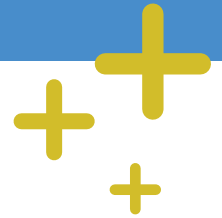


# The Child Welfare Landscape of Region 10



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# Executive Summary

In January 2024, a steering committee consisting of child welfare partners in Region 10, was formed to support The Texas Center for Child and Family Studies (TCCFS) in preparing a community landscape analysis. This analysis can be used to inform and facilitate a region-wide effort to develop a consensus understanding of the resources that will best support implementation of Community-Based Care (CBC) in Region 10. Using data from the Department of Family and Protective Services and interviews with key partners in the region, this report shares information on strengths, challenges, and opportunities across Region 10, and how they might impact CBC readiness.

# UPDATES ON COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

The child welfare system in Texas is undergoing a fundamental shift in its service delivery model for children in foster care. In this new model, Community Based Care (CBC), responsibility lies with a local nonprofit or local governmental entity (known as a Single Source Continuum Contractor or SSCC) for developing foster care capacity, building a network of service providers, engaging the community, foster care placement services, and coordinating and delivering services to children in foster care and their families. The goal of CBC is to keep children in foster care closer to home and connected to families and friends.

Seven areas of Texas are currently implementing CBC, with four new areas currently in the procurement process, including the El Paso area, or Region 10. The region is the furthest western region in the state, bordered by Mexico to the south, separated by the Rio Grande, and the state of New Mexico to the north. Most of West Texas is sparsely populated and is home to mountainous regions including Big Bend National Park. The largest population center is El Paso, which forms the Paso Del Norte region, the shared metropolitan area with Juarez, Mexico.

The region is currently operating under the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) legacy system and is in the planning phases for CBC. Although there is not a specific time frame for when a contract for CBC will be established for Region 10, a request for application (RFA) has been released for the region and the State Implementation Plan calls for full roll-out by Fiscal Year 2029. Child placing agencies and community organizations in the region are already working together to establish a network of services and strengthen capacity to improve the quality of care provided for children and families.

## TEXAS CHILD-CENTERED CARE

The Texas Child-Centered Care (T3C) system represents a complete transformation of the foster care system. T3C is designed to improve outcomes for children, youth, and young adults by establishing a well-defined service continuum that meets the needs of the foster care population and compensates the caregiver for delivering high-quality services. This includes an evidence-informed universal assessment of child need, clearly defined service packages tailored to meet the specific needs of the children, and a new foster care rate methodology that aligns payment with the cost of care.

To successfully transition to T3C, modifications must be made to IT infrastructure, policy, procedures, contracts, contract monitoring, and the process for assessing, matching, and placing children under the new modernized system. The infrastructure and readiness work to implement T3C is underway and estimated to take approximately 19 months (June 2023-December 2024). Beginning in January 2025, children and youth will begin to transition under the new foster care continuum. Based on the current plan, it is likely that a full transition of children under the new continuum will occur by fiscal year 2028.

The T3C and CBC roll outs combined impacts will significantly alter the foster care system and child welfare service delivery in the future.

# WHAT ARE THE KEY CHALLENGES IN REGION 10?

## KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH CLOSER TO HOME

- + 47 percent of Region 10 children and youth in foster care are placed outside of the region in foster homes or residential treatment settings.
- + Children and youth are being placed far from home, in regions across the state and sometimes out of state, but most commonly in Region 6.
- + Older youth leave the region more often than babies and younger children. Over half of the youth ages 14 - 17 who are placed out of the region were in a residential treatment center, suggesting the need to build the region's capacity to care for teenagers with acute needs.

## FOSTER HOME CAPACITY

- + Higher rates of children and youth are leaving the region for placement than in previous years. The region needs safe placement options for all levels of care, preferably in home settings, but there is also a need for residential options.
- + As foster care capacity is built within the region, special consideration should be given to adding homes and placement options for teenagers and sibling groups.

## MEETING THE SERVICE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

- + Prioritizing wraparound services, including behavioral and medical services, for children and teenagers is essential to developing appropriate foster care capacity. Region 10 includes El Paso, the furthest western county in Texas, and some of the largest, most rural counties in the state. Due to the location, size, and population distribution, ensuring both provider capacity and access to services for all children and youth comes with challenges unique to the region.
- + There are more teenagers, ages 14 to 17, in care than any age group.
- + 27 percent of Region 10 children and youth in care are teenagers, compared to 19 percent in the rest of the state.
- + There is a need to increase services and supports for youth in care, as well as for youth who turn 18 while in foster care, to ensure successful transitions into adulthood.



## PREPARING FAMILIES FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

- + Just over 22 percent of Families that receive Family Preservation Services have children who are alleged victims in new investigations within a year of receiving services. Strengthening prevention and family preservation can reduce system involvement for many families in the community.
- + Approximately 27 percent of children and youth in care are placed with relatives at any given point in time in the region. This is among the lowest in the state and could be improved by building a kinship first culture and working to place children that have been removed from their home with relatives immediately after removal.

## WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

- + The city of El Paso is currently leading an initiative to address labor challenges and transform the workforce. There is a need to develop intentional strategies for recruiting and retaining child welfare staff, including those that provide wraparound supports such as behavioral and mental health supports, that can compete with other labor markets in the region.



# OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD ON AND NEXT STEPS

## **THERE IS A STRONG FAMILY CULTURE AND FOUNDATION IN PLACE TO CONTINUE TO STRENGTHEN AND BUILD OUT CAPACITY TO SERVE FAMILIES.**

- + There are evident intentions to support children and families and keep children with their parents whenever safely possible. Many families are receiving family preservation and family-based safety services and supports.
  - ▶ 2,514 children were served in Family Preservation last year and an additional 1,100 families were served with Prevention and Early Intervention Services.
  - ▶ In fiscal year 2023, the region opened nearly half (49 percent) of substantiated investigations to FBSS, while the rest of the state opened 24 percent. The region has opened higher percentages of cases to FBSS than the rest of the state since fiscal year 2012.

## **EXISTING PARTNERSHIPS THAT HAVE BEEN BUILT WITHIN REGION 10 PAVE THE WAY FOR A TRUE COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH TO SERVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.**

- + There are several considerations that are unique to the El Paso area, such as being a border county with New Mexico and Mexico and being the home for Fort Bliss, the largest regional military complex in the United States.
- + State agencies and providers have been intentional in creating strong partnerships to help support their communities. Some of those partnerships include federal agencies such as customs and immigration and border control, state governmental agencies in New Mexico, the Fort Bliss Army Base, juvenile probation departments, family courts and the Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo tribal government.
- + Continuing to include the voices and experiences of youth, parents, and providers is critical to building quality capacity and trust throughout the community both with the network of providers, and any future entity that plans to the SSCC.

## **THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO LEARN FROM OTHER REGIONS THAT HAVE IMPLEMENTED CBC.**

- + There are opportunities to gain knowledge about the difficulties, insights gained, and achievements in establishing CBC by collaborating with the provider networks and SSCC's that are currently in place in other parts of the state.

## **NEXT STEPS**

The steering committee and TCCFS will host a community meeting for partners and providers to discuss how they can lead the planning for CBC in Region 10. Through this collaboration, the region can develop actionable plans and opportunities for strengthening children and families, building capacity, and informing local and state level leadership and policies.



# Landscape Analysis



Although there is not a definitive date for when Community-Based Care will roll-out in Region 10, child placing agencies and community organizations in the region are already working together to create a network of services and placement options that improve the quality of care provided to children and youth. There are existing collaborative efforts across the region that are working to improve the outcomes of children and youth in foster care and their families. Region 10 communities are committed to ensuring families have the support and services necessary to provide children and youth safe, loving, and permanent homes.

The goal of this community landscape analysis is to report on data that reflects potential ways that Region 10 can expand on current resources and collaborate to establish a well-coordinated response when CBC comes to the area. Additionally, the information in this report can serve to inform providers and communities on capacity needs and opportunities for innovation and growth to meet the needs of children and families throughout the region. Information sources included provider and community partners interviews, internet research as referenced in the body of the report, and data from DFPS data book and monthly reports.

### **QUESTIONS USED TO GUIDE THE COLLECTION OF INFORMATION:**

1. What trends are we seeing related to intakes and investigations of child abuse and maltreatment in the region?
2. How many children are being placed in foster care, how many families are receiving family-based safety services so children can stay at home, and what does this mean for developing appropriate capacity to meet their needs?
3. What trends are we seeing in the children in the region being placed in residential treatment care and treatment foster care?
4. What impact does recent state and federal legislation have on our local child and family service providers?
5. What gaps in services exist in Region 10?
6. What opportunities exist to inform policy that could support CBC implementation in Region 10?
7. What do answers to the above questions suggest for what resources and structure will be necessary to successfully implement Community-Based Care in Region 10?

These questions were agreed upon by a committee of key partners in Region 10 to guide this analysis, as well as prepare for future conversations in the community.

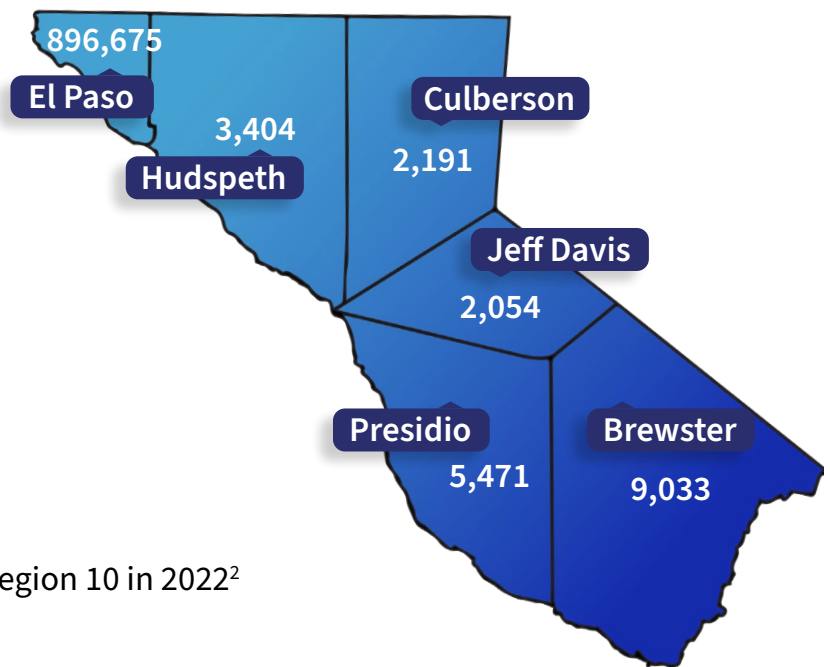
# CHARACTERISTICS OF REGION 10

Region 10 is the 7th largest region in the state by population and has 3 percent of the Texas Child Population<sup>1</sup>. The region is a 6-county area that is vastly rural, except for El Paso County, which is the 10th most densely populated county in the state. Counties in the region include Brewster, Culberson, El Paso, Hudspeth, Jeff Davis, and Presidio. Four of the six counties in the region are in the top five largest counties by area in the state, and Jeff Davis comes in as the 11th largest.

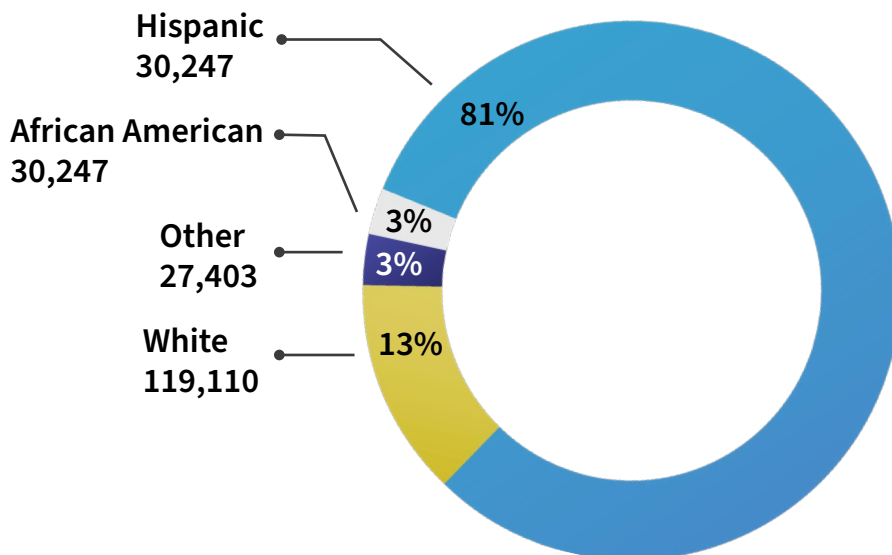
El Paso County, which encompasses approximately 98 percent of the region's population, is located right on the border with the Las Cruces area of New Mexico and just across the Rio Grande from Ciudad Juarez, Chihuahua, Mexico. This tristate area is often referred to as the Borderplex Region. The region has a rich Mexican-American culture, vibrant communities that are welcoming and kind, and beautiful desert landscapes with scenic routes through the Franklin Mountains.

## COUNTY POPULATIONS

*Data source is: Population Estimates and Projections Program, Texas State Data Center, Office of the State Demographer and the Institute for Demographic and Socioeconomic Research, The University of Texas at San Antonio.*



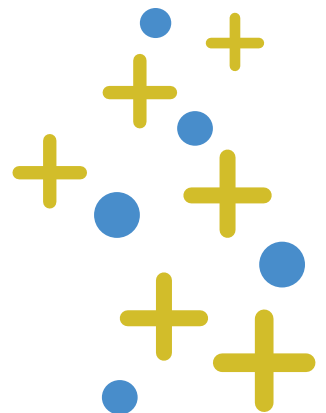
Total Estimated Population of Region 10 in 2022<sup>2</sup>



## CHILD WELFARE PARTNERSHIPS

Throughout Texas, there are multiple organizations that cross county boundaries and provide services for families that are child welfare involved. Those organizations that are represented in Region 10 include:

- + 2 Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHA) that deliver mental health services to children, youth, and families.
- + 9 Children's Advocacy Centers where law enforcement, child protective services, prosecution, and medical and mental health professionals may share information and develop effective, coordinated strategies for each child.
- + 2 Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) programs that support and promote court-appointed advocates for abused and/or neglected children and youth to provide them a safe and healthy environment in permanent homes.
- + 1 Foster Care Center For Excellence, MD Kids Pediatrics presented by Superior Health, who work with children and youth in foster care who have experienced trauma.
- + 24 public school districts, 10 are in El Paso County.
- + 14 STAR Health Certified Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessors.
- + El Paso County and Brewster, Jeff Davis, and Presidio County Juvenile Probation Departments.
- + Ysleta Del Sur Pueblo, tribal government including a social services division.
- + Fort Bliss, the largest regional military complex in the United States and headquarters for the 1st Armored Division.





# PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Source: DFPS Databook; PEI Families Served in Child Abuse/Neglect Prevention Programs; PEI Youth Served - Fiscal Year; PEI FAYS Youth by Presenting Problem

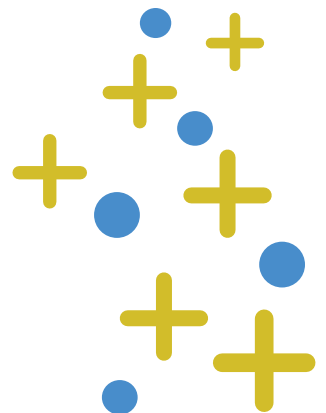
Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) includes programs that support youth, families, and communities in preventing child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, runaway youth, and truancy. While some of these services may be offered to families who have or have had child welfare involvement, many of the families served by these programs have not.

**In fiscal year 2023, nearly 1,100 families in the region received prevention services through the following programs:**

- + **Healthy Outcomes through Prevention & Early Support (HOPES):** A flexible community grant that funds a wide variety of innovative initiatives and supports families with children 0-5 years of age. In Region 10, the El Paso Center for Children offers group parenting classes to families that want to learn, improve, or better their parenting skills.
- + **Texas Service Members, Veterans, and Families (SMVF):** Services provided by The Child Crisis Center of El Paso, the program is designed to strengthen and support military and veteran families through supports such as parenting, education, counseling, and youth development.
- + **Texas Nurse Family Partnership (TNFP):** Voluntary program through which nurses partner with first-time mothers to improve prenatal care and provide one-on-one child development education and counseling. In Region 10, this program is offered through the El Paso County Hospital District.

**During this same year, 1,869 youth were served in a PEI program, including:**

- + **Community Youth Development (CYD):** Programs, offered through El Paso Human Services, are designed to foster positive youth development, and build healthy families and resilient communities.
- + **Family and Youth Success (FAYS):** Programs include coaching, counseling, and group-based learning for youth and parents to address family conflict and everyday struggles while promoting family strength and youth resilience. This program is offered through The El Paso Center for Children.
- + **Statewide Youth Services Network (SYSN):** Designed as a network of programs focused on positive youth development. In the El Paso area, this is provided by Big Brothers Big Sisters Lone Star and the Texas Alliance of Boys and Girls Clubs.



# INTAKES AND INVESTIGATIONS

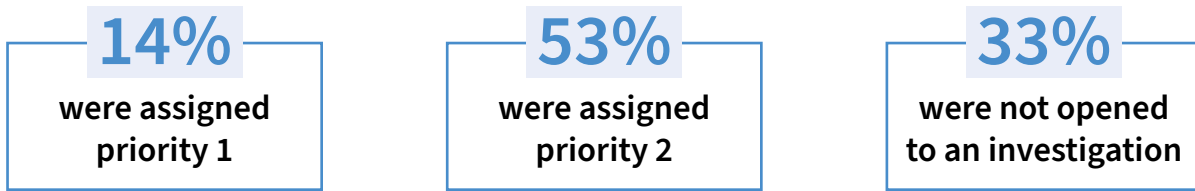
Source: DFPS Databook; CPI Intakes: Initial Priority, Screening and Assignment

The Statewide Intake (SWI) division at DFPS reviews intake information, and if it contains credible and actionable information that meets the statutory definition of abuse or neglect, the intake is referred to the field for further investigation. Prior to an intake being referred to the field for further investigation, it is assigned as Priority I, Priority II, or Priority None. Priority I reports are immediately assigned to an investigation due to the increased safety concerns associated with the report and require face-to-face contact within 24 hours, Priority II reports receive further screening by SWI and require face-to-face contacts within 72 hours.

## REPORTS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT ARE INCREASING IN REGION 10

In fiscal year 2023, there were 9,494 reports of abuse and neglect, 98% were in El Paso County. This is the highest number of reports since at least 2014.

67 percent were assigned to an investigation



## SUBSTANTIATED CASES OF ABUSE ARE DECLINING

There were 4,985 completed investigations in Region 10 in 2023, this is a 22% increase since 2021.

The Reason to Believe (or RTB) disposition is assigned as the outcome of the investigation if the caseworker determines that the reported abuse or neglect did occur. The percentage of completed investigations closed with a substantiated RTB disposition has been decreasing over the past couple of years. In fiscal year 2023, Region 10 had five percent fewer investigations with an RTB than in 2021.

Similar to what is seen in the rest of the state, these trends are potentially driven by the legislative changes in late 2020 in the definition of neglect, requiring an increased threshold of evidence that actions or omissions involved “blatant disregard” and resulted in harm or immediate danger to a child.

# CHILDREN AND FAMILIES RECEIVING SERVICES

Source: DFPS Databook; CPI Completed Investigations: Case Action for Families and CPS Conservatorship: Removals

## CASES OPENED FOR SERVICES

When investigations are completed, cases can be closed with no services, or cases can be opened to either in-home Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) or conservatorship (CVS).

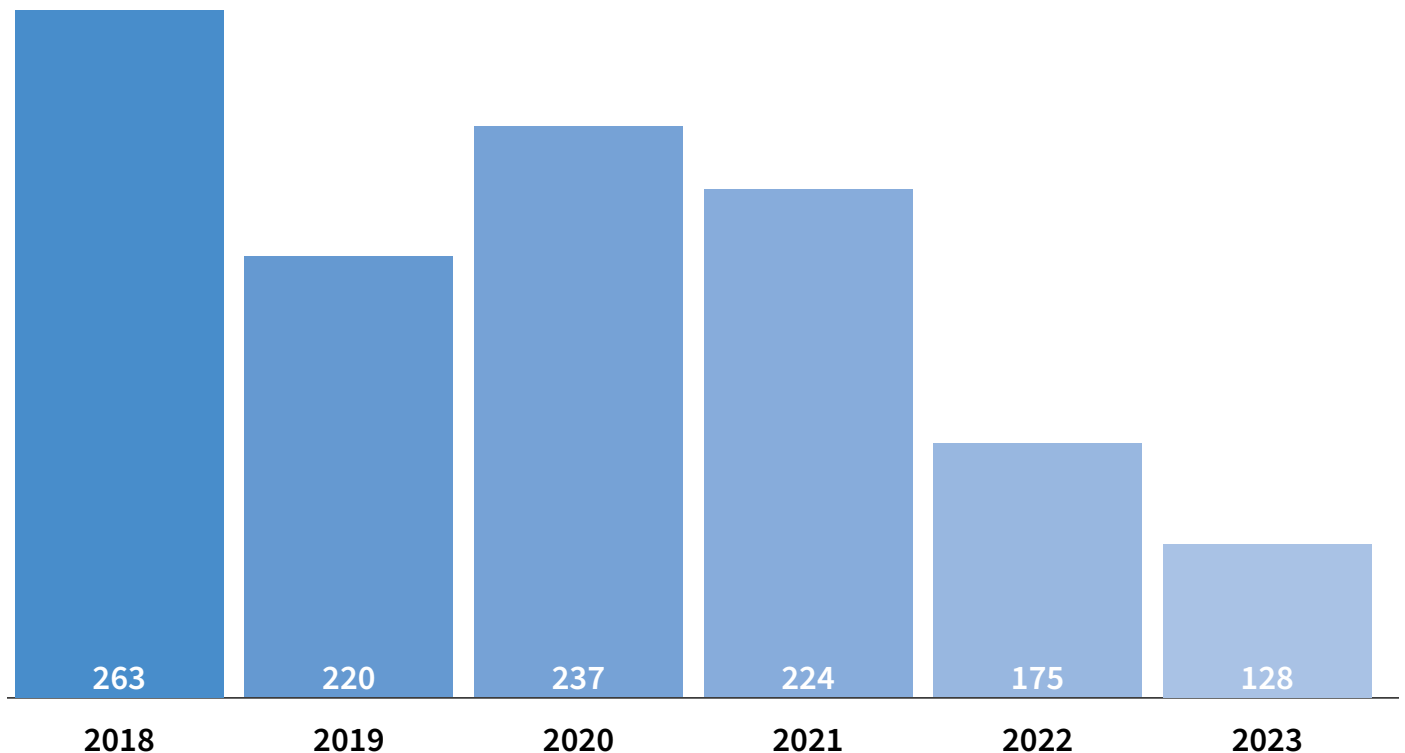
### STATEWIDE, THERE HAS BEEN A SHIFT TOWARDS KEEPING KIDS AT HOME.

During the same time the threshold of what constitutes abuse and neglect increased, DFPS also implemented a new policy to narrow types of investigations that could be opened to FBSS, for example, if parents were not willing to participate in services or DFPS was unable to obtain a court order for services.

### FEWER CHILDREN ARE BEING REMOVED FROM THEIR HOME.

Although the state did see a slight uptick in removals last year after trending down since 2018, there were still 38 percent fewer removals in fiscal year 2023 compared to 2021. Removals in Region 10 continued to decline last year. The region has the lowest number of children in care and the lowest rate of removals per 1,000 children than any region in the state.

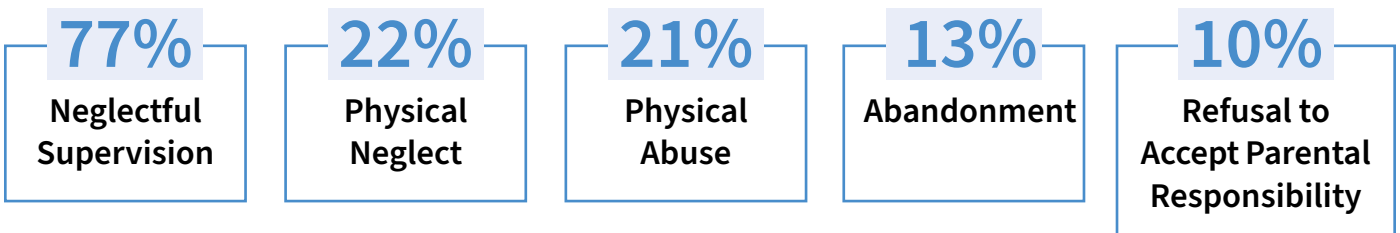
Number of Children Removed from Home







A child may be removed for more than one reason, these were the most common last year.



### **MORE FAMILIES ARE BEING REFERRED TO FAMILY BASED SAFETY SERVICES**

In Region 10, as well as statewide, the number of investigations opened to Family Based Safety Services (FBSS) sharply declined in 2021 and this continued across the rest of the state until last year. Region 10 began referring more families to services in fiscal years 2022 and 2023, and overall refers higher percentages of investigations to FBSS than the rest of the state.

## **Region 10 opened 49 percent**

**of substantiated investigations to FBSS in 2023, the rest of the state opened 24 percent.**

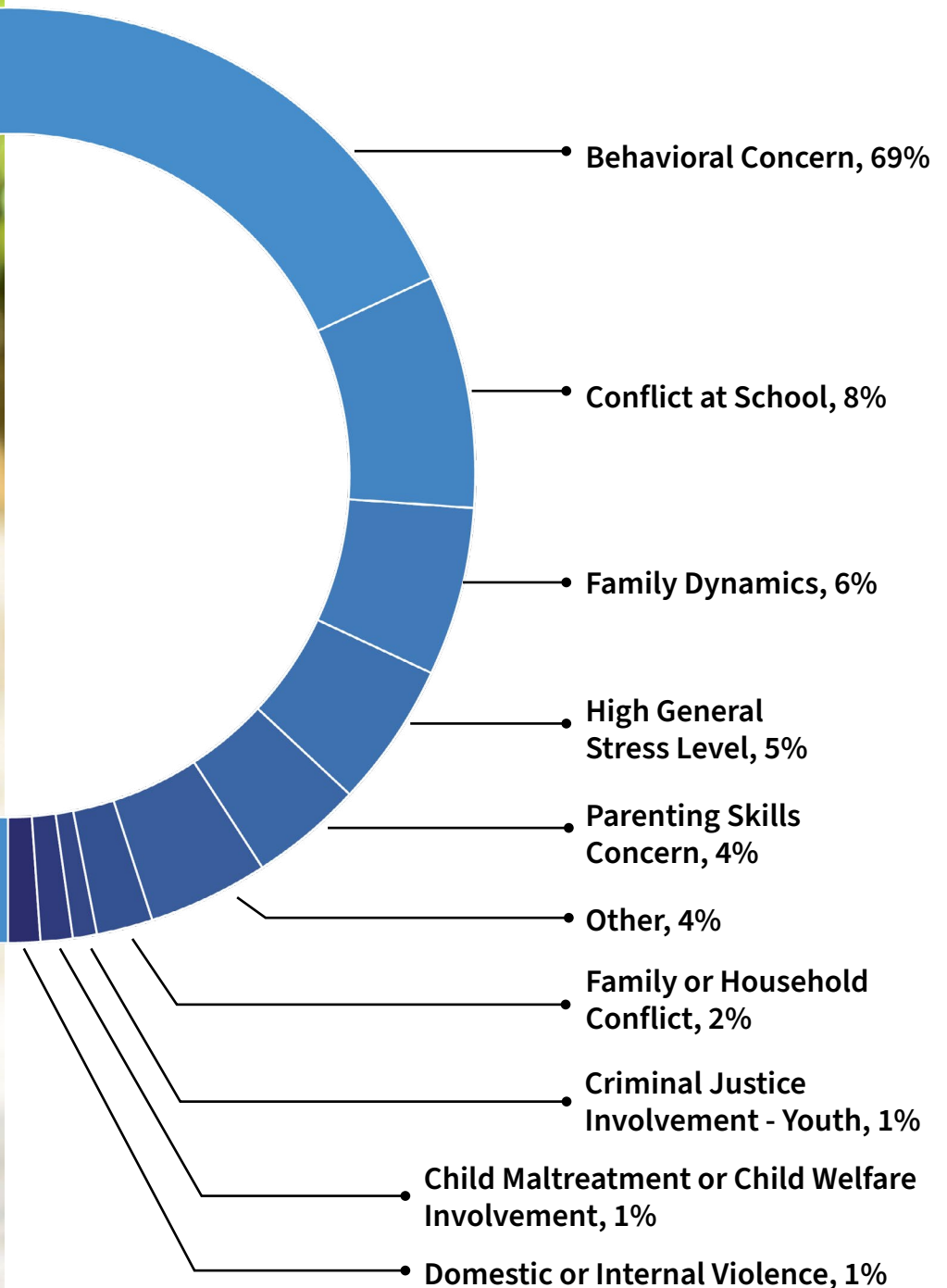
FBSS are designed to maintain children safely in their homes, or make it possible for children to return home, by strengthening the ability of families to protect their children and reducing threats to their safety.

## **2,514 children and youth**

**were provided FBSS last year.**



The FAYS program records the presenting problem to better determine service plans for the youth and their families. For the 933 youth in Region 10 served in the FAYS program last year, the most common presenting problems were:



Other, or less commonly reported, presenting problems include developmental delays for youth or for caregivers, parental drug use or criminality, low income, mental health concerns, substance or alcohol abuse related concerns, school engagement, runaway, or military connection.

# SUBSTITUTE CARE

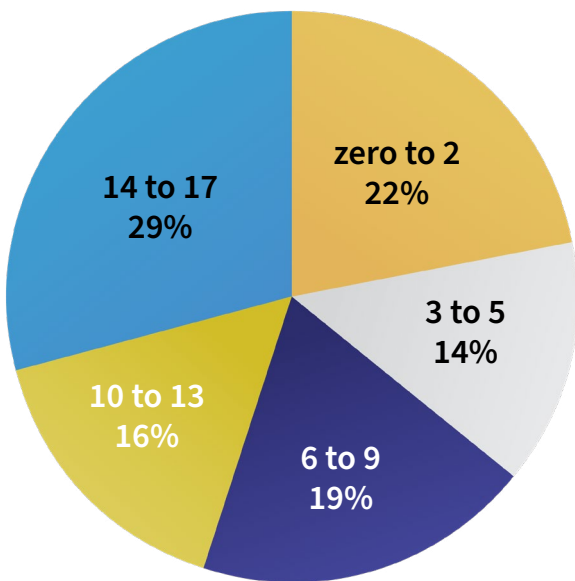
Substitute care includes all children living in a Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) out of home placement. Provided from the time a child is removed from their home due to abuse or neglect and placed in Child Protective Services (CPS) conservatorship until the child returns home safely or is placed in another living arrangement that does not require CPS supervision.

- + Licensed Foster Care: Foster care refers to licensed foster placements, including licensed kinship care placements.
- + Relative Care: Relative care refers to unpaid placements with a relative or fictive kin.

## DEMOGRAPHICS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE IN REGION 10

Source: DFPS monthly data report Children in Substitute Care Placements by Living Arrangement Categories (0-17)

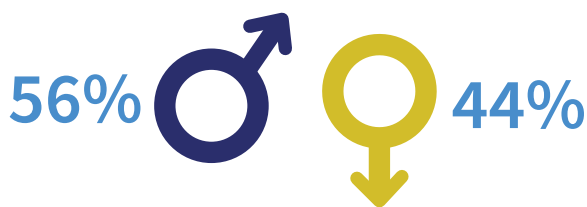
At the end of January 2024, there were 253 Region 10 Children and Youth in Substitute Care, approximately 95 percent were from El Paso County.



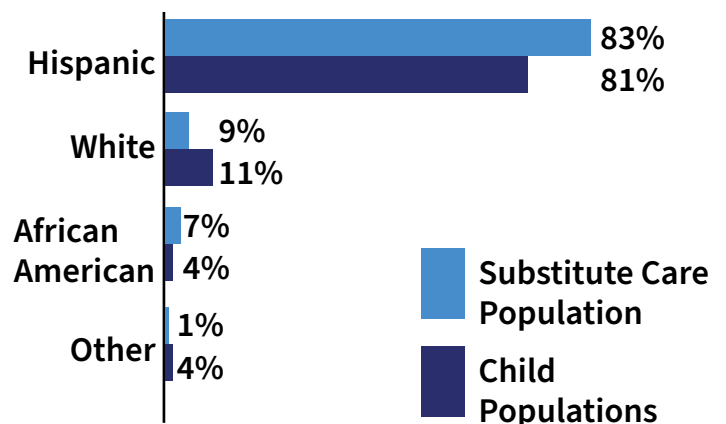
There are more teenagers in care than any other age group. Both babies and teenagers are disproportionately represented in care compared to their child populations.

A majority of youth in care are Hispanic, which is similar to regional demographics. However, we can see that both Black and Hispanic children are disproportionately represented in care

Male children are overrepresented in care



The region's gender ratio for youth is nearly equal: 51 percent male, 49 percent female.



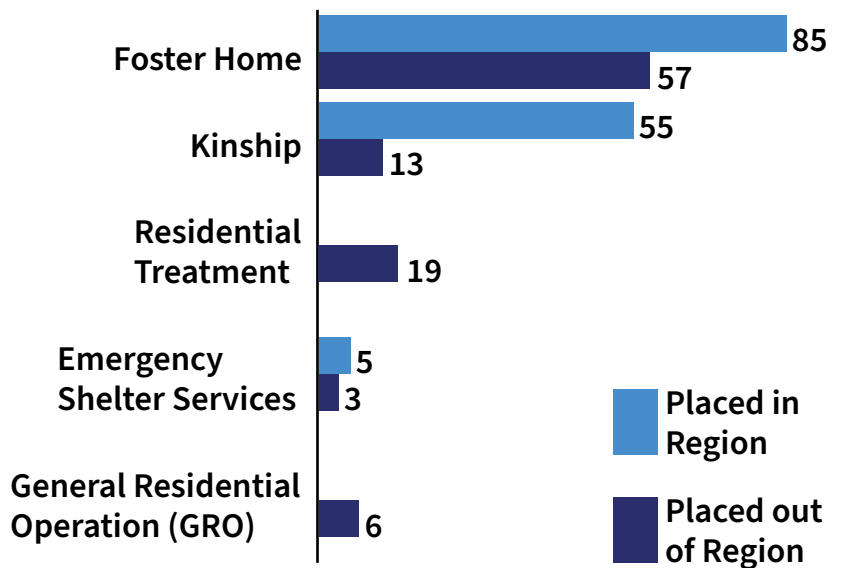
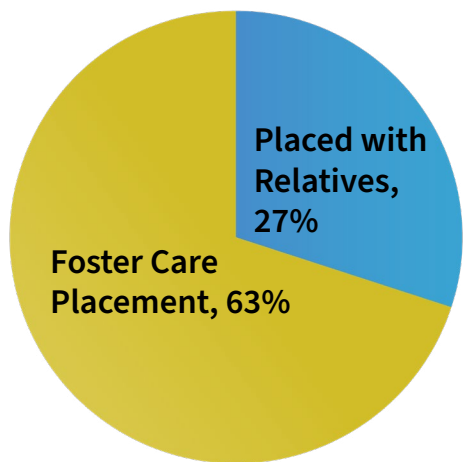




# PLACEMENT INFORMATION

Source: DFPS monthly report Children In DFPS Care, January 2024

In January 2024, 27 percent of children and youth ages 0-17 in substitute care in the region were placed with relatives, compared to 32 percent the previous year and an average of 34 percent in the rest of the state.



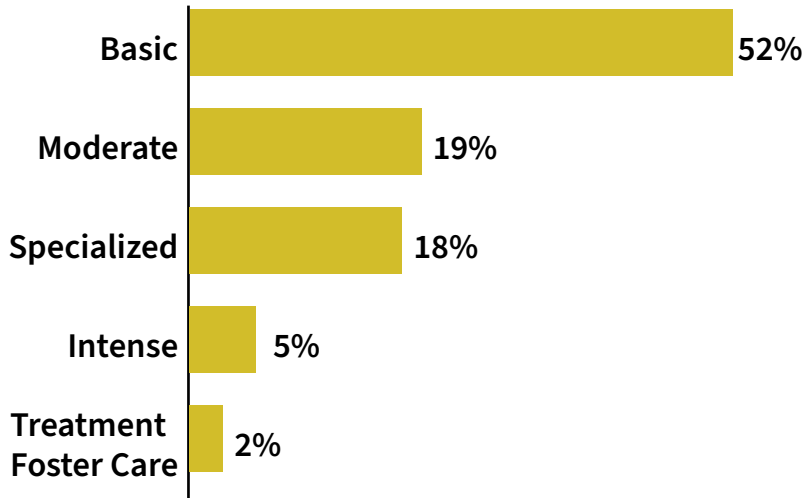
Fifty-five percent of children and youth in care are in foster homes. Forty percent of those in care are placed outside of Region 10.

# SERVICE LEVELS

Source: DFPS monthly report *Children In DFPS Care, January 2024*

Each child placed in foster care is assessed for the level of services they need. Service Levels are based on the needs of the child and are ultimately used to guide their placement. Children and youth needing higher levels of care need a more structured and supportive setting, preferably in a family, but are commonly in residential settings that are designed to stabilize and address psychological, behavioral, or substance use treatment needs.

Definitions of each level can be found here: [DFPS - Service Levels for Foster Care \(texas.gov\)](https://www.texas.gov/dfps-service-levels-for-foster-care)



Nearly half, 48 percent, of the children and youth, ages 0 to 17, in foster placements were categorized as needing above basic levels of care. Four percent of children in care during this time had not been assigned an Authorized Level of Care yet.

## CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE HAVE UNIQUE, AND OFTEN COMPLEX, NEEDS

Source: DFPS monthly report *Demographics of Children New In Substitute Care For Children Age 0-17*

Caseworkers capture a number of child characteristics after a removal to begin identifying children with more acute, or special, needs. Of the 128 children in the region who had a conservatorship removal last year, the following characteristics were recorded:

6

with Medical needs, such as failure to thrive, hearing or vision impaired, terminal illness, or traumatic injuries

8

with Learning disabilities, for example Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD), learning and speech disablement, Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), or other learning disabilities.

9

presenting with Drug and Alcohol Abuse

10

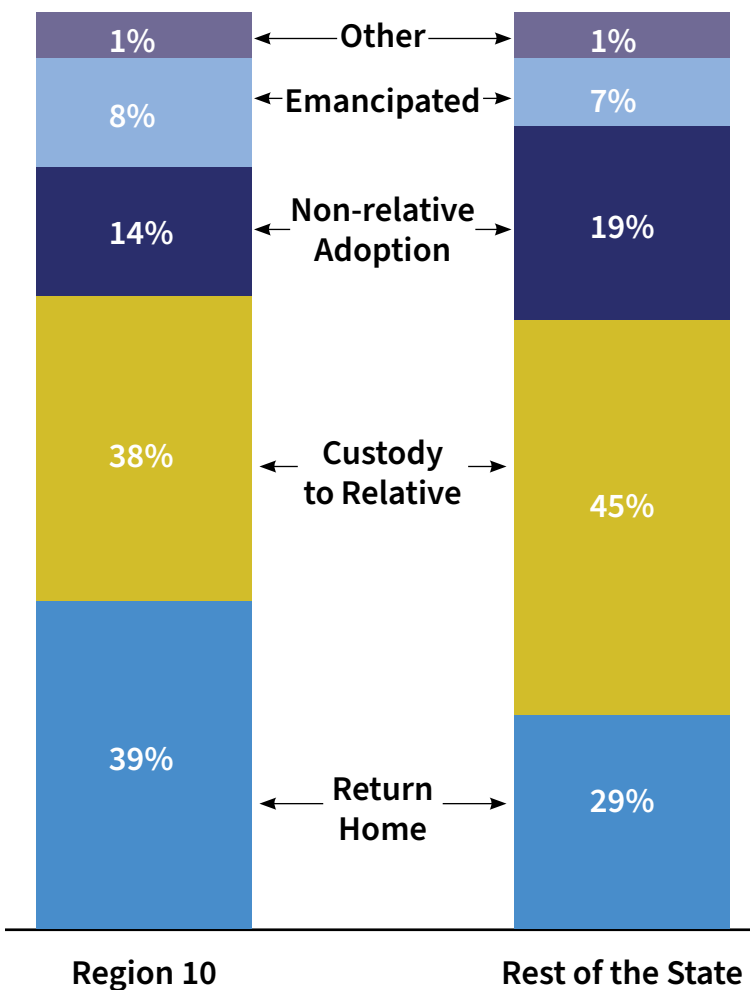
with Emotional characteristics, such as depression, runaway, self-harm, sexually acting out, and mental health illnesses

A child may have more than one characteristic reported and these may change over the life of the case. Definitions of person characteristics are provided on the DFPS website.<sup>3</sup>



## EXITS FROM CARE

Source: DFPS Databook CPS Conservatorship: Children Exiting DFPS Legal Custody



### MANY CHILDREN WHO LEAVE CARE RETURN HOME

One hundred and eighty-nine children from Region 10 left care in fiscal year 2023. Thirty-nine percent of them returned home, and an additional 38 percent exited care to a relative or fictive kin.

Those that left care in fiscal year 2023 spent 21 months in care and had 2.7 placements, on average. When looking at all types of exits, compared to the average in the rest of the state, children from Region 10 spend fewer months in care.





**+**  
**+**  
**+**

# **Challenges to providing Community-Based Care in Region 10**



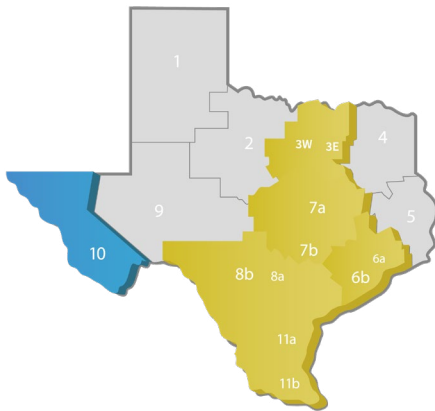
# KEEPING CHILDREN AND YOUTH CLOSER TO HOME

Source: DFPS monthly report Children In DFPS Care, January 2024

When a child enters foster care, the state and community organizations work together to keep the child close to home whenever safely possible. Keeping children and youth close to home helps ensure safety, stability in their routines, access to family and familiar connections, and removes some burden on caseworkers in managing services.

## NEARLY HALF OF REGION 10 CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN CARE ARE BEING PLACED OUTSIDE OF THE REGION.

47 percent of Region 10 children and youth in foster care are placed outside of the region. This is up from 35 percent at the same time in the previous year. So, while fewer children are entering care, the rate at which they are leaving the region for placements is still increasing.



### CHILDREN ARE BEING PLACED FAR FROM HOME.

Often, children and youth that are placed outside of the region go to Region 6, the Houston metropolitan area, for both foster home and residential placements. Additionally, many children and youth are placed in Regions 3,7,8, and 11, and a few are placed in Regions 1,4, and 9.

In January 2024, there were 29 youth that were placed either out of state or in unauthorized or unknown placements.

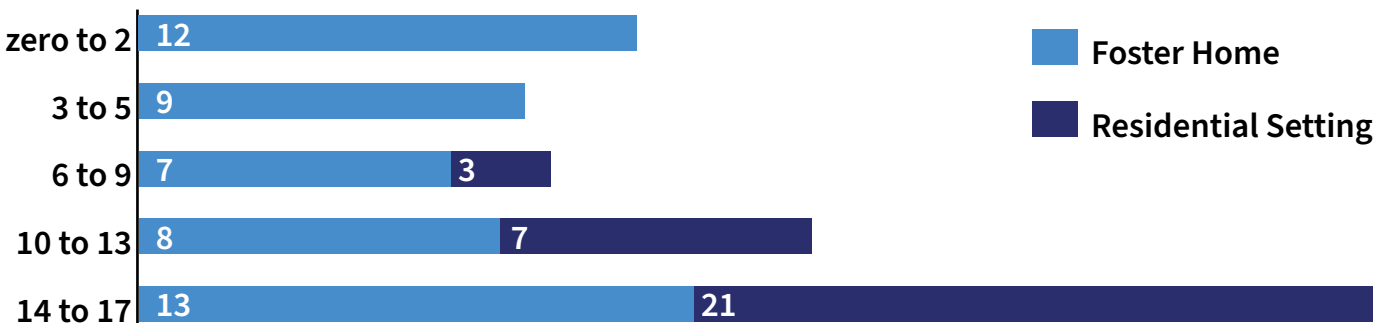
### OLDER YOUTH MORE COMMONLY LEAVE THE REGION FOR CARE.

Source: DFPS monthly report Children In DFPS Care, January 2024

Placements outside of the region are mostly foster homes and residential placements, including General Residential Operations (GROs). There are several additional youth placed outside of the region in settings such

as emergency shelters, hospitals, youth correctional facilities, or home and community-based service placements for individualized needs.

The region does not currently have residential treatment capacity. In January 2024, over half of the youth ages 14 - 17 who were placed out of the region were in a residential treatment center, suggesting the need to build the region's capacity to care for teenagers with acute needs.



# FOSTER HOME CAPACITY

Source: [DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment 2024](#)

Building foster home capacity has been an ongoing challenge for the region. Under CBC contracts, success in keeping children and youth close to home is based on the percentage of children and youth who are placed within 50 miles of their home. Understanding existing capacity is challenging and requires disaggregating data based by children’s age and service level and recognizing that a home may be verified for more children and youth than are actually placed in the home at any given time.



Minimally, the fiscal year 2024 foster care needs assessment reports that the region needs an **additional 78 beds**:



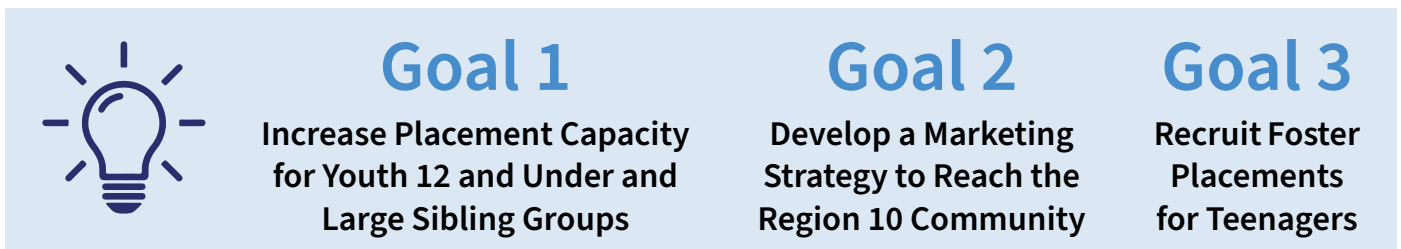
## LESS THAN HALF OF SIBLING GROUPS ARE PLACED TOGETHER.

Source: *DFPS Databook CPS Substitute Care: Siblings Placed Together*

At the end of the last fiscal year, there were 65 sibling groups from the region, and 45 percent were placed together. Looking at trends over time, the number of sibling groups in foster care has declined and the percentage placed together last year was the lowest since at least 2014. Being placed with siblings can serve as a protective factor against the adverse experiences associated with placement in foster care, provide continuity and connection to family, and help to expedite the management and delivery of services.<sup>4</sup>

## WORKING TOGETHER TO INCREASE FOSTER CARE CAPACITY

Although fewer children and youth are entering the state’s foster care system, the percentage of those leaving the region for a placement is increasing, suggesting that the region could be losing foster home capacity. To support the recruitment and licensing of new foster homes, the Fiscal Year 2024 Capacity Building Plan<sup>5</sup>, published by DFPS, has the following goals set for the region:



It is important that the provider network continues to work together with the community to recruit foster parents that can meet the needs of the children and youth in the region. This collaboration can look like supporting foster families so they can understand and appreciate

adolescence, care for and foster resilience in the community’s teenagers, and providing higher levels of behavioral and medical care for children and youth so that they can thrive both in care, and as they transition to permanency or adulthood.

# MEETING THE SERVICE NEEDS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH

To meet the diverse needs of children and youth in foster care, a continuum of high-quality, timely services must be available in reasonable proximity to the child's placement. Having long-term access to these vital resources is essential for fostering healing, improving both physical and mental health, and establishing permanency. As part of building adequate foster care capacity, wraparound supports for children and youth, such as behavioral and medical services, must be prioritized.

A particular strength of the El Paso network is the strong working relationship between DFPS and the local mental health authority, Emergence Health Network (EHM). DFPS and EHM have consistent monthly meetings to staff cases, resolve barriers to service delivery and ensure processes between the two agencies are effective. EHM attends monthly provider meetings which underscores their commitment to the service of the foster care population. EHM also has a child mental health system navigator that is a point of contact for foster families and can help families make connections to other community resources when EHM is unable to meet a child's needs. In addition to the EHM, military families (including children) also have access to mental health care at the Steven A. Cohen Military Family Clinic at Endeavors.

In January of this year, Texas Health and Human Services published an annual review of STAR Health Services.<sup>6</sup> The report highlights two dominating themes found that impact the use of medical and behavioral health services for children and youth in foster care statewide: 1) Provider availability and Capacity, 2) Access to Services. Below are specific needs outlined in the report under each theme:

## Provider Availability and Capacity

- + Increase and retain quality Medicaid providers in the STAR Health network.
- + Residential child-care providers expressed the need to improve the capacity for Medicaid providers to be trained and equipped to meet the unique needs of children and youth in foster care.
- + Increase the provider network and capacity in rural areas of the state.

## Access to Services

- + Increase access to alternative services such as equine therapy, music therapy, and art therapy. These services are not Medicaid state plan services and are only available to children enrolled in certain Medicaid waiver programs and are often covered by the residential child-care provider.
- + Continue to keep teleservices assessable; and provide more in-person service to meet the individualized needs of children and youth in care, specifically in certain rural areas of the state.
- + Improve communication between state agencies, SSCC's, providers, and STAR Health.
- + Increased need for access to resources for youth with complex needs, as well as young adults who are transitioning out of foster care.

## YOUNG ADULTS AGE OUT OF FOSTER CARE WITHOUT PLANS AND SUPPORTS IN PLACE

*Source: DFPS Databook CPS Conservatorship: Children Exiting DFPS Legal Custody; DFPS monthly report Demographics of Children in Substitute Care by Permanency Goal; DFPS monthly report Young Adults in Extended/Return to Care Placements by Living Arrangement Categories For Youth Age 18 and Over*

When a child is placed in substitute care, Child Protective Services (CPS) must prioritize permanency planning on behalf of the child or youth to ensure safe and timely reunification when possible, or placement with kinship or an alternative family. In cases where a youth or young adult turns 18 while in the state's conservatorship, they are emancipated from foster care.

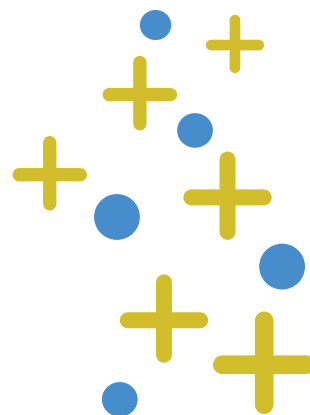
**Sixteen youth in Region 10 were emancipated from state custody last year.** They had been in care for over 41 months, on average, and had an average of 4.1 placements while in care. While we do not have the data to show us how many of these young people enrolled in Extended Foster Care (EFC), we do know that only six young adults from the region, ages 18 and older, are currently enrolled in the program.

In January of this year, there were seven youth with Independent Living or Community Care, and 26 youth aged 14 to 17 with adoption by a non-relative, assigned as their permanency goals for when they turn 18. This, in concurrence with low participation in EFC, could suggest that there are youth and young adults in the region that are not successfully transitioning out of foster care and that more supports and attention needs to be given to this population.

## MISSING CHILDREN

*Source: DFPS Databook DFPS Human Trafficking and Child Exploitation (HTCE) report on children missing*

Last year, there were 24 children, ages 11 to 17, in the region that were missing (runaway, abduction, or unknown) from DFPS temporary or permanent managing conservatorship at one point in time. The Region is a vast and it borders New Mexico and Mexico, increasing the threat to children and youth that are not in supervised care and cross state or country borders. Also, because so many youth leave the region for placements, they are already far from home when they are reported as missing, increasing the risks and challenges associated with their well-being and successfully ensuring their safety.





# PREPARING FAMILIES FOR LONG-TERM SUCCESS

## FAMILIES HAVE REPEATED SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT AFTER RECEIVING PRESERVATION SERVICES

Source: DFPS Databook CPS Family Preservation (FPR): Six Month, One Year, and Five Year Outcomes

The region is strongly family oriented and works hard to support the community through prevention programs and through post permanency services. While the data shows the large numbers of children and families served in PEI and Family Preservation (FPR), 22.3 percent of children served in FPR in fiscal year 2022 were subsequently alleged as a victim in an investigation in fiscal year 2023. The rate at which families that received FPR services and whose children were alleged as victims in a new investigation within 1-year has been increasing since fiscal year 2020.

## BUILDING RESOURCES AND SUPPORTS FOR KINSHIP CAREGIVERS

The region has historically been challenged in placing youth that are removed from their home with relatives or fictive kin. Although many children do exit foster care to the custody of a relative, they may initially go to hospitals, emergency shelters, or even be without a licensed placement, first. Additionally, those relative and fictive kin families are often left without financial assistance or other supports.

As outlined in The Working with Kinship Families Best Practices Manual for Child Placing Agencies, building a kinship first culture can give help develop early and immediate relationship with kinship families.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, with state and national legislation focusing on ways to remove licensing barriers and increase payments for kinship families, there is opportunity to provide primary care assistance to relatives and increase paid foster care payments for licensed kinship homes.



# WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

Over the past five years, the county's population growth has outpaced the nation's overall growth. El Paso County is young and family-friendly, with a median age of 34, and close to 40% of the population being under the age of 25.<sup>8</sup> While there is a growth in some areas of the economy, the El Paso metropolitan area has an 18.9 percent poverty rate, coming in above the 11.5 percent national average.<sup>9</sup>

The city of El Paso, in partnership Workforce Solutions Borderplex, is leading an initiative to address and transform workforce challenges that impact persistently distressed communities.<sup>10</sup> In creating the workforce recompetete proposal, the team identified unfavorable labor market conditions including low pay and limited growth opportunities, economic disparities including education and training, and limited access to childcare and support services as some barriers for the Borderplex area. Just like other labor markets and other regions in the state, the area struggles to build child welfare workforce capacity and there is additional uncertainty due to the system-wide changes coming with CBC and T3C implementation. The population, location, and local economy all contribute to unique challenges with building and retaining the workforce, and all need to be considered by any SSCC coming to the region.



# OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD ON AND NEXT STEPS

## **STRENGTH IN PARTNERSHIPS**

El Paso County makes up 98 percent of the region's population, however it is the furthest western county in the state and is over 280 miles from any other metropolitan area, which is the Midland-Odessa area in Region 9. Region 10 also includes large, rural counties, where resources and access to services can be scarce. Preparing for CBC will require an SSCC to be intentional in building partnerships with communities in rural parts of the region, in addition to El Paso County. DFPS has formed solid relationships and sound practices for working with the Family District Court, Juvenile Probation and the local mental health authority. These processes and practices are excellent models that ensure effective communication and contribute to the system's ability to meet child and family needs and should be maintained through any transition. Because of the region's size and location, it is imperative that the child welfare provider network, and any SSCC, continue to prioritize partnerships, such as those that have been built with the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, Fort Bliss Army post, The Department of Tribal Empowerment, family courts and juvenile probation departments region-wide.

## **LEARN FROM OTHER REGIONS THAT HAVE IMPLEMENTED COMMUNITY-BASED CARE**

CBC is expanding in two stages:

- + In Stage I, the SSCC develops a network of services and capacity for children and families with the focus on keeping children in foster care closer to home and connected to their communities.
- + Stage II expands the continuum of services for families, including case management, kinship, and reunification services, with an emphasis on improving exits to permanency.

CBC has been implemented in seven areas across the state, four of which have transitioned to stage II. There are opportunities to learn from existing provider networks in other regions across the state to understand challenges, lessons learned, and successes in implementing CBC in their communities. While other regions in the state may vary significantly and have key differences to Region 10, there is value in building relationships with other region's networks and SSCC's to learn from what is now years of experience in CBC in Texas.

## PLACEMENT OPPORTUNITIES

One key area for development is placements. As evidenced by the percentage of children leaving the region and children placed with kin caregivers, there is a need to address placement capacity and practices. One area to explore is relative placement practices with military families who are involved with DFPS. Relative placements may be less accessible for those families and there is a need to consider child proximity to parents when reunification is the plan. However, further examination of this issue could yield ideas for impactful changes. Because the region does not house any residential treatment programs, DFPS is also exploring possibilities in New Mexico, which is geographically much closer than Houston, where many of the region's children are placed. That, alongside exploration of what could be done to better support teenagers with supportive in-home services in a less restrictive foster home setting, may facilitate more children being able to be placed in the area. One additional opportunity is identifying barriers to siblings being placed together to address the decline in numbers as reflected in the data.

## REMOVALS

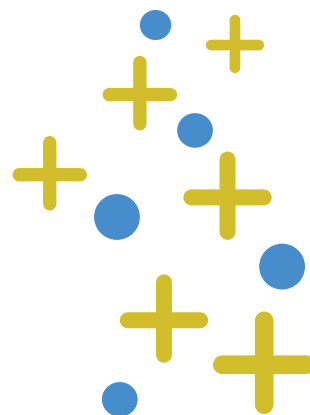
*Source: DFPS monthly report Number of Children Removed During Selected Fiscal Year By Age and Removal Reason*

While removals have been declining, as noted in a previous section of this report, Region 10 removes a disproportionate and higher rate of teenagers than other parts of the state. Additionally, 10% of removals last year were due to refusal to accept parental responsibility, while the statewide rate was 4.6%. A close analysis of the factors contributing to this may support the identification of opportunities to utilize local resources to support more children in their own homes.

## NEXT STEPS

The information contained in this report is intended to provide communities across Region 10 with a common understanding of the opportunities and challenges related to increasing their capacity to care for children, youth, and families in the child welfare system. Community organizations, partners, and families can use this report to inform a planning process to improve their capacity to provide services and prepare for the arrival of Community-Based Care in Region 10.

Although there are no known CBC implementation dates for Region 10, an RFA has been released and the community is beginning conversations and planning. In the near term, there will be opportunities for community partners and providers to come together to discuss how they can lead the planning and preparation of CBC for their region. In addition to defining strategies for building capacity, community partner meetings can create a space to outline the preferred criteria for any entity that is interested in being the SSCC for the region as well as identify opportunities to inform state leadership and policies.





## Endnotes

- 1 [Child Protective Populations at Risk: Texas Child Population](#)
- 2 [TDC - 2022 Estimates \(texas.gov\)](#)
- 3 [Appendix 6241.25: Definitions of Person Characteristics for CPS \(texas.gov\)](#)
- 4 [Strategy Brief: Strong Families, Casey Family Services](#)
- 5 [Fiscal Year 2024 Capacity Building Plan Based on the Foster Care Needs Assessment \(texas.gov\)](#)
- 6 [2024 Annual Review of STAR Health Services \(texas.gov\)](#)
- 7 [Working with Kinship Families: Best Practices Manual](#)
- 8 [Population Demographics \(elpasotexas.gov\)](#)
- 9 [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: El Paso city, Texas](#)
- 10 [Borderplex Region Workforce Recompete Initiative](#)