



January 1, 2013

The Honorable Martin O'Malley
Governor, State of Maryland
100 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

RE: MSAR Report #6519 - 2012 Annual Report of the Social Services Administration

Dear Governor O'Malley:

Pursuant to Human Services Article §4-205(f), the Social Services Administration of the Department of Human Resources must submit a report on its activities to the Governor of Maryland before the start of each regular session of the General Assembly.

In response, I am pleased to provide you with the attached 2012 Annual Report of the Social Services Administration. You will find that this year's report highlights the continued success of DHR's "Place Matters" initiative, including the continued decline in the number of children in out-of-home care and group homes, revisions to regulations regarding adoption assistance, and improvements in ensuring the educational sustainability of children in out-of-home placement.

DHR will continue to work collaboratively with the local departments to provide and improve essential services to Maryland's most vulnerable families. If you should have any further questions or require additional information, please contact me at 410-767-7109 or Allyson Black, Executive Director of Government, Corporate and Community Affairs at 410-767-6586.

Sincerely,

Theodore Dallas
Secretary

Enclosure

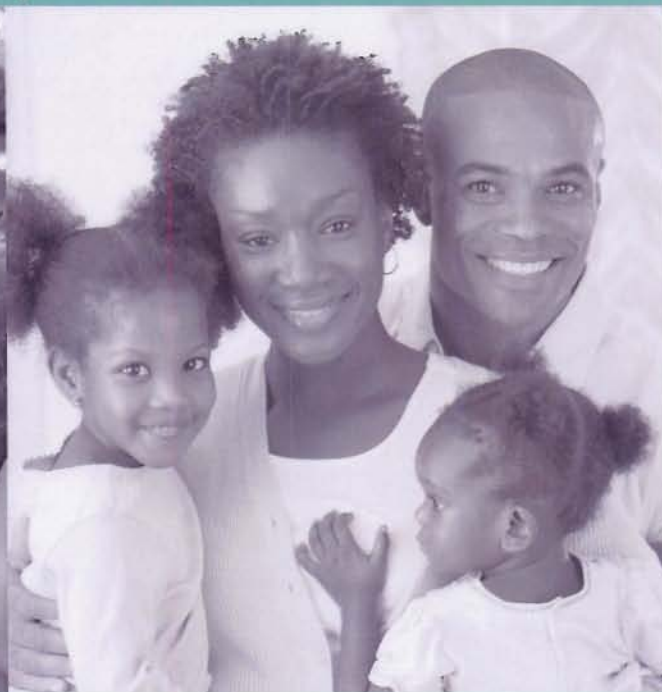
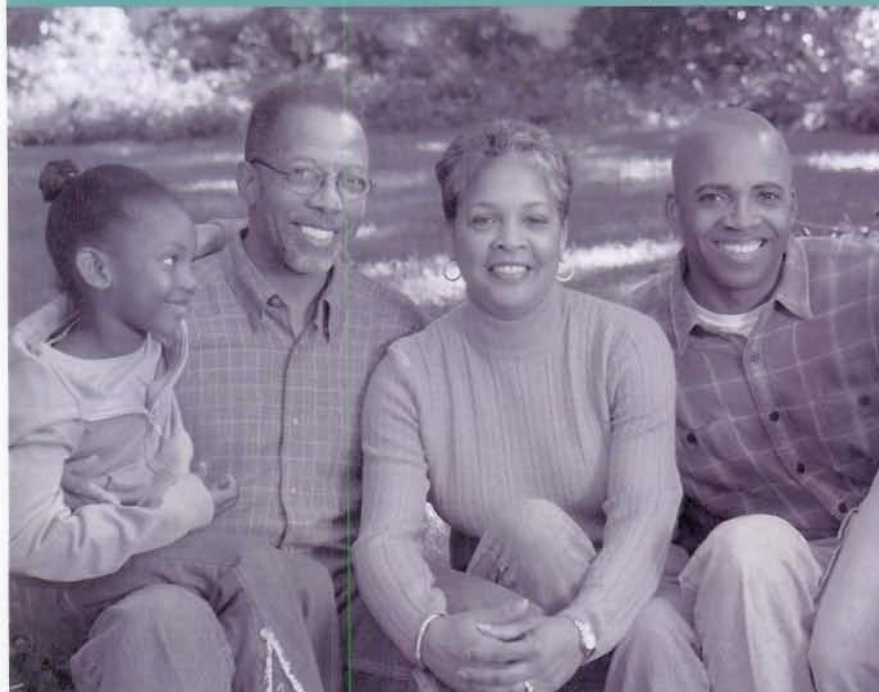
cc: Carnitra White, Executive Director, Social Services Administration
Allyson Black, Executive Director, Office of Government, Corporate and Community Affairs



Social Services Administration

Annual Report 2012

(MSAR#6519)



Martin O'Malley, Governor

Anthony G. Brown, Lt. Governor

Theodore Dallas, Secretary

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INTRODUCTION

Mandate

The Maryland Department of Human Resources (DHR) is designated by the Governor of Maryland to administer the Social Services Block Grant (Title XX), Title IV-B and Title IV-E programs. Specifically, DHR's Social Services Administration (SSA) administers the IV-B, subpart two, *Promoting Safe and Stable Families Plan* and supervises all services provided by the 24 local departments of social services, as well as those purchased through community service providers.

Vision

The Maryland Department of Human Resources, Social Services Administration, envisions a Maryland where all children are safe from abuse and neglect, where children have permanent homes and where families are able to meet their own needs.

Mission

To lead, support and enable local departments of social services in employing strategies to prevent child abuse and neglect, protect vulnerable children, and preserve and strengthen families by collaborating with State and community partners.

LEADERSHIP OF THE SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION

Executive Director

The Executive Director of the Social Services Administration (SSA) oversees the entire Administration with support from two Deputy Directors (Programs and Operations). Furthermore, the Executive Director carries out the vision of the Administration in establishing an infrastructure to support service delivery and the capacity for ongoing sustainability of these systemic improvements across all 24 local departments of social services. The Executive Director's scope of responsibility includes oversight for the provision of policy development, training, foster and adoptive home recruitment and approval, consultation and technical assistance, budgeting, data analysis, quality assurance, and also limited direct client services to children and families.

Coordination with the Secretary of the Department of Human Resources, SSA's Deputy Secretaries, the Office of the Attorney General, other Administration Directors, and the local directors of social services takes place on a regular basis. The Director represents the Administration before other state and federal agencies, advisory groups, legislators, Governor's Office personnel, and advocacy groups. In addition, there are five other offices or units within the Administration that provide the structure to support the overall child welfare mission.

Deputy Director of Programs

The Deputy Director of Programs is responsible for policy and program development for In-Home Services, Out-of-Home Placement, Organizational Development and Training, and Resource Development and Placement Support Services. This position shares responsibility for the development of the budget and legislative agenda.

Deputy Director of Operations

The Deputy Director of Operations is responsible for the Offices of Management and Special Services, Research and Evaluation, Quality Assurance, Systems Development, and Contracts and Monitoring. This position also shares responsibility for the development of the budget and legislative agenda.

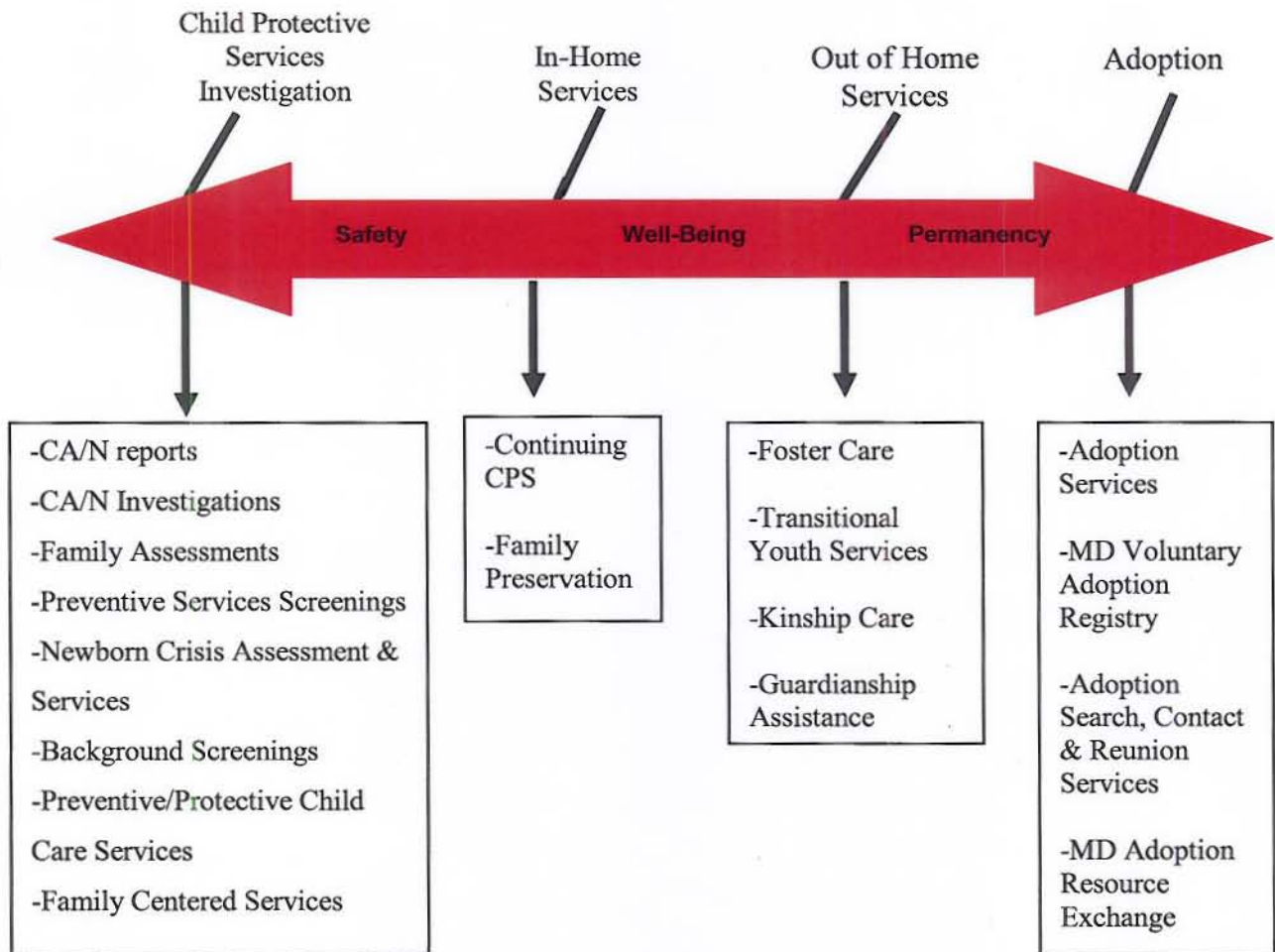
PROGRAMS

The Social Services Administration, under the direction of an Executive Director, has primary responsibility for administering the child welfare and social services programs as required by the Title IV-E plan and programs including:

- 1) Independent Living Services;
- 2) The Title IV-B Plan and programs for children and their families funded through the Social Services Block Grant; and
- 3) The federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA).

The illustration below shows the *Child Welfare Continuum of Care* in Maryland. The large red arrow depicts the Safety, Well-Being and Permanency outcomes; above the red arrow are the State's programs that contribute to the desired outcomes.

Child Welfare Continuum of Care



PRORAM DESCRIPTIONS

A. In- Home Services

In-Home Family Services represents a continuum of family preservation programs available within the local departments of social services. These programs are specifically identified for families in crisis whose children are at risk of out-of-home placement. Family preservation actively seeks to obtain or directly provide the critical services needed to enable the family to remain together in a safe and stable environment.

Child Protective Services (CPS) is a mandated program for the protection of all children in the state of Maryland, who are alleged to be abused or neglected. Child Protective Services screens and investigates allegations of child abuse and neglect, performs assessments of child safety, and evaluates conditions that support or refute the alleged abuse or neglect and need for emergency intervention. It also provides services designed to stabilize a family in crisis and to preserve the family by reducing safety and risk factors. Additionally, this program provides an array of prevention, intervention and treatment services including:

- Operating a local jurisdiction-based telephone hotline for receiving child abuse/neglect (CA/N) reports;
- Conducting CA/N investigation, family assessment and preventive services screenings;
- Providing substance exposed newborn crisis assessment and services;
- Providing background screening checks on current or prospective employees and volunteers for children/youth serving agencies;
- Preventive and increased protective capacity of families; and
- Providing family-centered services.

B. Out-of-Home Placement

Foster Care Services provide short-term care and supportive services to children that have been physically or sexually abused, neglected, abandoned, or put at a high risk of serious harm. Children are placed in the least restrictive placement to meet their needs, with a strong preference for relatives as the placement of choice. Attempts are made to keep the child in close proximity to their family; however, the child's placement is based on the treatment needs of the child and the availability of placement resources.

Time-limited reunification services are concurrent permanency planning to reunite with the birth family or to pursue a permanent home for the child within 12 months of the placement.

Permanency planning options that are considered in order of priority are:

- Reunification with parent(s);
- Permanent Placement with Relatives (includes guardianship or custody);
- Adoption (relative or non-relative);
- APPLA (Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement); and

- Voluntary placement services because of the child's need for short term placement to receive treatment services for mental illness or developmental disability.

Adoption Services develops permanent families for children who cannot live with or be safely reunited with their birth parents or extended birth families. The Maryland Adoption Program is committed to assisting local departments of social services and other partnering adoption agencies in finding "Forever Families" for children in the care and custody of the State. Adoption services include study and evaluation of children and their needs; adoptive family recruitment, training and approval; child placement; and post-adoption support.

Transitioning Youth Services provide independent living preparation services to older youth, ages 14-21 years of age in any type of out of home placement (such as kinship care, family foster care or residential/ group care). Maryland continues to provide services to help them prepare them for self-sufficiency in adulthood.

Guardianship Assistance Program serves as another permanency option for relatives caring for children in out of home care. The goal of this program is to encourage relative caregivers to become legal guardians of children who have been placed in their home by the local department of social services by removing financial barriers.

C. Resource Development, Placement and Support Services

Resource Development and Retention unit is responsible for services related to the recruitment and retention of resource families. They provide technical assistance to local departments of social services in development of their local recruitment plans. The Maryland Foster Parent Association also receives technical assistance from this unit. The unit is responsible for monitoring and coordination of the 24 local departments of social services' resource home development plans.

The *Placement and Support Services* unit is responsible for assisting the local departments of social services in addressing the discharge and placement plans for youths in State care from psychiatric hospitals in Maryland and offer suggestions to the local departments for applicable placements for youths in State care. Placement and Support Services is also responsible for participating in a myriad of committee meetings to represent DHR in order to maintain a rapport with different State agencies, as well as in-State and out-of-State providers, to glean updated knowledge of programs and initiatives; this information assists local departments of social services in ensuring that the youth in State custody are appropriately positioned at their recommended placement that is in their best interest. This unit works with stakeholders to identify and develop strategies to improve the array of services available to support children and families in achieving safety, permanence and well-being. The services include education, substance abuse treatment, and the provision of health care and mental health care services.

Moreover, the *Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)* ensures that children from other U.S. states in need of out-of-home placement in Maryland receive the same protections guaranteed to the children placed in care within Maryland. The law offers states

uniform guidelines and procedures to ensure these placements promote the best interests of each child while simultaneously maintaining the obligations, safeguards and protections of the “receiving” and “sending” states for the child until permanency for that child is achieved in the receiving state’s resource home, or until the child returns to the original sending State.

In 2011, 523 Maryland children (through public, private agency or parent-initiated private referral) were placed in out-of-State ICPC placements; another 214 children were denied out-of-State placements. The majority of children placed out-of-State are placed with relatives or parent-initiated referrals to Residential Treatment Centers (RTCs). Maryland continues to decrease the number of children placed in out-of-State RTCs and group homes. In the reverse direction (i.e., other states children coming to Maryland), 1,489 children were placed into Maryland (with 273 denied placement), the majority of whom came from Washington, D.C. These placement numbers include the full array of parent, relative, foster, adoptive and residential placements of children.

The *Interstate Compact on Adoption and Medical Assistance* (ICAMA) provides a framework for interstate coordination specifically related to adoption. ICAMA works to remove barriers to the adoption of children with special needs and facilitates the transfer of adoptive, educational, medical, and post adoption services to pre-adoptive children placed interstate or adopted children moving between states.

The Social Services Administration continuously offers staff up-to-date child welfare education and training, as well as promoting overall organizational development. This includes:

- *Child Welfare Training* oversees the training of all child welfare staff in the State of Maryland by monitoring the contract and coordinating the training activities with the University of Maryland’s School of Social Work and Child Welfare Academy. In conjunction with the Child Welfare Academy, this office coordinates the pre-service training for all new staff and continuing education opportunities for existing staff in addition to training the public foster care providers. This also includes oversight of the Title IV-E Education for Public Child Welfare Program at the University Of Maryland School Of Social Work.
- *Child Welfare Organizational Development* is responsible for supporting new initiatives that advance the overall strategic mission of the SSA and coordinating technical assistance to local departments of social services for emerging practices.

OPERATIONS

Working in conjunction with the various support services units, SSA relies on other administrative units to assist in achieving its goals. SSA receives essential support from the:

- *Budget and Central Services* is responsible for the management of SSA's budget development and monitoring. They also are responsible for the development of regulations, legislative updates, and personnel issues. *Contracts (Purchase of Care)* are responsible for the development and monitoring of contracts for Maryland's licensed child placement agencies and residential treatment facilities.
- *Research and Evaluation* is responsible for the collection and analysis of data for SSA and local department of social services. They are responsible for reporting for SSA to State Stat. State Stat collects data from all of Maryland's Departments on outcomes and trends within their organizations and reported to Governor Martin O'Malley. The Research and Evaluation unit also reports on AFCARS, Caseworker Visitation, the National Youth in Transition Database (NYTD), and the National Child Abuse and Neglect Data System (NCANDS) to the Federal government.
- *Systems Development* is responsible for MD CHESSIE, Maryland's SACWIS system. They work with Central Office and local departments of social services staff to ensure accurate and reliable data is input into the system. They work with the contractor on enhancements and troubleshoot any operational problems. This unit is also responsible for assisting public and providers with trouble shooting issues with their payments that are to be received on behalf of the children in their care.
- *Quality Assurance* is responsible for regular on-site review and data analysis for each the 24 local departments of social services. This unit coordinates the Continuous Quality Assurance process for child welfare and develops the reports for these reviews.

2012 UPDATES

A. Place Matters Initiative

The Social Services Administration made a deliberate and focused shift in its practice, policy and service delivery with the July 2007 State-wide implementation of the “Place Matters” initiative, which promotes safety, family strengthening, permanency and community-based services for children and families in the child welfare system. The proactive direction of “Place Matters,” designed to improve the continuum of services for Maryland’s children and families, places emphasis on preventing children from coming into care when possible, ensuring that children are appropriately placed when they enter care, and shortening the length of time youth are placed in out-of-home care. The goals of the Place Matters Initiative are:

- **Keep children in families first** - Place more children who enter care with relatives or in resource families as appropriate and decrease the numbers of children in congregate care.
- **Maintain children in their communities** - Keep children at home with their families and offer more services in their communities, across all levels of care.
- **Reduce reliance on out of home care** - Provide more in-home support to help maintain children with their families.
- **Minimize the length of stay** - Reduce length of stay in out-of-home care and increase reunification.
- **Manage with data and redirect resources** - Ensure that managers have relevant data to improve decision-making, oversight, and accountability. Shift resources from the back-end to the front-end of services.

In fact, since July 2007, through its Place Matter’s Initiative, Maryland has seen significant improvement in its outcomes, including:

- ✓ Reduction in the number of children in out-of-home care by 35%;
- ✓ Decrease in the proportion of youth in group home placements from 19% to 10%; and
- ✓ Increase in the proportion of family home placements from 70% to 73%.

In addition, the proportion of children exiting due to reunification, guardianship, and adoption has increased from 66% during fiscal year 2008 to 78% during fiscal year 2012.

The graphs found in the Appendix to this report, on pages 20-21 of this report, further illustrate these achievements.

B. Program and Strategy

Family Centered Practice

In 2008, Maryland began the implementation of its Family-Centered Practice (FCP) Model which is the cornerstone of Maryland's child welfare service delivery. The core values, principles and implementation strategies of the practice model are aligned with improving the outcomes of safety, permanency and well-being through the active engagement of a child's family team throughout the continuum of child welfare services. The model encourages service delivery to be a continual loop of assessment, engagement, teaming, monitoring and re-evaluation and supports the ongoing transfer of learning training opportunities for staff to enhance the skills required to employ the practice principles. Maryland continues to explore opportunities and strategies to institutionalize the FCP core values and principles. In addition to training and community outreach efforts, ongoing technical assistance has been available to the local departments to align practice with emerging initiatives such as Youth Matter, Kinship Navigator and Family Finding.

Supervision Model

Maryland believes that supervisors are the cornerstone of practice and they need to be trained, supported and coached effectively. Therefore, in May of 2011, Maryland began the development of its Supervision Model with the support of Casey Family Programs. The model was developed by a workgroup that consisted of central and local staff facilitated by Marsha Salus, who has been training supervisors in Maryland since 2006. The workgroup met monthly from May through December 2011. As a result of this workgroup, Maryland's Child Welfare Supervision Model, "Supervision Matters," was developed. The components of the model are:

- Clearly defined standards and expectations of the supervisor;
- A comprehensive training system for new and experienced supervisors, including state-of-the-art transfer of learning strategies;
- Peer-to-peer learning;
- Coaching and mentoring of new supervisors;
- Screening tool to be utilized in recruiting, screening and selecting new supervisors;
- Ongoing support for supervisors; and
- Performance appraisal system consistent with the standards and expectations of supervisors.

The workgroup also developed standards and expectations to define effective supervisory practice. The conceptual framework around which the standards and expectations were developed delineated the roles of the supervisor:

- Effective Leadership
- Building the Foundation for Unit Performance
- Building the Foundation for Staff Performance
- Promoting the Growth and Development of Staff
- Case Consultation and Supervision

- Supportive Supervision
- Managing Effectively in the Organization

The standards and expectations provide a model for child welfare supervision, clarify what is expected of a supervisor, provide the foundation and focus of new and advanced supervisory training and provide the basis on which supervisory performance is evaluated.

Implementation of the model will be conducted in seven pilot sites (Anne Arundel, Charles, Frederick, Prince Georges, Queen Anne, Somerset, and Worcester counties). A kick-off event for the model was held on May 31, 2012. In attendance were the Directors, Assistant Directors and Program Managers of the seven pilot sites, along with several of the Supervision Model workgroup members. They were given an overview of the model and the expectations of the pilot sites. The expectations are:

- 1) Support for participating in the project from all levels of management;
- 2) New supervisors (less than 1 year of supervisory experience) will participate in the pilot delivery of the twelve-day new supervisor training program (delivered 2 days per month over a six month period) and provide feedback on recommended revisions to the training program;
- 3) All supervisors in the pilot counties who have not completed the Excellence in Supervision course (delivered to new supervisors through the Child Welfare Training Academy since 2006) will participate in the pilot delivery of the twelve-day new supervisor training program (delivered 2 days per month over a six month period) and provide feedback on recommended revisions to the training program;
- 4) The Assistant Director/Program Managers, who directly supervise the supervisors, will support and reinforce the supervisor's transfer of learning. They will meet with the consultant ½ day per month during the six months their supervisor(s) is participating in the training to receive an overview of the current supervisory module and their role in reinforcing and supporting their supervisor's application of knowledge and skills to the job. If appropriate, they will provide recommendations to enhance the transfer of learning process;
- 5) The pilot counties will evaluate the standards and expectations for supervisors to identify barriers for implementation and strategies and support needed for successful implementation; and
- 6) Pilot counties will conduct a self-evaluation to determine if they can provide the needed support to implement the project.

Training began in July 2012. Casey Family Programs is providing evaluation technical assistance and support of the evaluation model.

Safety and Risk Assessment and Consolidated In-Home Services

In July 2012, Maryland implemented a statewide Consolidated In-Home Services model. The Consolidated In-Home Services model is designed to provide comprehensive, time-limited and family focused services to families with a child or children at-risk for an out-of-home placement or at risk for future maltreatment. Under this new approach, the determination of case acceptance and subsequent level of service will be driven not by a service category designation, but rather by the combination of child safety and risk of maltreatment assessments:

- **Level 1:** Conditionally safe and a safety plan in place
- **Level 2:** Safe with moderate to high risk
- **Level 3:** Safe with low risk

The intensity of the service provided (i.e. direct service hours by the worker) is based upon the specific needs of the family. The model allows for supervisory discretion to be applied to the types of cases (levels) that are given to any individual worker on the basis of expertise, knowledge and work experience, as long as the worker's caseload does not exceed 18 hours per week of face-to-face contact.

When the child welfare worker updates either the safety or risk assessment, the level of service intensity may change, and the worker will be able to observe these shifts in safety and risk and plan hours of service for each family served accordingly. Cases can be transitioned according to the needs of the family without a change in workers, providing continuity of service and practice. The new model is dependent upon accurate and reliable assessments of both safety/danger and risk of future maltreatment.

Maryland has also begun the development of the Family Version of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment based upon the family-focused Family Advocacy and Support Tool (FAST) and the youth-focused Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (MD CANS) tool. This new assessment tool, the CANS Family (CANS-F), will assist in-home service workers in the identification of strengths as well as underlying issues and needs for families that have been brought to the Department's attention. A workgroup comprised of representatives from the In-Home Service units from Anne Arundel, Wicomico and Frederick counties and a representative from the Institute for Innovation and Implementation at the University of Maryland, worked closely with the Department over a 6-month period to design the CANS-F.

The CANS-F is comprised of a comprehensive family system assessment as well as individual caregiver and youth assessments. It centers on the family unit as a whole for planning and measuring of service needs; therefore, all members of the household, regardless of age, are included in the assessment. Completing the CANS-F throughout the life of an in-home service case can help verify that the interventions or recommended services are successful in affecting change for the family.

The CANS-F will initially be piloted in Anne Arundel, Frederick and Talbot counties using a Microsoft Word version of the assessment. The initial training, and pilot kick-off, for the CANS-F was conducted in June 2012. Training in the CANS-F assessment includes:

- A review of the CANS-F assessment;
- Best practice guidelines for strength-based, culturally competent, and family centered use of the CANS-F assessment; and
- Instruction in using the information gathered for the CANS-F assessment towards the creation of strength-based family service plans.

C. Permanency Strategies

As stated previously, Maryland has reduced the number of children in out-of-home care by 35% since 2007. This reduction is a result of children leaving the system due to reunification, adoption and guardianship. Maryland strongly believes that every child deserves to grow up in a permanent, safe, and loving family. The Maryland Foster Care Program features a family-centered approach that encourages foster parents to play an active role with the birth family in planning and carrying out the goals of the permanency plan. Using the Family-Centered Practice model, foster children are placed in homes that are in their own community, thereby keeping the children connected to their home school, friends and resources within their neighborhood.

Permanent Connections for Youth

The Transitioning Youth to Families (TYTF) initiative was developed to identify youth in congregate care settings who are ready to transition to families with an emphasis on biological families. The initiative provides a mechanism to standardize procedures for identifying and accessing the most appropriate placement consistent with the best interests and needs of the child. The TYTF initiative:

- Prioritizes permanency;
- Specifies preference for children living in families and in their communities;
- Requires that children and families be involved in decisions about their lives;
- Outlines appropriate use of congregate care; and
- Requires an approval/sign-off process for congregate care placements.

As a result of this policy the number of youth in group care setting continues to decline.

Family Finding

Family Finding is an initiative designed to promote permanence and foster meaningful and lifelong connections between youth and their families of origin. Family Finding builds on the tenets of Place Matters and Family-Centered Practice to enhance best practices across the state. The goals are to prevent children and youth from languishing in foster care due to failure of the child welfare system to engage potential relative resources in a timely manner, and to ensure supportive connections for children and youth upon their exit from Maryland's child welfare system. Maryland's Intensive Family Finding initiative is based on the model developed by Kevin Campbell, which is a six-step process focused on methodical search, identification, assessment, engagement and sustaining family resources to offer relational permanence and/or

placement for youth in care without a plan of reunification or those without an identified permanent family resource. Family Finding enhances current child welfare practice through engaging and teaming with families to facilitate meaningful family connections that will continue when the provision of child welfare services have ended. The Family Finding initiative provides an extension of case management services to assess relatives as potential placement resources and establish relational permanence.

Transitioning Youth Services

Maryland continues to engage youth and assist them in developing transition plans that are youth driven and will aid them in making a smooth transition to self-sufficiency. The Transitioning Youth Services Program provides independent living preparation services to foster youth, ages 14 to 21. The program is designed to assist youth in obtaining the life skills and support necessary to make a successful transition from out-of-home care to self-sufficiency. Independent living services generally include assistance with money management skills, educational assistance, household management skills, employment preparation, health care and other services as needed.

Over the next year DHR will focus on changing the policy and practice for transitioning youth ages 14 to 21. The goal of is to ensure that youth transitioning out of foster care are self-sufficient. A Transitioning Youth Manual is currently being developed. The manual will be distributed to all local department staff to serve as a "How-to Guide" for providing services to transitioning youth. The main areas the manual will cover are: Transition Plan; Casey Life Skills Assessment; Independent Living Service Agreement; Semi Independent Living Arrangement; and After Care Services.

Adoption

The focus of Adoption Services is to ensure the best interests of children in foster care awaiting permanent homes. The goal is to develop permanent families for children who cannot live with, or safely be reunited with, their birth parents. Maryland's Adoption Program assists local departments of social services and other partnering adoption agencies in finding adoptive families for children in the care and custody of the State. The range of adoption services includes study and evaluation of children and their needs; adoptive family and resource parent recruitment; training and home study; child match and placement; and post-adoption support. In April 2012, DHR published revisions to the Code of Maryland Regulations (COMAR 07.02.12) which focused on adoption assistance, IV-E, Non-recurring, State and Post Adoption. The sections removed from the Adoption Regulations were consolidated with either the Out-of-Home or Resource Home regulations.

The adoption program also includes mediated "open" adoption when it is in the child's best interest; the Mutual Consent Voluntary Adoption Registry; the Adoption Search, Contact and Reunion Services (ASCRS); the Post Adoption Services Permanency Program (which provides limited funds for families when the adoption is at risk of disruption); the Adoption Assistance Program; Title XX Child Care Reimbursement; and the Non-recurring Adoption Expenses reimbursement. The Adoption Subsidy may continue until the age of 21 as long as the agreement is entered into prior to the youth's 18th birthday, and if the child continues to meet eligibility requirements, such as continued special needs status or school enrollment. Maryland's child

welfare services continue to emphasize concurrent permanency planning and dual approval of resource homes to increase the number and timeliness of adoptions of children in out-of-home care.

Guardianship Assistance Program

The Guardianship Assistance Program (GAP) serves as another permanency option for relatives caring for children in out-of-home care. The goal of this program is to encourage relative caregivers to become legal guardians of children who have been placed in their home by the local department of social services by removing financial barriers. A relative agreeing to participate in the GAP is granted custody and guardianship of the child in their care with a subsidy that includes a monthly payment and Medical Assistance. The assistance payment is a negotiated rate that can be up to 100% of the foster care board rate. Under certain circumstances, the GAP payment can continue until the youth reaches age 21. In the past year, we instituted major enhancements to the MD CHESSIE system, provided training to staff at local departments of social services and adopted new regulations (COMAR 07.02.29). Maryland has been approved for Title IV-E reimbursement of eligible children for GAP.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS)

Since July 2011, DHR has been using the Maryland Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (MD CANS) to assess youth in out-of-home placement settings. This aligned the public staff with private agency staff that had been using the CANS tool since 2009. The MD CANS assessment is intended to elicit information about a child's particular strengths and needs to be used for service planning and placement intensity identification. MD CANS was incorporated into MD CHESSIE in early fiscal year 2011 in preparation for DHR staff completing the assessment. A DHR policy was issued detailing the triggers and frequency for completing the assessment. All children over the age of five entering Out-of-Home placement (OHP) will have the CANS completed within 60 days of entry into out-of-home care. Children already in care will have the assessment completed at one of several triggers which resulted in a requirement that every child over the age of five receive an assessment by June 30, 2012.

D. Resource Development

Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment

Maryland continues to need resource parents for teens, sibling groups and medically fragile children. Though gains have been made in these areas, especially through educating current resource parents, these individuals are still the most in need of permanent homes. Recruitment of minority resource parents, in particular Spanish speaking parents, continues. In many instances, the potential resource parents who respond to outreach efforts are only interested in younger children or children solely available for adoption.

As of March 2012, the State-wide reported race for children in care are: Black/African American only, 67.2%; White/Caucasian only, 25.3%; Other 0.3%, Multiple, 3.1%; Missing 4.1%; and Hispanic, 4.1%. These percentages fluctuate very little throughout the year. Older youth ages 14 to 20 account for 54% of the caseload. From this information, local departments choose strategies targeted at finding families for the children in need of homes in their jurisdiction.

Some of the innovative strategies local departments used for recruitment and retention include:

- E-mail profiles of teens and sibling groups needing placement to all active resource parents;
- Engage youth and resource parents of teens in public education activities- given gift cards as incentives for participation;
- Maintain updated local department website that focuses need for foster/adoptive families for teens;
- Utilize young adults who are currently involved in the Independent Living Program to recruit foster families for older children. Also include young adults who have successfully aged out of foster care- \$50 stipend per child per event;
- Send “New Year, New Start” post cards to those who received information or attended information session but did not follow up with PRIDE training;
- Develop Facebook page to help recruit foster/adoptive parents using the popular social media;
- Quarterly calls and yearly surveys to receive feedback and provide support to foster/adoptive parents;
- Retain current families by providing support, encouragement, training and fun things to do with other resource families;
- Appreciation activities for current resource parents to acknowledge and thank resource parents for their hard work and dedication throughout the year; and
- Quarterly roundtable discussion/training for current and prospective resource parents.

Improving Educational Stability

The availability of and access to critical services are vital to the success of the outcomes for children involved with child welfare. Collaboration with other child and family serving agencies is essential in the development of the needed resources. DHR continues to work closely with Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) to address educational stability as required by Fostering Connections Act of 2008. MSDE updated their regulations in response to the McKinney-Vento Act to include a definition for “child awaiting foster care placement”. That definition includes children being placed in their initial out of home placement. In April 2012, DHR/SSA issued a policy directive (#12-36, Educational Stability)¹ to twenty-four local departments on education stability. This policy does the following:

- Establishes guidelines to ensure education stability for children upon their initial entry or experiencing placement changes as well as ongoing efforts for all children and youth that are in an out-of-home placement;
- Clarifies the responsibilities of the local department and the local school systems;
- Ensures that children and youth in foster care have proper transportation to school;
- Requires local departments to document each placement change in the case; and
- Requires local departments to document best interest determination.

¹ The policy is available at:

<http://dhrnet.dhr/directory/SSA/Child%20Welfare%20Policies/SSA%2012-26%20Educational%20Stability.pdf>

APPENDIX TO SOCIAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION 2012 ANNUAL REPORT

