



Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services

# **COMMUNITY UPDATE**



## **BLUEPRINT FOR BETTER**

**2023-2024**

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# OUR MISSION

Working collectively to support and strengthen children, youth, and families in communities across Texas.

# OUR VALUES

- Collaborative
- Honest Brokers
- Forward-Thinking
- Inclusive
- Reliable
- Solutions-Focused
- Thoughtful

# OUR GOALS

- ✓ Ensuring robust support for our member network
- ✓ Advocating for system change and supporting capacity of services and supports for children, youth, and families across the full continuum.
- ✓ Supporting successful implementation of Community-Based Care across Texas
- ✓ Expanding our shared influence on state and national policy
- ✓ Ensuring a strong infrastructure to sustain the organization



Members of TACFS and the Center Boards of Directors

## Dear members, partners, and friends:

We are pleased to share with you our 2023-2024 Community Update. This year we are taking a different approach to our yearly update—one that gives a more in-depth look into the work of our staff, our partners, and our community of members across the state. We are incredibly proud to partner with community organizations across the state and support work that directly impacts kids, youth, and families every day.

Our network creates the fabric of care that serves Texas’ children, youth, and families. Our strength is in the diversity of the unique experiences, populations, and areas of expertise that strengthen our knowledge and improve the way we serve. We learn together, solve problems, and push to be better each day. This year was no exception, and we are so proud to highlight that work across Texas and in communities.

**“Our strength is in our diversity.”**

Your diligence and grit amazes us as we sustain, disrupt, and innovate an ecosystem that fortifies families and heals trauma. YOU are drawing the blueprint professionals will rely on to pioneer the future of Texas child and family wellbeing.

Sincerely,  
Katie Olse, TACFS CEO

## Our 2023-2024 Board of Directors



tacfs.org  
@TxAllianceCFS



TACFS

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# FAMILIES AT HOME, TOGETHER

## EARLY PREVENTION


Across Texas, TACFS members are working to support and strengthen healthy families. For some of our prevention and early intervention (PEI) programs, this may mean offering parenting education and support, meeting concrete needs, home visiting for new moms, fatherhood programs, and more. Many of these are long-standing and established community programs that help families stay together and thrive. 

## UNIQUE SUPPORT IN UNIQUE COMMUNITIES

Family Resource Centers (FRC) are the direct opposite of the “one size fits all” approach. The building blocks of support in each community and neighborhood create unique configurations as they work to create conditions that may prevent and mitigate child maltreatment.

Family voices and parent autonomy are at the center of an FRC, and the community-based approach allows for individualized services. In partnership with Texas DFPS PEI, the Texas Family Support Network (TFSN) provided individualized training and technical assistance to the PEI-funded FRCs. In addition to the seven existing PEI-funded FRCs, an additional 11 will be added to TFSN in 2024.

## FAMILY PRESERVATION

For families already involved with the child welfare system, efforts are underway to keep those families safe, together, and at home. These interventions are typically more intensive than traditional prevention programs and may involve parenting support, substance use treatment, wraparound services, mental health services, and more. Several Community-Based Care regions are funded and directed by the Legislature through HB 3041. Many other community providers across the state have developed intensive home services to support youth and families that need more support. 


## MAKING SPACES FOR FAMILIES TO THRIVE

Starting in 2022, PEI invited the Center to become the steward of the Texas Family Support Network (TFSN). This year, St. David’s Foundation recruited the TFSN to create the Central Texas Family Resource Center Advisory Committee. The group gathered to inform research and recommendations for a report that offers a new pathway for public and private partners to work together on strengthening families approaches through the FRC approach.

## KINSHIP

If staying at home safely isn’t an option, placing kids with a relative is the next best option. To better support kids in these placements, the Legislature passed funding to support needs of these families and reimburse licensing costs. Additional funding was passed to support families caring for children with more complex needs. This aligns with provider-driven initiatives to support treatment kinship care, in an effort to keep kids with relatives but also provide a higher level of therapeutic support. The Legislature also provided important direction to move forward with rules to streamline the process for kinship families to be licensed, an issue long supported

by the TACFS network. This means that those families will receive increased support, resources, and guidance.

This year, TACFS partnered with DFPS and community-based providers to publish “Working with Kinship Families: A Best Practices Manual for Child-Placing Agencies.” Two highly attended Kinship Symposiums were also held in partnership with Casey Family Programs for providers working with kinship families. 

# ONE VOICE AT THE CAPITOL




## *TACFS Priorities: Strengthened Families, Supporting the Child-Serving Workforce, High-Quality Placements and Services, Mental Health Care for Texas' Most Vulnerable Youth, and Child Centered Oversight*

The TACFS network gathered on January 24 at the Texas Capitol to advocate for priorities to support children, youth, and family in Texas. Participants visited nearly 200 legislative offices and heard from state leaders including House Appropriations Chairman Greg Bonnen, M.D., Senator Royce West, and Sarah Hicks, Senior Advisor and Budget Director for Governor Greg Abbott.


## STATE DECISION-MAKERS TAKE NEW STEPS FOR YOUTH WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

What we see and hear in the news is echoed by the stories of community organizations—mental health is a significant and growing concern for the kids and youth we serve. TACFS members see the impact every day—there is a greater need in the community, diagnoses are often complex and serious, and there is limited capacity. Statewide and in communities we are working hard to expand capacity and keep kids and youth stable in every environment. This Session, the Legislature established:

- ✓ Youth Mobile Crisis Teams
- ✓ Mental Health Innovation Grants for child and family service providers
- ✓ Higher education grants for institutes that recruit and train mental health professionals
- ✓ Crisis stabilization and inpatient services 

## REGULATORY REVIEW NOW UNDERWAY

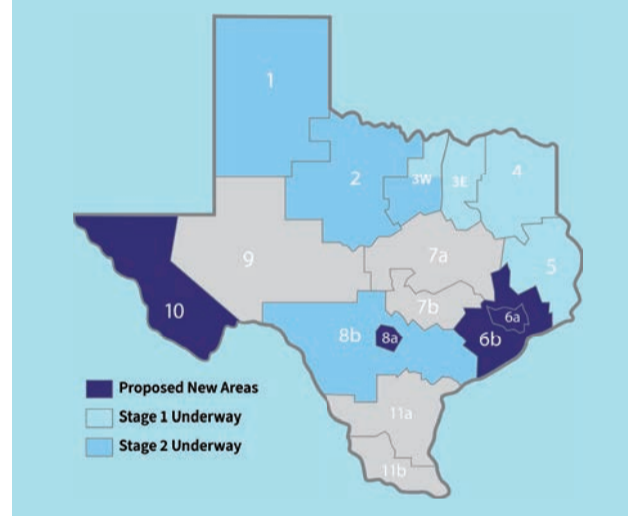
As the state shifts toward new and more progressive models of care, these reforms are layered with a rigid infrastructure that are not built to serve the model of care Texas is implementing. The sheer volume and complexity of standards can overwhelm and frustrate families and staff and often do not relate to the placement and child's needs. This can deter the growth of foster and kinship homes.

SB 593, a TACFS priority bill, requires a third party to assess the state's foster care regulatory environment. This report will make recommendations to improve the state's regulatory and oversight to better serves kids and families. We anticipate that the review will begin in early 2024 and conclude in the fall prior to the next legislative session. 


## *CBC Across Texas*

Community-Based Care (CBC) is a foster care model that relies on local lead agencies to build networks and services to care for kids in their communities. This model values placing kids close to home, keeping siblings and families together, and making sure child and youth voices are heard and valued. Based on the funding from the Legislature, around three-fourths of the system will be community-led by the end of 2024. The Legislature also directed the state to explore improved case management systems so information is accurate and timely, which will ultimately better serve kids and youth.

For the last two years, CBC regions have been working to better support kinship families, build more effective treatment models, and better support case managers. For well over a year, these efforts have been working to keep kids in safe, stable placements, and few to no kids are staying in hotels or other unregulated settings.



## FOSTER CARE FUNDING SEES MONUMENTAL CHANGE

For several decades, Texas has been operating and funding foster care based on an outdated methodology that wasn't best serving kids. That's why, since 2018, TACFS and partners have been working to educate leaders on this issue and laying the groundwork for the passage of rate modernization, which was passed and fully funded during this last legislative session. This is more than about payments, it is a holistic change to help make sure we're getting the right placements and services for kids: high quality care, treatment services, and placements aimed to improve outcomes. This multi-year initiative was renamed Texas Child-Centered Care, or T3C, and implementation is well-underway since its passage. TACFS, Single-Source Continuum Contractor (SSCCs), and our members are working closely with DFPS to inform the process, ready providers through training, information and resources, technical assistance and more. 

**“The Heart Galleries of Texas is more than just photographs, it is a testament to the potential that lies within each child, reminding us all that when hearts come together, we can change lives forever.” - First Lady of Texas, Cecilia Abbott**

## HEART GALLERIES

In 2023, the Texas Legislature funded \$12 million to support the Heart Galleries of Texas expansion and post-adoption services. In partnership with the Moritz Center for Societal Impact and The School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin, and the Governor’s Commission for Women, the Center is supporting the rollout of Heart Gallery programs statewide. Heart Galleries use professional portraits displayed in the community to connect families interested in adoption with children in the foster care system. But Heart Gallery programs are bigger than the photos. This statewide expansion also emphasizes engagement with community partners and post-adoption service providers to ensure that families have the support and resources needed to reduce the number of children coming back into foster care. 🏠



## TXPOP

Children’s Bureau • Children’s Commission • Texas Department of Child & Family Services • The Center • UT | Texas Institute for Child & Family Wellbeing | Steve Hicks School of Social Work

The Texas Permanency Outcomes Project, or TXPOP, is transforming the way our system works with families. This year, the collaborative created Compassionate Caregivers, a resource hub for caregivers who want to engage with a foster child’s family of origin. The TXPOP practice model, Child Welfare Academy, and system engagement efforts have made a statewide impact, and the team trained a total of 228 child welfare professionals in three DFPS regions. We engaged child welfare judges through 33 advisory group meetings this year and created a statewide movement around family engagement. And, in 2024, TXPOP will be joining forces with the Heart Galleries of Texas to provide caregiver workshops to foster and adoptive families.



## TAKING ON PERMANENCY

*Permanency represents the full array of options available to a child or youth as they navigate out of the child welfare system. Whether it’s adoption, living with grandparents, or returning home, we are working hard to get it right every time for every kid. And, as a community, we are working to provide a caring network that will be committed to being involved in their lives as they reach adulthood.*

## WENDY’S WONDERFUL KIDS® SCALES UP IN TEXAS

We are proud to partner with the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption® to support the expansion of Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK) in Texas, a program focused on achieving permanency for young people most at risk of aging out of foster care without a family — including youth ages 9 and older, children with special needs and siblings. Through a co-investment partnership with foster care adoption agencies, DFPS and Single-Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs), the Foundation supports the hiring of adoption professionals, known as recruiters, who are dedicated to finding safe, permanent homes for the longest-waiting children in care. These professionals use an evidence-based, child-focused recruitment model to identify connections within a child’s familiar circles of family, friends, neighbors and others in the communities in which they live. “The Dave Thomas Foundation and the Texas Center for Child and Family Studies believe that by scaling the Wendy’s Wonderful Kids program, an evidence-based, child-focused model, we will see decreased time in care, increased permanency outcomes and decreased Children Without Placement for children and youth across the state of Texas. We are grateful for our partnership with the Center, which shares our fervent belief that unadoptable is unacceptable. Together, we can achieve the vision that every child in Texas will have a permanent home and a loving family,” said Rita Soronen, Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption® CEO and President.



# 29

recruiters

# 474

permanency finalizations

# 624

kids matched with families

# 846

children served

# A STATEWIDE YOUTH MOVEMENT BEGINS

2iNgage • Bexar County Fostering Educational Success • Our Community, Our Kids • Saint Francis Ministries • Selfless Love Foundation • The Center

This year, TACFS partnered with the Selfless Love Foundation to create a statewide youth voice movement with a dual focus on transition-age foster youth and child welfare system improvement. Alliance for Our Futures strives to amplify youth voices and facilitate youth-adult partnerships. Futures provides opportunities for youth to connect with each other and to engage with advocacy and leadership.

This effort began because of the TACFS Board and network’s collective effort to transition the child and family wellbeing system toward one where youth voices are heard, valued, and respected. Futures creates space for youth and young adults with lived experience to work alongside system leaders to find solutions to local issues and provide a platform for statewide collaboration.



## ***DRAWING THE BLUEPRINT TO BETTER ACROSS THE STATE***

*Communities across Texas are working collaboratively to better serve kids and families and prepare for CBC implementation.*



### **HOUSTON**

Since 2018, the Coalition of Child Serving Sectors (CCSS), child welfare and local leaders from Harris County and surrounding counties, has met to increase community capacity to support early, successful exits for children and youth; improve support for providers; and strengthen family-based services. Together they have developed kinship trainings, held a Bench Bar to engage and inform the Judiciary community, hosted information sessions for CPS caseworkers, and supported a family engagement position to assist judges in better supporting families.



### **SAN ANTONIO**

For the last two years, the Bexar County Foster Care Collaborative has convened more than 40 meetings for providers, judges, education administrators, and faith and nonprofit leaders to work toward a successful launch of Community-Based Care. The Collaborative has hosted educational briefings, a kinship symposium, and large community forums to review data trends and policy changes and strategize on how to best meet the region’s capacity needs.



### **NORTH TEXAS**

The North Texas Child Care Consortium serves the Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex and all of North Texas. This group has been meeting for over four years and built their priorities based on an environmental assessment that identified community strengths and opportunities and areas to address gaps in services. This year, they focused on supporting kinship care, the judicial system, and held a mental health summit.



### **CENTRAL TEXAS**

In Central Texas, stakeholders began meeting in 2019 with the goals to develop a collaborative approach to Community-Based Care and work toward measurable positive change in communities across the region. This collaborative is aimed on families being supported, the safety of children, and placements outside of permanency that are rare, brief, and non-recurring.



### **AROUND TEXAS**

Regions 9 (West Texas), 10 (El Paso), and 11 (the Valley) are building coalitions and exploring what the implementation of Community-Based Care could look like. Through collaborative meetings, surveys, and/or data analysis, they are working to understand the unique needs and opportunities their communities face. Some key issues they are addressing are building foster home capacity in communities and building services in rural areas.

# A FRESH APPROACH TO WORKFORCE SUPPORT



## A VISION FOR HEALING AND PREVENTING EXPLOITATION

In partnership with the Governor's (OOG) Child Sex Trafficking Team, the Center is working to help recover youth victims of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEY) and improve the prevention, identification, and intervention efforts of youth at risk of exploitation. This initiative has included community outreach, training and implementation support, provider coaching, technical support focused on best practice and program-level improvements, clinical coaching, and coalition engagement.

During the last fiscal year, over 40 evidence-based CSEY competency trainings were held with nearly 1,700 child welfare professionals and clinicians. In addition, the team held a Trust-Based Relational Intervention® Learning Collaborative and developed two Texas-specific "train the trainer" models aimed at foster parents and exploitation prevention providers. Through assessment results from a recent survey, the team is working to respond to findings that address barriers to serving the population, education and training needs, workforce development, and more as they look ahead to 2024.

## STRENGTHENING RESIDENTIAL CARE

The Center, Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs), and key leaders of Residential Treatment Centers and General Residential Operations came together for a day of shared learning. Partnering with the state's SSCCs to host the event in Houston, this interactive day of discussion centered on ways to elevate quality and identified challenges around solutions to meeting the needs of youth with complex trauma. *Watch our recap of the Strengthening Residential Care Symposium.*



## TEXAS FIRST IN THE NATION TO CERTIFY SUPERVISORS

2INgage • National Certification Board of Child Welfare Professionals • Our Community, Our Kids • SJRC/Belong • The Center

Three of Texas' Community-Based Care (CBC) regions are launching a new professional credential for child welfare supervisors. Our Community, Our Kids (OCOK), 2INgage, and SJRC/Belong, three of the state's SSCCs partnered with the Center and the National Certification Board of Child Welfare Professionals last year to begin the process of building the nation's first child welfare supervisor certification.

Supervisors typically manage caseworkers who work directly with system-involved children and families. The stakes of their jobs can be particularly high because they help to manage foster care, adoption, residential treatment, shelters, and other types of care for the vulnerable children and youth who are alleged victims of alleged abuse or neglect.

**“This is significant and will put Texas at the forefront of professionalizing the workforce caring for many vulnerable children and families.”**

OCOK and 2INgage were the SSCCs to initiate the child welfare supervisor credential for their employees. This implementation is part of a larger effort to credential all Texas child welfare supervisors on the CBC model.

The first cohort of about 40 supervisors underwent 40 hours of training, four hours of field observation, a case file review, and must pass an exam before earning the “Certified Child Welfare Supervisor” credential. They each passed their exam and received their credential this past June.

“This is significant and will put Texas at the forefront of professionalizing the workforce caring for many vulnerable children and families,” said Wayne Carson, OCOK CEO.

The Center staff provided the 40-hour *Excellence in Supervision and Management* training curriculum to a new cohort of supervisors with staff from the three participating organizations.



CSEY • Education • Intellectual & Developmental Disabilities • Kinship • Secondary Trauma • Transracial Adoption

TACFS staff Trust-Based Relational Intervention® practitioners host special guests for virtual sessions on interesting and relevant topics for clinicians. Andrea and Chelsy invite guest speakers who are typically experts in their fields to create space for peer engagement and shed light on important trauma-informed practices.

**“WE ARE  
GROUNDED  
AND  
GROWING  
IN OUR  
MISSION”**

*-Alicia Frye, TACFS  
Board President*



# **2023 TEXAS CHILD CARE ADMINISTRATORS CONFERENCE**

TCCAC 2023 brought nearly 1,500 child welfare professionals together to get grounded in our shared purpose as we grow a diverse, thriving, and ever-evolving child and family wellbeing ecosystem. The Center's signature event is a hub of shared learning where innovation finds room to blossom each year.