

Fresno County Department of Social Services  
 Child Welfare Outcomes, Initiatives, & Upcoming Changes  
 September 4, 2024

Child Welfare Data Highlights

Fresno County Foster Care Entries & Exits by Calendar Year						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 YTD Jul	% Change
Removals – Total	1258	1339	1135	946	408	-178%
Removals – Monthly Avg.	105	112	95	79	58	-64%
Exits – Total	1112	1302	1256	1258	657	-91%
Exits – Monthly Avg.	93	109	105	105	94	-12%

Removals = Youth removed from custody of parents and placed into foster care  
 Exits = Youth exiting foster care

Fresno County Child Welfare Investigations & Case Count				
	Pending Investigations	Total Cases	In Placement	STRTP Placement
May 2022	1899	3207	2327	98
September 1, 2024	494	2187	1608	38
Difference	-1405	-1020	-719	-60
% Change	(74%)	(32%)	(31%)	(61%)

STRTP = Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program

Fresno County Cases by Status				
	May 2022	September 2024	# Diff.	% Diff.
Family Reunification	1201	515	-686	-57%
Family Maintenance	258	166	-92	-36%
Planned Permanency Living Arrangement	1559	1344	-215	-14%
Supportive Transition	189	162	-27	-14%
Total	3207	2187	-1020	-32%

Wellbeing and Safety Outcomes

Successes	Fresno County			Standard
	05/2022	08/2024	+/-	08/2024
Maltreatment rate in foster care	6.2%	8.9%	2.7	8.4%
Recurrence of maltreatment	7.2%	7.5%	0.3	9.1%
Re-entry into foster care	4.4%	3.9%	-0.5	8.3%

Progress for our Identified Challenges	Fresno County			Standard
	05/2022	08/2024	+/-	08/2024
Permanency in 12 months	18.6%	29%	10.4	40.5%
Face-to-face contacts	78.8%	83.6%	4.8	95%
Case plan completion	73%	70.9%	-2.1	80%
Structured Decision Making (SDM) Safety Assessment	52%	82.5%	30.5	90%

## Other Indicators of Success

1. Linkages cases increased from 15 to 238 between 2022 and 2024
  - Refers to cross-system collaboration of Child Welfare, CalWORKs, and Employment Services to support eligible families in receiving efficient services and consistent benefits
  - Addresses poverty issues, provides supports and maximizes funds and resources between programs
2. Resource Family Approval (RFA) backlog eliminated
  - Through revamp of approach to RFA approval, Child Welfare significantly decreased unapproved homes from 2022 to 2024 and improved administration processes and tools to better track homes
3. Family Time (formerly known as Visitation) increased significantly between 2022 and 2024
  - Now begins prior to Detention hearing
  - Eliminated wait times (In May 2022, waitlist of 350 hours)
  - Every family receives at least double the minimum of court required visitation time
4. Standby Workgroup produced changes to practice regarding after-hours social work
  - The first quarterly (90-day) standby calendar was completed with 44 volunteers, 55 social workers currently trained, and 2nd cohort of 78 social workers being trained
  - Reflects an increase of 162% (from 21 to 55 Social workers) able to perform standby duties

## Staff Impact

1. Wages, benefits, and Child Welfare differential significantly increased during past 2 years
  - Increased salaries over 10% between May 2022 – February 2024
  - Added differential for staff assigned to the Transitional Shelter Care Facility (aka Mod C)
2. Social Worker vacancy rate at 5% as of August 2024
  - Turnover rates at pre-pandemic levels
3. Caseloads reduced between 50-60%
  - Ensures timely service delivery, greater capacity to facilitate robust case plans
4. Emergency Response Investigations Combo Unit resulted in better workload for staff
  - In November 2023, DSS collapsed the crisis work assignment and non-crisis work assignments into one caseload approach, marking a significant departure from previous practices.
  - Successfully decreased the monthly child abuse referral assignments per worker in Emergency Response by addressing various business processes that contributed to the imbalance
  - Monthly caseload assignments went from 6-28 per worker to 13-15 per worker
5. BSW and MSW Internship placements increased by 65% (20 to 33)
  - Supports families and increases exposure to employment with Child Welfare

## Training

1. Increased staff for Emergency Response on the job / field-based training
  - Ensures up-front efforts of safety planning, service connecting, and family findings are provided
  - Aims to reduce entries into foster care and help families be more successful in reunification
2. Safety Organized Practice training completed for all Child Welfare staff with retraining underway
  - Provides framework, tools, and strategies to engage with families and their networks of support
  - Aims to ensure child safety, permanency, and well-being
3. Redesigned induction training for social workers
  - Increased hours from 64 to 204, complementing Child Welfare Academy Training
  - Improved administrative processes and tools to provide greater, coordinated support to staff

## What's Next in Child Welfare?

### Statewide Impacts & Reforms

1. CARES System Implementation – Oct 2026
  - California Automated Response and Engagement System (CARES) is a new system that will replace CWS-CMS; it is being developed by Child Welfare Digital Services (CWDS), a collaboration of state and local government agencies
  - Since June 2023, Fresno has been one of 4 pilot counties for CWS CARES Release 0.9.1, specifically for the Resource Family Approval (RFA) Application Submission, Review, and Approval Process.
  - Currently, this system is set to go-live in October 2026
2. Foster Care Rate Reform
  - Current foster care rates are structured based on placement type. For example, a child placed with a relative will cost less than a child placed in STRTPs
  - In line with the Continuum of Care Reform, the State is proposing a restructure that would instead base rates on the child's assessed level of needs and strengths, including Immediate Needs funds and Strength Building funds
3. Foster Family Agency (FFA) Insurance Impacts
  - In August 2024, Nonprofit Insurance Alliance of California (NIAC) issued non-renewal notices to all of their FFAs, effective end of September 2024, impacting 90% of the State's FFAs
  - AB 2496 passed CA Senate on 8/30/24, which provides the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) with ability to streamline process of transferring FFA resource home approval to another FFA or to the county in the event the FFA cannot obtain insurance

### Operationalizing Ongoing DSS Initiatives

1. Comprehensive Prevention Plan
  - State Plan approved with \$7M in one-time funding
  - Efforts to operationalize and find sustainable funding have begun
  - Will include new training for staff and restructure of contracted services that support prevention
2. Child Well-Being Continuum (CWBC) Project
  - 3-year pilot to establish highly individualized assessment and placement for high needs youth
  - Restructure and improvement to the wraparound program
  - Fresno County Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved State contract (\$8.5M) in August 2024
  - New provider agreements and placement types going to BOS on 9/10/24 and 10/8/24
3. Transitional Shelter (Mod C) licensing, reporting, ongoing program improvement and move
  - Final steps for licensing are complete
  - Identified new location, funding and contracts for Mod C move should we need it beyond December of 2025
4. Neurosequential Model of Therapeutics (NMT) ongoing implementation
  - Cross-system enhancement of practice to support youth and families
  - Efforts are underway for departmentwide and community training
5. Linkages training and full implementation are underway
  - Program design as well as policies and procedures are complete
  - Departmentwide training and implementation will kick off in the upcoming months

## **New DSS Program Initiatives**

1. Placement Workgroup
  - Evaluate and restructure DSS approach to placement, including partnerships and expectations of providers, as well as tracking of placements:
    - i. Subgroup 1-Least Restrictive Placement Criteria Subgroup (Develop “Emergency Placement Homes”)
    - ii. Subgroup 2 - Higher Level Placement Criteria
    - iii. Subgroup 3 - Placement Protocols
  - Aims to promote Kin 1<sup>st</sup> culture, least restrictive placement, and provide clarity on placement priorities and criteria.
2. Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) program improvement
  - Updating program statement and aligning it with current industry standards, mandates, new legislation, updating roles & expectations of social workers, and restructure of unit.
  - Aims to promote wellness & youth placement stability.
3. Case Plan redesign (parents and children)
  - Aligning case plans to include CANS, SOP (behavioral plans) and voice of CFT.
  - Improved Administrative oversight- timely data entry, parents signature, submission
4. Family Finding and Engagement Efforts
  - State funding plan submitted
  - Increased staffing and training identified
  - Aims at connecting all youth, especially older youth in Permanency Planning with kin or chosen kin to ensure long term wellbeing and connection
5. Full Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Implementation
  - Multi-purpose tool that supports decision-making, including level of care and service
  - State requirement for all youth in child welfare that will drive placement and case plan decisions