

Talbot County

Department of Social Services



Annual Report | 2020





Vision

We envision a community where people independently support themselves and their families, and where individuals are safe from abuse and neglect.

Mission

We assist people in economic need, protect children and vulnerable adults, and promote the safety and well-being of the residents of Talbot County.

Guiding Principles

- We will preserve the Department's and individual's dignity by respecting diversity, promoting self-determination and ensuring confidentiality.
- We recognize that employees are our greatest asset.
- We will ensure customers receive timely and equitable access to services.
- We will support and value a culture of health, well-being and safety.
- We will educate the public regarding our role in the community and the challenges customers face.
- We will collaborate with community partners to insure delivery of comprehensive services.
- We will advocate for needed State and Local services for customers.

FY 2020 Talbot County Social Service Board Members

A. Thomas Duncan III, Chair
Daphan Smith, Vice Chair
Corey Pack, Ex Officio Member, Talbot County Council
Victoria Gomez Lozano
Mary Gregorio
Rabbi Peter Hyman
Sarah Cloxton
Heather Plutschak
Rosalee Potter
Brenda Wooden

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to the Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCDSS) Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report. You will read in the following pages the many accomplishments of this year. And what a year it has been!

For most of our programs, this report covers July 1, 2019 through June 30, 2020, a period of time that included just 3 ½ months of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Within these pages, you will see that TCDSS immediately began adapting to the abrupt and dramatic changes in our environment that took place during those three months, and we have continued to do so in the many months since. Because many of you did the same, you know that this has been a herculean task, both for our employees as individuals and for the organization as a whole. From day one of the pandemic, we have never stopped responding to community needs, including child and vulnerable adult safety, individual and family support, linkages to services, income support and meeting emergency and other needs. And, we learned to operate many of our programs in an increasingly virtual world using telework and other technology for the first time in the history of this organization. As has been true for many of you, our agility, adaptability, and resilience have been tested.

I cannot write this message without recognizing the heroic work of the TCDSS team - whether social workers or others in our Child Welfare and Adult Services programs and the Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center who have continued to work in the field - in peoples' homes and in various community settings; case managers in our Family Investment income support programs who speak with people in need every day and do everything possible to meet those needs; Child Support workers who support both custodial and non-custodial parents in the most difficult of circumstances; or support and administrative staff answering phones, scheduling appointments, distributing mail, scanning documents, locating and purchasing personal protection equipment and other supplies, and keeping the business of TCDSS going - every member of the TCDSS team contributed to our ability to achieve our mission and serve our most vulnerable neighbors in the Talbot County community. And, they have done this while managing the many personal demands made upon them and their families by social changes made necessary by the pandemic. This has truly been a picture of courage and one that I am proud to share with you.



TCDSS Team - as I have said to you many times since March 2020 - you are superheroes, each and every one of you. The many individuals and families whom you have served and supported have benefited from your engagement, and I am so very proud of you.

And to you, our many community partners, the experiences of this past year have shown us the depth of your commitment to supporting us in achieving our vision of a community where people independently support themselves and their families and where individuals are safe from abuse and neglect. You have our most sincere gratitude for the support you have provided as we navigate this challenging time together.

The following pages will provide more detail about the ways in which we have continued to meet individual and community needs, including during those first few weeks of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. I submit this for your review, acknowledging the hard work and commitment of the TCDSS staff with the support of our Social Service Board, Talbot Community Connections, the Talbot County Council and county government and community partners, including government agencies, non-profit and faith-based organizations, resource families and other generous individuals. Because of you, we are able to serve the residents of Talbot County. It is with the deepest gratitude for each individual and community contribution that I offer this brief overview of our 2020 accomplishments.

And, so, I will close this message in a manner similar to that used in every one of my weekly messages to the awesome TCDSS team - Peace (in your mind and in your life, for our nation and across the globe), love (for yourself and your neighbors), good health and well-being to each of you.

Linda Webb, LCSW



COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Talbot County DSS partnered with St. Vincent de Paul, the Presbyterian Church of Easton, the Neighborhood Service Center, Chesapeake Women's Health, faith based organizations, businesses and individuals to distribute over 169 food bags and baskets to families over the holiday season and organized Christmas gift sponsorships for 262 individuals and families.
- Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center (TCCAC) worked with many community partners after learning in March 2020 that the physical space and medical services provided at the hospital would no longer be available effective October 1, 2020 due to the changing healthcare delivery needs of University of Maryland Shore Regional Health (UMSRH). Negotiating all that was required to relocate the CAC during a pandemic brought to light the deep relationships that TCCAC has within the community and the commitment of Talbot County to the victims and families served by the TCCAC.
- Beginning June 1, 2020, TCDSS partnered with Talbot County's Finance Office to operate the CARES Individual Assistance Program. The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act was passed by Congress to provide economic assistance for workers, families, and small businesses, and preserve jobs. Some of these funds were distributed to States and then to local governments. The Talbot County Council set aside a portion of these funds to help those impacted financially by COVID-19 with rent, mortgage, utility and other emergency costs. The Neighborhood Service Center, St Vincent de Paul Society, and the Chesapeake Multicultural Resource Center made significant contributions to the development and implementation of this program.
- TCDSS operated Talbot County's Food Helpline. The phone number was manned each week day to connect callers with food resources in the area.
- TCDSS continues to provide financial support through Families Blossom funding to expand Healthy Families - a home visiting program. In fiscal year 2020, the program served 15 families and 12 children in Talbot County.
- TCDSS continued to operate "Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-by World" with funding from the Talbot Family Network. Designed to promote resource-building for individuals living in poverty, this year's sessions began in October 2019 with the goal of having 30 participants by September 2020. 22 individuals participated in the program in the first

ACHIEVEMENTS

- The agency training plan, a component of our strategic plan, was implemented by providing training to all staff in the areas of Racial Equity, Poverty, Change Management, the Impact of Trauma on Clients, and Secondary Traumatic Stress and Compassion Fatigue. The management team participated in a series of training sessions on racial equity. While progress on the training plan was delayed due to COVID-19 and the switch to virtual platforms, a total of 8 trainings were delivered before March 2020. All planning teams resumed their work in May 2020 and the Spring 2020 training sessions were moved to fiscal year 2021.
- The Sobriety, Treatment and Recovery Team (START) model was implemented at TCDSS in fiscal year 2019. This model is a child welfare led intervention for families with children 0-5 years old that improves outcomes for both parents and children affected by child maltreatment and parental substance use disorders. Recruitment for the Family Mentor position was unique and conducted in partnership with the Talbot County Health Department. This position was filled in March 2020 in the midst of the pandemic. The Family Mentor used this time of telework and contact restrictions to complete all of the training required for the position. While awaiting the first START referral, the Family Mentor has conducted advocacy work with families with a history of substance abuse disorders.

three quarters of the fiscal year, 10 of whom were unable to complete when COVID-19 related social distancing ended face-to-face contact. The ongoing pandemic kept fourth quarter programming from being offered.

- Empower Me, a child safety program designed to prevent child sexual abuse, began fiscal year 2020 with a pilot implementation in Talbot County Public Schools. Empower Me was presented to all first grade classes in the county, totaling 300 students and 20 teachers. The feedback from the sessions was excellent and the Empower Me team was optimistic about returning the following year. In January 2020, a refresher training was provided to returning trainers and new community members interested in delivering the training . One in-person community presentation was completed at Talbot Mentors before all in person presentations stopped due to COVID-19. A community wide presentation at the Talbot County Free Library was rescheduled multiple times and ultimately canceled due to the pandemic. All presentations scheduled for Saints Peter and Paul Elementary School were canceled. The remainder of the year was spent sharing digital resources and creating flyers and a social media presence to provide pre-recorded presentations for children and adults. The fiscal year closed with planning and preparation to record a Talbot County specific presentation for children.
- TCDSS held its 12th Annual Back to School Event in August 2019, which included a supply giveaway and resource fair for school children and their families. The event provided school supplies and tote bags to 93 middle and high school students and 148 elementary school students in Talbot County. Additional school supplies were donated to local youth-serving organizations. Planning for next year’s event began this fiscal year in an effort to best support the needs of virtual learners in fiscal year 2021.
- Agency outreach and education was impacted significantly by COVID-19. Although the number of in-person presentations and participation in traditional community events were down, the amount of outreach and education virtually and by print, radio and television were drastically increased in an effort to get information and needed resources into the community. This fiscal year, the agency participated in 5 in-person events, 2 virtual events, 6 live speaking engagements and 18 outreach events in the form of radio, advertisements, print distribution, newspaper and television. In addition to these efforts, the agency directly supported information distribution on several occasions at all of the local food pantries and food distribution sites and regularly shared information on social media platforms.

- Unable to host their primary fundraiser, the Annual Senior Summit due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Talbot Community Connections held a yard sign sale to raise funds to answer unmet needs that are fundamental to the safety, security, health and well-being of Talbot County’s children and adults through programs delivered by TCDSS. The “Thank You Talbot County” signs, sold online and at the weekly drive-through Farmer’s Market, expressed gratitude for the many ways that Talbot County rose to support its residents during the pandemic.



CHILD WELFARE AND ADULT SERVICES

The Child Welfare and Adult Services Division works with county residents and community partners to protect, stabilize and strengthen families. We focus on strategies that promote the safety and well-being of the children, families, and adults we serve while promoting their independence and self-sufficiency.

Child Protective Services and Consolidated In-Home Services

Child Protective Services responds to allegations of child abuse and neglect. Consolidated In-Home Services works with families to provide stabilization services with the goal of minimizing risk and reducing future out of home placement. Consolidated Services also includes Risk of Harm cases, substance-exposed newborn cases and 30-day assessments.

Changes related to COVID-19:

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Child Protective Services and Consolidated In-Home Services continued to meet all State safety assessment mandates. Following CDC and SSA Health and Safety guidelines, staff were required to wear masks and practice social distancing while conducting visits, complete a self-assessment with health screening questions before visiting and take their temperature and consult supervisors with any concerns. Staff also reviewed COVID-19 screening questions with each family member an hour before conducting a home visit. Initial visits with families and children were conducted face to face unless the COVID-19 screening questions did not permit that level of contact. Anytime initial face to face visits could not be conducted safely, they were conducted virtually. Following the initial visit, some visits were conducted virtually until the stay at home order was lifted and visits were conducted outside as often as possible.

All Family Involvement Meetings(FIM) were held either virtually or in the agency's large Multipurpose room to allow for social distancing. FIM's held at the agency were a combination of in person and virtual.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Held 66 Family Involvement Meetings (FIMs) with family members and their support networks at key child welfare decision points for families receiving In Home and Out of Home Services
 - 29 of these were Enhanced Youth Transition Planning meetings for transition age youth in foster care using the Achieve My Plan (AMP) youth engagement model. This enhanced planning process is a primary intervention of the Thrive@25 grant and is designed to help youth aged 14-21 plan for a successful transition out of foster care.
- Provided Family Preservation Services to 8 families and 19 children
- Conducted assessments for risk and provided In Home Services to 63 families
- Responded to 45 reports of child abuse or neglect using an investigative response
- Responded to 52 reports of child abuse or neglect using an alternative response
- Received 467 reports of child abuse or neglect and 46 requests for information and/or community resources



Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center

The Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center (TCCAC) provides a multi-disciplinary response to allegations of child abuse. TCCAC ensures that victims of child sexual abuse or assault and their non-offending caregivers have access to support services in a safe, culturally respectful environment in a child focused setting.

Changes related to COVID-19:

During COVID-19 the Children's Advocacy Center was not accessible due to pandemic related restrictions at the hospital. As a result, the Children's Advocacy Center operations were moved temporarily to the TCDSS office with the exception of medical exams, which were scheduled and conducted at the hospital, as needed.

Forensic interviews were still conducted face to face with children. The Forensic Interviewer wore a mask during the interview, maintained social distance and encouraged the child to wear a mask when appropriate. Children could decline to wear a mask if they chose. COVID-19 screening questions were asked when scheduling the interview with the family and again an hour before the interview.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Conducted 35 medical exams for the Mid Shore counties
 - o Talbot - 11
 - o Caroline - 13
 - o Dorchester - 3
 - o Kent - 2
 - o Queen Anne's - 6
- Conducted 72 forensic interviews for the Mid Shore counties
 - o Talbot - 57
 - o Caroline - 4
 - o Dorchester - 8
 - o Kent - 3
 - o Queen Anne's - 0
- Provided Victim Advocacy services
 - o 247 children and non-offending caregivers served
 - o 296 victim advocacy sessions provided
- Provided Mental Health services
 - o 69 children were referred to mental health providers
 - o 255 sessions of Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy were provided virtually to victims of child abuse during COVID-19
- 15 cases were accepted for prosecution, 7 of which resulted in a conviction
- A therapeutic girls' group for teens between the ages of 13 and 17 was facilitated by a licensed mental health therapist. The group used the Girls Circle curriculum, which is a strengths based evidenced based practice easily adapted to the specific needs of the group. Pre and post test evaluations from group participants indicated improvements in the Hamilton Anxiety Rating Scale and the Schwarzer Self Efficacy Scale.
- Another TCCAC success is the utilization of alternative therapies. TCCAC provided:
 - o 57 sessions of equine therapy to CAC clients with an instructor accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship
 - o 14 sessions of art therapy by a board certified art therapist
 - o 35 sessions of music therapy
 - o There has been positive feedback from those who have utilized these alternative therapeutic services.
- TCCAC was able to provide monetary support to 25 families facing hardships resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. Emergency funds

were used to stabilize housing, pay utilities, and purchase food. Direct deliveries of requested items were made for COVID-19 positive families.

- 33 members of the Multi Disciplinary Team (MDT) were sent to 89 trainings throughout the year with the goal of continuously improving the team's response to child abuse cases.
- Talbot Community Connections (TCC), a non-profit organization that supports the CAC and other unfunded TCDSS programs, conducted a fundraiser by selling "Talbot County Cares" lawn signs. Their annual Senior Summit could not take place in June due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- TCCAC held 8 Advisory Board meetings to obtain and disseminate information to community partners and ensure continuity and availability of services. Coordinated efforts with board members ensured that community agencies are aware of resources for victims and allowed for development of programs that address gaps in services.



Foster Care, Adoption and Respite Care (Out of Home Services)

Out of Home Services provides safe, stable and temporary out of home placements for children who can no longer remain in their own homes. With the goal of permanency for children, placement options include adoption, placement with a relative, reunification with biological family and/or caregivers, and Another Planned Permanent Living Arrangement (APPLA).

Changes related to COVID-19:

Using COVID-19 guidance provided by the DHS Social Services Administration regarding visits with foster youth, foster families and biological families, monthly visits with youth were performed virtually. Technology was provided to youth and families, if needed, for virtual visits with workers. Family visits were also virtual.

When visits could take place in person they were held outdoors. Some Residential Treatment Centers, group homes and hospitals had very strict visitation policies that allowed only outdoor visits.

Enhanced Youth Transition Planning meetings for our youth 14 - 21 continued without interruption by conducting virtual meetings.

On April 7, 2020, DHS extended services for youth in care who had turned 21 during the pandemic, allowing the continued provision of foster care services and funds to 21-year old youth who had experienced hardship due to COVID-19.

Locating resource homes that were willing to care for children during the pandemic was a challenge. The agency relied on Talbot County resource homes as well as statewide resources. In addition to securing and maintaining placements, Talbot County DSS provided 91 nights and 8 full day respite episodes during COVID-19.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Provided foster care services to 18 youth
- Prepared for implementation of Family Finding and Kinship Navigation
 - Family Finding assists youth and families with identifying and locating individuals with whom they can be reconnected
 - Kinship Navigation provides service linkages to families who are caring for or who have custody of family members
- Made 4 training events available to resource parents from October 2019 to June 2020, some of which were held virtually due to COVID-19
- Held 5 Resource Parent Appreciation events between July 2019 and June 2020

TCDSS Option Respite Program

Option Respite provides parents with scheduled and emergent short term childcare services that offer temporary relief, improve family stability, and reduce the risk of abuse and neglect.

- Served 28 children and 40 parents
- Provided 714 overnight episodes and 143 full day episodes of respite care for a total of 857 episodes of respite

TCDSS Nurturing Parenting Program

The Nurturing Parenting Programs are a family-centered trauma-informed initiative designed to build nurturing parenting skills as an alternative to abusive and neglectful parenting and child-rearing practices.

- Delivered 2 in-person sessions of the Nurturing Parenting Program (NPP), one of which was delivered in English and Spanish
- Began one-on-one virtual sessions in June 2020
- Held sessions at the Talbot Interfaith Shelter from September 2019 through March 2020
- Served a total of 48 parents and 55 children from 25 families with a total of 607 units of service/personal contact

Adult Services

Adult Services provides vulnerable adults, age 18 and over, with professional services to protect their health, safety, and welfare, and to prevent or remedy neglect, abuse or exploitation.



Changes related to COVID-19:

Adult services prioritized and identified those individuals most in need and concentrated efforts, outreach, and services on that population. Resources for purchasing food and supplies were provided to those in need. TCDSS efforts were coordinated with Brookletts Place Talbot Senior Center's Meals on Wheels and with the Talbot County Emergency Operation Center's volunteer activities for food distribution. A bulk purchase was made for incontinent supplies, personal protection equipment (PPE), and Ensure dietary supplement. Project Home providers were provided a one-time only stipend of \$500 for caring for a client during COVID-19.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Conducted 10 Adult Protective Services (APS) investigations and assessments
- Provided 288 units of personal contact in APS continuing care

- Provided 180 units of personal contact in In-Home Aide services continuing care
- Provided 190 units of personal contact in the Social Services To Adults (SSTA) program, a case management service that provides assessment, service planning and connection to community resources
- Provided services that supported the ability of 98% of the adults served to remain safely in the community
- Maintained 3 providers of Project Home, a supportive housing program for persons with mental illness or other disabilities, by offering an adult foster care family model of care that provides a stable, family-like living arrangement in the community

FAMILY INVESTMENT SERVICES

Family Investment provides income support to those in need. Assistance includes Food Supplements, Cash Assistance, Medical Assistance, Long Term Care Medical Assistance, and Emergency Assistance. These programs help the residents of Talbot County maintain healthy households while they work toward independence. Family Investment also includes the Work Opportunities Program, which provides employment readiness and job placement services.

Changes related to COVID-19:

The most significant change to Family Investment operations was the move from Talbot County- specific service delivery to a Statewide Processing Model in April 2020. This meant that we processed applications for assistance for individuals residing anywhere in the State of Maryland, not just for those in Talbot County. This also meant that applications for most benefit programs that were submitted online, by mail, email, fax or in person were entered into a statewide pool for processing. The exceptions to this reassignment were Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), Emergency Assistance for Families with Children (EAFC), Public Assistance to Adults (PAA) and Long-Term Care (LTC) applications, which continued to be processed by the local department. While this process was new to Family Investment across the state, it was preparing us for the upcoming 2021 launch of the cloud-based MD THINK Enrollment and Eligibility system (E&E).

There were a number of steps taken on the Federal and State levels to support families during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the Federal government allowed States to issue emergency food supplement (SNAP) benefits to school-aged children who received free or reduced meals, but who could not receive these meals due to school closures. Called Pandemic EBT (P-EBT), these benefits



were issued to both SNAP and Non-SNAP households. These benefits began in March when schools first closed and continued to the end of the school year in June.

In addition, each SNAP-eligible household received the maximum amount of SNAP benefits beginning in April 2020. To receive this benefit, families must have initially been eligible for SNAP benefits based on income, but that income was not used to determine the monthly allotment amount. So, households eligible for SNAP received an emergency allotment equal to the full benefit amount based on household size without consideration of income.

A third provision in place was the extension of Medicaid coverage. Those who were eligible for Medicaid had coverage extended.

Work requirements for those receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) were temporarily suspended due to the pandemic to avoid undue hardship on families. However, our Workforce Specialist remained engaged with our customers to address any barriers experienced during this time.

Finally, to continue critical support for families receiving benefits other than Medicaid, recertifications were extended through June 2021 and interview requirements were waived.

From July 2019 to June 2020 we:

- Served a monthly average of 2,369 households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance (SNAP) by issuing combined total annual benefits in excess of \$6,634,190

- Served a monthly average of 64 individuals receiving Temporary Disability Assistance (TDAP) with a combined annual grant amount of \$162,750
- Served a monthly average of
 - 412 individuals receiving Community Care Medical Assistance
 - 116 individuals receiving Long Term Care Medical Assistance
- Served a monthly average of 80 households receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) by issuing a combined total annual grant of \$528,620
- Facilitated 30 full-time job placements for individuals receiving TCA, 10 of which paid a wage of at least \$10 per hour
- Assisted 13 families with Emergency Assistance grants, including 2 Burial Assistance grants
- Served a monthly average of 9 recipients receiving Public Assistance to Adults (PAA) with a combined annual grant amount of \$9,331

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

The Child Support Program is federally funded and requires each state to establish standards to measure the effectiveness of the program. Performance is measured in the areas of paternity establishment, child support order establishment, collection of current child support and payment on arrears.

Changes related to COVID-19:

In March of 2020, Child Support staff transitioned with the rest of the agency to telework status adapting to laptops, agency cell phones and electronic work orders from the Statewide Call Center as a primary source of communication with customers. Staff handled a total of 118 work orders through the month of September. Staff came into the agency one day per week on a rotating basis, mindful of social distancing, to complete processes that could not be done remotely. One staff member volunteered to manage the Talbot County Food Resource Line and handled 35 calls through the month of September, directing those experiencing food insecurity to local resources.

Court hearings were suspended in March, limiting the ability to establish, modify or enforce child support orders. However, we continued to receive requests for new child support cases and modification of existing orders due to job loss. Staff worked remotely to process requests, working with counsel to file motions with the court so that they could be heard when court hearings resumed. From April 1 through September 30, 2020, 34 applications for child support services were processed. Monthly court proceedings resumed in July

for non-paying cases and August to establish or modify orders. Staff handled a total of 91 cases, conducted hearings in 44 cases and collected just under \$10,000.00 as a result of resumed court proceedings.

From October 2019 through September 2020 (Federal Fiscal Year 2020), we:

- Collected and distributed to families and children \$2,428,775.00 in current child support
- Collected 70.27% of current child support due
- Collected payments in 81% of the cases where individuals fell behind in their obligations



Talbot County Young Fathers/Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP)

The Child Support Program is supported by the Talbot County Young Fathers/Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP). This program provides one-on-one case management services to non-custodial parents by identifying, assessing, and addressing barriers to self-sufficiency and employment. NPEP provides referrals to community partners for services in the areas of behavioral health, substance abuse, job readiness, and employment resources.

Changes related to COVID-19:

COVID-19 restrictions and mandatory telework made the implementation of NPEP more challenging this year. The Program Coordinator was issued

a laptop and cell phone in mid-April, established a Facebook page (www.Facebook.com/TalbotNPEP) and developed virtual relationships with as many customers as possible.

The Program Coordinator succeeded in engaging customers and sharing job leads and information on food and behavioral health resources in the Mid Shore region. With support from the agency Finance Office, the Coordinator supported program participants by purchasing work clothing, transportation, drivers' improvement classes and certified MVA records for employment.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

(The Program Coordinator position was vacant from July through November 2019. Position vacancy, COVID-19 telework restrictions and suspension of live court hearings in March 2020 resulted in fewer individuals served than had been in past years.)

- Enrolled 19 parents
- Served a total of 22 parents
- Assisted 6 parents to secure full time employment
- Collected \$23,328 in child support

Responsible Fathers Program

The Responsible Fathers Program provides peer support and education sessions for fathers incarcerated at the Talbot County Detention Center. Utilizing the evidence-based curriculum Inside Out Dad, the goal of this program is to reduce recidivism. In October 2019, a community group was also formed for those leaving the Detention Center. The group meets bi-weekly and utilizes the 24/7 Dad curriculum.

Changes related to COVID-19:

Classes were abruptly halted in March 2020 due to COVID-19 but resumed in April using a virtual platform. By the end of the fiscal year, 18 classes had been held virtually, serving 7 men, and a virtual graduation was held in May for two men who remained steadfast in their commitment to participation. The community group unfortunately remains suspended until further notice.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Held a total of 92 classes, in person or virtually, at Talbot County Detention Center
- Served 20 men
- Held a graduation for 6 men
- Conducted 4 community presentations
- Supported the program facilitator in participating in 3 webinar workshops



ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

The Administrative Division facilitates quality service delivery to our customers and our community by supporting TCDSS employees in the areas of human resources, budget management, accounting operations, procurement and purchasing, fleet operations, information technology and communications, inventory and supply management, facilities and lease management, and security services.

Changes related to COVID-19:

- Completed daily health screening of all individuals entering the building
- Procured and installed plexiglass and various signs to communicate and maintain social distancing
- Procured and distributed the necessary PPE for employees working onsite and offsite
- Procured and provided IT equipment, training and support for employees teleworking
- Procured and distributed additional hand sanitizer, sanitizing wipes and other personal protection equipment (PPE) throughout the agency
- Contracted Agency Day Porter for additional cleaning within the building between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM, as well as "enhanced" cleaning in the evenings after close of business
- Rearranged the lobby to encourage social distancing in the event that customer appointments were being conducted
- With DHS Approval, began accepting digital signatures and email approvals on requests for payment

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

- Provided support to 69 individuals, including TCDSS employees and
 - 2 Talbot County Health Department employees who provide addiction screening and peer support onsite
 - 1 MD Department of Human Services Central Office employee who works onsite
 - 2 Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center employees who assist customers in enrolling in health insurance programs
- Supported employees in continued professional development.
 - 2 employees pursuing their Masters in Social Work degrees
- Recruited for and filled 5 vacant positions
- Promoted 1 individual

CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (CQI)



Quality in the human service field is more important than it is in manufacturing. In the latter, you can easily throw away or rework the flaws. In human service, we do not have that luxury. We must strive to make it right the first time, every time. A multi-faceted approach has therefore been developed at TCDSS, which includes a CQI Central Council working with Performance Improvement Teams (PIT Teams) from each program area. The precepts are communication, evaluation, planning, training, staff empowerment, and teamwork. Participation is considered critical to an effective CQI process. All staff members are encouraged to participate in CQI activities.

Changes related to COVID-19:

The CQI Central Council (CQI-CC) and all related teams suspended meetings and activities in April 2020 due to COVID-19 and technology challenges. CQI-CC resumed meetings in May and all other Performance Improvement teams returned to some form of meetings in May and June. As a result of the new working environment, these meetings have looked different for different groups. Not all staff have access to video streaming devices so some groups were only able to meet by phone. The access to technology has progressed over time, which has helped meeting participation. The finalized short term plans for fiscal year 2020 had some incomplete tasks and fiscal year 2021 short term plans were developed using a new format and keeping potential COVID-19 impact in mind.

From July 2019 through June 2020, we:

CQI-CENTRAL COUNCIL (CQI-CC)

- Formed a group to explore and develop employee engagement measurement strategies in an effort to move away from the standard “satisfaction survey”
- Implemented CQI-CC individual and group facilitator orientation, which now includes shadowing
- Delivered the first Annual CQI training for all staff in November 2019 with a “Family Feud” theme; the session was very entertaining and informative and resulted in positive recruitment efforts and feedback
- Reviewed and updated the CQI-CC Bylaws, Plan and procedures
- Oversaw the delivery of quarterly all staff PIT team presentations
- Continued participation in the agency training plan committees
- Reviewed 14 Care to Share submissions (employee suggestions for process improvement), resolving 12 with 2 remaining under review

PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT TEAMS

Child Support Improvement Team (CSIT):*

- Reviewed program requirements and goals to measure progress
- Continued implementation of the Early Intervention best practice to increase collections
- Maintained team wellness goals, even during the pandemic, by keeping track of walking totals; held team salad days prior to COVID-19
- Attended training in preparation for the MD THINK Child Support Management System (CSMS) rollout

Family Investment Improvement Team (FIIT):*

- Assessed leadership style and meeting structure and successfully implemented changes
- Sponsored a 90-day Biggest Loser program to encourage a healthy lifestyle; the program enjoyed excellent participation
- Offered Spanish language lessons, such as greetings and basic questions, to support continued excellent customer service to Spanish speaking customers
- Reviewed requests for paperless process implementation, which was unexpectedly expedited by COVID-19 and teleworking
- Reviewed a request for uniform narration and made recommendations to leadership

- Held a virtual and creative annual retreat in June 2020 that provided a great morale boost
- Attended statewide and local training sessions to prepare for the MD THINK Eligibility and Enrollment System (E&E) rollout

Customer Administrative Support Team (CAST):*

- C.A.S.T, formerly known as G.A.I.T., revisited and refreshed their mission and revised their meeting format to include ground rules with an eye toward accomplishing goals that support all agency functions
- Continued during the pandemic to work on projects that benefited the agency by, for example, updating the online Employee Directory that is a resource for staff who are teleworking
- Created a manual of front desk procedures to support the customer service staff
- Provided and participated in training on outgoing mail procedures and using the postage machine
- Developed and maintained front desk and other back up coverage schedules

Services Excellence Team (SET):*

- Implemented and continued the peer support circle
- Implemented a feedback loop with Services leadership to enhance communication within the division
- Took over responsibility for delivering Mandated Reporter training and delivered that training twice virtually during COVID-19.
- Received regular updates from the START team Family Mentor on training opportunities and program development
- Identified and addressed the need for staff training and access to encryption software for communicating confidential information
- Created a CQI Fact Sheet that is provided to new staff to aid in the understanding of and participation in the quality improvement process
- Reviewed and proposed training and policy revisions to address concerns for physical and psychological safety
- Formed a technology group to support staff in launching the MD THINK Child, Juvenile and Adult Management System (CJAMS)

** All PIT teams worked diligently on accomplishing all goals from their fiscal year 2020 Short Term Plans. Due to COVID-19 some goals were postponed to fiscal year 2021.*

2019 Customer Service Excellence Awards



L to R: Linda Webb, TCDSS Director; Kimberly Irvine, DHS Deputy Secretary of Programs; Shari Blades, TCDSS Assistant Director of Child Welfare and Adult Services; Angela Barnes, TCDSS Adult Services Social Worker and Customer Service Excellence Honoree; Lourdes Padilla, DHS Secretary; Craig Eichler, DHS Chief of Staff and Deputy Secretary of Strategy and Administration.



Juana Blue, Assistant Director of FIA, graduating from the DHS Leadership Development Initiative. She is joined by Linda Webb, TCDSS Director.

Community Partnerships with Foster Care



Pictured left to right are Patricia and Chris Pittman with their children Tobias and Lukas Pittman and Nykol Mariano of Amerigroup, who provided tote bags and English and Spanish books for the event.

Back to School Event



October 2019 - First Mid-Shore Resource Parent Support Group "Game Night"

Pictured left to right: Emprin Wilson, Resource Parent; Bryan Baynard, Resource Parent; Orlando and Daisy Scharf, adopted siblings

TCDSS formed a partnership with Easton High School and the Talbot County Health Department to present a training for Resource Parents on Narcan and Epi-pen



Pictured left to right are Beth Williams, Prevention Program Consultant for the Talbot County Health Department; Glenda Dawson, Audrey Hansen, Megan Greenwood, RN, Easton High School; Dan Zollinhofer, Logan Harris, Health Educator for the Talbot County Health Department; Joe Guffey, and Sharon Caldwell

Doc's Downtowne Grill Donates to Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center



Pictured left to right are Amy Steward, President, Talbot Community Connections; Chooch Oristian, Doc's Downtowne Grille; and Lauren Krasko, Coordinator of the Talbot County

TCDSS held its 2nd annual “Thanks for Giving” event celebrating the Thanksgiving holiday with foster and adoptive parents and their families in November 2019



Pictured left to right are Linda Webb, Director of Talbot County DSS; Resource Parent Susan Guffey; Zion Carter; Resource Parent Johnette Dozier; Jibreel Dozier; Senator Addie Eckardt; Emprin Wilson; Tavion Wilson; and Don Abbatiello, Easton Town Council.



Beginning in June 2020, Talbot Community Connections sold “Thank You Talbot County” yard signs to both express gratitude to the Talbot County community for the support being provided to county residents and to raise funds to support the Talbot County Children’s Advocacy Center and other TCDSS community services.

Mid Shore Resource Parents attend Shorebirds Game



Pictured left to right are Christine Abbatiello, Foster Care Supervisor, (TCDSS); Christine Montague, Parent Education Coordinator, TCDSS; Sharon Caldwell, foster parent; Brian and Sarah Baynard, foster parents; Justin and Sara Smith, foster parents; Jeanne and Jeff Scharf, foster parents; Jessica Reading, Mid-Shore Regional Recruiter; Paris Quillet, Special Projects Coordinator, TCDSS; and Audrey Hansen, foster parent.



**TALBOT COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

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Larry Hogan, Governor

Boyd K. Rutherford, Lt. Governor

Lourdes R. Padilla, Secretary