

CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STRATEGIC PLAN SUMMARY

The Department of Children and Families (DCF) is one of the few state-run consolidated child welfare agencies in the nation. The statutorily mandated responsibilities include children's protective services, children's behavioral health, juvenile justice, and child abuse and neglect prevention. DCF's Strategic Plan contains explicit statements of what the agency and its stakeholders believe Connecticut's consolidated children's agency should accomplish. More importantly, the Strategic Plan routinely offers a picture of agency performance and a testing of the viability of the Strategic Plan itself through a composite assessment of multiple indicators associated with five broad outcomes.

Outcome 1: Prevention services will strengthen families and reduce the need for DCF involvement.

DCF services are aimed at protecting all of the state's children and youth from harm. Specifically, we strive to reduce child abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and serious mental health problems whenever possible. When citizens and communities support families, negative outcomes for children can be prevented and fewer families will require ongoing protective services involvement.

- The rate of children alleged to have been victims of child abuse or neglect will be reduced.
- The rate of children substantiated as victims of child abuse or neglect will be reduced.
- The rate of children living in homes requiring ongoing child protective services will be reduced.
- There will be fewer delinquency petitions filed.
- There will be fewer Family with Service Needs petitions filed.

Outcome 2: Children will remain safely at home with their parents or guardians.

We will strive to intervene effectively and keep children with their families whenever safely possible and avoid any unnecessary removals from home by conducting strength-based and comprehensive assessments that accurately identify risks and needs.

- There will be a reduction in the rate of repeat maltreatment of children.
- The rate of children entering DCF care will be reduced.
- Fewer children will re-enter care after having returned home from placement.
- There will be fewer delinquency commitments.
- The rate of recidivism for children that were previously committed as delinquent will be reduced.
- There will be fewer disrupted adoptions.
- There will be fewer Family with Service Needs commitments.

Outcome 3: Children in the Department's care will achieve more timely permanency.

Placement is only a temporary situation for children who are removed from their families. The goal of the child welfare system is to provide children/youth in care with lasting family connections and permanent homes. Most often, this is through returning the child home to his or her family of origin following resolution of protective concerns, after completion of behavioral health treatment, or at the conclusion of sentences for juvenile crimes. In some cases of abuse or neglect, returning home may never be safe and children may find their lifelong connection through permanent placement with relatives or adoptive families.

- There will be fewer youth in care with a permanency goal of Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

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- For children with a permanency goal of Reunification, there will be an increase in the percentage of children reunified within 12 months of their entry into care.
- The average length of time to achieve the permanency goal of Reunification will be reduced.
- For children with a permanency plan of Transfer of Guardianship, there will be an increase in the percentage of children achieving that goal within 24 months of their entry into care.
- The average length of time to achieve the permanency goal of Transfer of Guardianship will be reduced.
- For children with a permanency plan of Adoption, there will be an increase in the percentage of children adopted within 24 months of their entry into care.
- The average length of time to achieve the permanency goal of Adoption will be reduced.

Outcome 4: For children in the Department's care or custody there will be an improvement in their well being while in placement.

For children who cannot live safely in their homes, the next most appropriate option is another family setting. Ideally, the placement is familiar to the child—with relatives or family friends or in his or her home community. Placing children appropriately also means avoiding multiple placement moves, as such experiences are damaging for children who must repeatedly sever bonds. Congregate care settings are appropriate placements only for children whose therapeutic need requires more restrictive settings, which are meant to be temporary. Regardless of the placement setting, all children should maintain connection with any siblings and experience safety and well-being while they are in our care.

- Children will experience fewer placement changes.
- An increased percentage of children in care will be in the same placement with all of their siblings.
- An increased percentage of children in care will be placed with relatives.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of children living in family care settings.
- The percentage of children on "discharge delay" status in congregate care settings will decrease.
- The percentage of children having their needs met will increase.
- There will be a decrease in the percentage of children experiencing an arrest while in DCF care.
- There will be a reduction in youths' length of stay youth in locked, juvenile or criminal justice settings.

Outcome 5: Youth that will be transitioning from the Department's care will be better prepared for adulthood.

Youth leaving DCF because they are in transition from child welfare, children's mental health, or juvenile justice system to independent living or adult systems of care can be particularly vulnerable. In addition to meeting their basic needs for food, shelter and care, we must ensure that young people receive training and support for acquiring knowledge, skills, and aptitudes for self-sufficiency.

- There will be an increase in the percentage of eligible youth that graduate from high school.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of high school graduates that enroll in post-secondary education or vocational training.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of youth having completed an independent living skills course prior to their transition from DCF care.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of youth living in a Community Housing Assistance Program (CHAP) at the time of their transition from care.
- There will be an increase in the percentage of youth achieving their educational, vocational, and/or employment goals at the time of their transition from care.
- All youth meeting DMHAS or DDS eligibility will have been referred for service and have a transition plan in place prior to leaving DCF care.
- There will be a reduction in the number of children in care who subsequently return to receive DCF services as a parent.