safety items that were distributed to our workers in the field so they could continue to serve the children of Mississippi safely during the pandemic. (Please see the attached Executive Memorandum regarding Cares Act Supplemental Funding for Title IV-B)



XII. Publication and State Contact

Publication

A copy of the state's approved 2025 APSR and other required documents will be available on MDCPS's website. The MDCPS's website is: <https://www.mdcps.ms.gov/about/federal-reports>. Additionally, an electronic copy of the of the 2025 APSR will also be emailed to its stakeholders by MDCPS.

State Contact

The state contact for the 2025 APSR and other federal plans is Karen Austin, Director of Reporting Unit. The contact email address is Karen.Austin@mdcps.ms.gov.

XIII. 2025 APSR Attachments

Attachment A: MDCPS Organizational Chart

Attachment B: Financial Information

Attachment C: ETV Attachment

Attachment D: CAPTA State Plan Requirements and Updates

Targeted Plans

- Training Plan
- Health Care Oversight and Coordination Plan
- Foster and Adoptive Parent Diligent Recruitment Plan
- Disaster Preparedness Plan