



Worcester County Department of Social Services Annual Report July 2013 - June 2014



Worcester County Department of Social
Services
299 Commerce Street
P.O. Box 39
Snow Hill, Maryland 21863
<http://dhr.maryland.gov/blog/?p=258>

State of Maryland
Martin O'Malley, *Governor*
Anthony G. Brown, *Lt. Governor*
Maryland Department of Human Resources
Theodore Dallas, *Secretary*
Peter J. Buesgens, *Director*



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Vision

WE ENVISION WORCESTER COUNTY AS A SAFE COMMUNITY, FREE OF EXPLOITATION, NEGLECT, AND ABUSE, WHERE INDIVIDUALS TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES BY STRIVING FOR INDEPENDENCE AND ACHIEVING SELF-SUFFICIENCY.

Mission

WORCESTER COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES IMPROVES THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR CITIZENS OF WORCESTER COUNTY BY EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS TO BECOME SELF-SUFFICIENT AND PRODUCTIVE, ASSURING THAT PREVENTION EFFORTS PROTECT THE VULNERABLE, POOLING RESOURCES AND MAXIMIZING PARTNERSHIPS WHILE RESPECTING THE DIVERSE CULTURAL VALUES WITHIN THE COMMUNITY AND OUR AGENCY.

INTRODUCTION

Director's Message

If I had to summarize FY2014 for the Worcester County Department of Social Services in a single phrase it would be "Adjusting to changing paradigms and the policies that follow." Nowhere was this more evident in the past year than in our Family Investment Unit. The Federal Government's push for Health Care reform resulted in the initiation of Maryland's Health Insurance Exchange January 1. This required our staff to train for; then implement the complex medical enrollment system devised. We then assisted hundreds of Worcester residents to obtain the medical coverage they needed. By June, the Maryland Insurance Exchange was scheduled for discontinuation and a better system, the Maryland Health Benefits Exchange, will take its place. These transitions are difficult for everyone, but especially our line staff who are charged with making these systems work for persons who are often not "system" or technologically experienced.



Within our Child Welfare Unit, the Child Protective Services Program also incurred a dramatic shift in service parading that changed how we practice on a day-to-day basis. The State's Alternative Response Program was implemented this past year in order to improve our ability to better engage families in the process of healthy change. Rather than approaching families in need in a forensic/investigative manner, CPS workers, in some instances where risk is initially assessed as low, now focus more on a problem solving approach. Our initial results seem promising and we are encouraged that we will have a better chance to partner with families in the goal of achieving safe home environments for children.

In Child Support we continued to work with our non-custodial parents in an attempt to help them access the services/goods they needed to enable them to consistently support their children. In 2014 though, we put renewed focus on holding those parents able, but not willing to pay their support accountable. Although there are limits to what we can do to motivate absent parents to fulfill their parental responsibility, we have challenged ourselves to do whatever we can to ensure children receive the support they require from both parents.

Finally, our Administrative Unit has had a busy year working to improve efficiency by implementing newer technology into our business practices. The biggest impact was experienced through implementation of Maryland's new State Personnel System. This system fully automated many human resource functions (recruitment, time sheets, etc.) while also giving all Maryland Department Human Resource offices a common IT system to work from. This common/shared system will greatly enhance the State's ability to access vital personnel information. In turn this data will be used to obtain greater efficiency and better serve employees and ultimately, our community.

I believe it is a fair bet this type of adjusting to changes in our environment will be continued well into FY2015. Fortunately, we at Worcester DSS (to paraphrase Bertha Calloway) realize "we can't change the direction of the wind, but can only adjust our souls to reach our desired destinations."

I would like to thank our staff at the central DHR office, the Worcester County Commissioners and our community partners for their support and assistance in helping Worcester DSS protect the vulnerable and promote independence for the citizens of Worcester County and I look forward to our continued good works in the future.

Advisory Board of Agency

Members of the Worcester County Department of Social Services Advisory Board are volunteers appointed by the Worcester County Board of County Commissioners to serve a term of three years. Their many duties include reviewing the Department's programs, assessing the need for new programs and additional resources, advocating for resources from local and state government and promoting awareness of services provided by the Department.

FY2013-FY2014 Board members:

Nancy Howard, Chair

Commissioner Judy Boggs, Ex-Officio

Arlette Bright

Cathy Gallagher

Nancy Dorman

Jeff Kelchner

Emma Klein

Wes McCabe

Laura McDermott

Judy Stinebiser



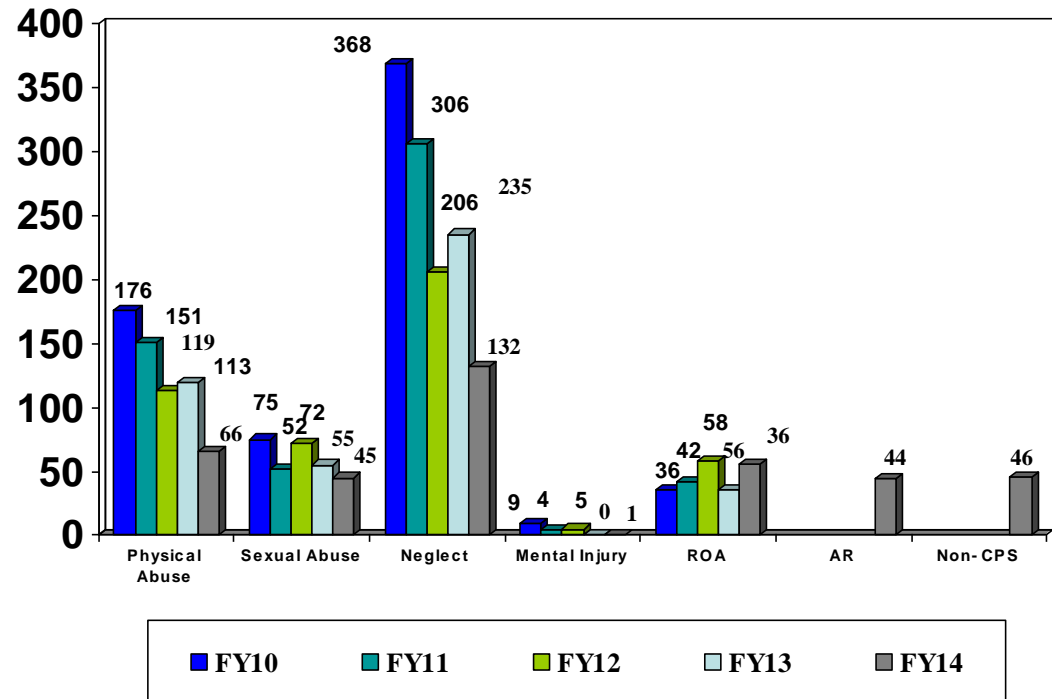
CHILD, FAMILY & ADULT SERVICES

Child Protective Services

It is required by law to respond to all reports of suspected child abuse and/or neglect. Child Protective Services workers are responsible for assessing and taking steps to ensure the safety of children. Only 16 children who received these services for FY14 entered foster care.

Accepted investigations FY14

- 66 Physical Abuse
- 45 Sexual Abuse
- 132 Neglect
- 1 Mental Injury
- 56 Referrals from other Agencies (ROA's)
- 44 Alternative Response (AR)
- 46 Non-CPS (512/domestic violence)



~ The Child Protective Services Unit started the new Alternative Response process on April 1, 2014. The unit attended trainings and has implemented the changes associated with the process. The unit is embracing the changes and adjusting well. Workers have had mostly positive feedback from customers regarding Alternative Response. Workers continue to hone their skills in hopes of further engaging their families for more positive outcomes.

In-Home Services

In-Home Family Services is a time-limited service designed to develop positive, nurturing parent-child relationships to families whose children are at risk of out-of-home placements. The main purpose is to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families. In-Home Family Services provides direct services as well as referring families to community resources to enhance the overall health of the family. In FY14, In-Home Services provided as follows:

- 11 families with 22 children received Services to Families with Children
- 21 families with 61 children received Family Preservation Services
- 182 families with 372 children received Consolidated Services

Only 9 children who received the above services for FY14 entered foster care



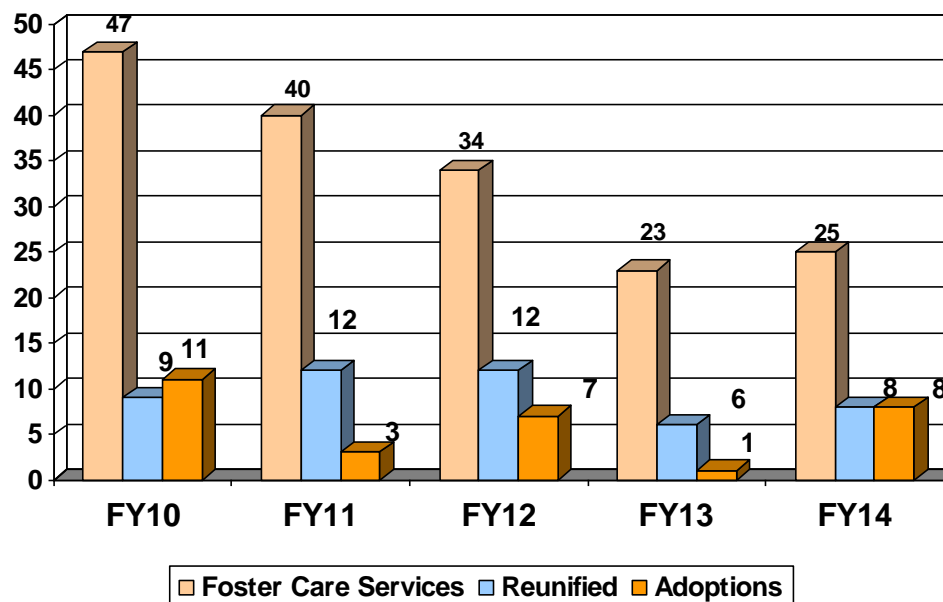
~ When the In-Home Services Supervisor began managing the unit in January 2014, the workers were struggling with getting information into MD CHESSIE. The cases were not up to date as contact notes were not being entered timely and case reconsiderations were not completed according to the program policy. Because of the intensity of the work that is being done with the families and the time spent out in the field, it is difficult for some workers to manage their time to ensure that the documentation is completed in a timely manner. The caseworkers have worked very hard at getting their cases up to date. As of 7/1/2014, 90% of the workers have all of their cases up to date. This is certainly a major accomplishment for the unit and I applaud all of their efforts.

Out- of-Home Placement

Out-of-Home Placement Services provides services to children who have been removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. The main purpose is to provide a safe and stable environment for the child. This can be established through foster care or adoption, placement with relatives or reunification of children with their parents once they can provide a healthy home environment.

Out-of-Home Placement Services for FY14

- 25 Out of Home services for children needing protection
- 8 Reunifications
- 8 Finalized Adoption

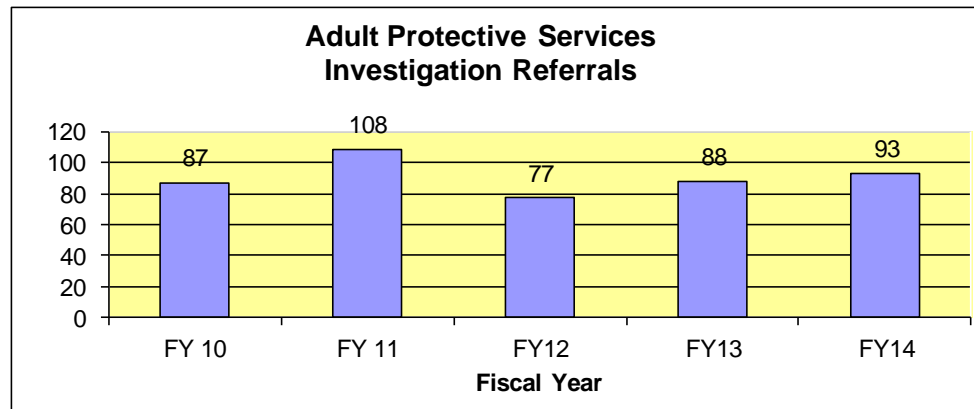


~ The Out-of-Home Service Unit has assisted in finalizing 8 adoptions from July 2013 through June 2014. This is quite an accomplishment given the many legal barriers the unit faced and has had to persevere through. The unit has remained compassionate in working with the foster children and families. They have worked with limited resources on the shore and linked with private agencies to secure the level of supportive services the children needed, as well as worked in a partnering fashion with the Worcester County Homes to find permanent homes for children in care. All 8 children were kept in their County of origin and adopted by Worcester County families. Out of the 8 cases, 3 were sent up to the appellate court following TPR being granted and all TPR's were upheld. Reaching this major accomplishment has been what is in the children's best interest and exceeded the State's established goal of 5 adoptions for FY14.

Adult Services

- Adult Protective Services

APS investigated and/or provided continuing services to reduce the risk of abuse, neglect, self-neglect or the exploitation of 93 vulnerable adults in FY14.



- The Adult Public Guardianship Program served 5 clients as of June 30, 2014. This program protects the person and interests of a vulnerable adult at risk by the court appointment of guardianship to Worcester County DSS as a last resort to enable them to make critical life decisions on the client's behalf. A service plan is sanctioned by the court; then both they and DSS implement and monitor the case for the effectiveness and continued need of guardianship.
- The Project Home Program assisted 2 adults with disabilities or mental illness by placing them in supervised housing where they receive room, board, personal care, and assistance with other daily activities.
- Respite Care Services were provided for 12 families. These services are for the adult caretaker of disabled clients.
- Social Services to Adults (SSTA) case management services were provided to 72 disabled and elderly adults as of June 30, 2014. Staff provided counseling, advocacy, case management, and referral services to assist adult customers function independently in the community.
- In-Home Aide Services were provided to 34 individuals. These services provide personal care, household and therapeutic services to elderly or disabled customers in their homes, enabling these clients to remain living at home rather than being institutionalized. As of June 30, 2014 there were 33 clients on a waiting list for these services.

FAMILY INVESTMENT ADMINISTRATION

Each Family Investment program has different technical and financial eligibility/guidelines that must be met before a customer can be eligible to receive benefits under these programs. Some of these programs are federally funded only, others are state and federally funded, and one is fully state funded. The criteria varies greatly in terms of what the income and resource limits are, what income must be counted, what income may be disregarded, and what deductions, if any, may be applied. The next several pages list the Family Investment programs offered at our Department.

Financial Assistance

The Family Investment Division administers a number of financial assistance programs that support low-income families and individuals. The programs provide a safety net for vulnerable Worcester County citizens who do not have other sources of income. These programs include:

- *Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)*

This program offers time limited financial assistance for families with children. Requirements may include cooperation with Child Support Enforcement and Employment Services. Sixty-four TCA recipients have been placed in jobs with an average wage of \$10.08 per hour, which exceeds our FY2014 job Placement Goal by 3 placements.

- *Welfare Avoidance Grants (WAGs)*

This program provides a one-time authorization of funds to alleviate a crisis which might result in a family becoming dependent on TCA. In FY14, WAGs totaling \$64,759 were issued to assist 32 families.

- *Emergency Assistance for Families with Children (EAFC)*

This program helps families with dependent children resolve crisis situations such as evictions and utility cut-offs. Burial assistance provides limited assistance for eligible individuals. EAFC grants of \$8,033.00 were issued to 25 families facing such issues.

Financial Assistance (continued)

- *Temporary Disability Assistance Program (TDAP)*

This program provides financial assistance to low-income adults with disabilities who meet certain medical qualifications. Benefits were issued to an average of 110 cases per month in FY14.

- *Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)*

This program provides benefits enabling households to supplement their food budgets. An average of 3,844 cases was worked each month by this program during FY14. These benefits averaged \$856,500 per month for a total of \$10,278,000 annually.

Medical & Health Services

Medical Assistance programs are administered by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DHMH). Worcester County Department of Social Services establishes eligibility for these programs but does not disperse the funds to pay for services.

- *Medical Assistance SSI Program*

This program provides Medical Assistance coverage to customers who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits from the Social Security Administration. There were 767 active cases at the end of FY14.

- *Medical Assistance – Long Term Care Program*

This program assists individuals residing in long-term care facilities with medical expenses and other cost of care. There were 181 active cases at the end of FY14.

- *Medical Assistance – Community Program*

This program serves low-income families and individuals who are aged, blind, or disabled. Services were provided to an average of 3,123 adults and children monthly.

- *Maryland Children's Health Program (MCHiP)*

This program provides Medical Assistance coverage to children and pregnant women who meet financial eligibility requirements. There was a monthly average of 589 cases in FY14.

- *Public Assistance to Adults (PAA)*

This program provided cash assistance for a monthly average of 10 adults who are physically and/or mentally disabled residing in supported living arrangements.

Child Care Programs

- *Purchase of Care (POC)*

This program assisted an average of 106 families monthly with the cost of childcare during FY14. There are no families presently on the waiting list at the end of FY14. This program is scheduled to transition to the Board of Education late in FY2015 or later.

Housing

The Worcester County Department of Social Services Housing staff work to stabilize housing and prevent homelessness for the low-income and most vulnerable Worcester County residents. The case managers assist these residents facing a housing crisis with financial aid and other resources. The array of services include: eviction prevention, foreclosure prevention, help with security deposit or first month's rent, emergency motel placement, case management and budgeting.

The Worcester County Family Investment Administration has consistently met application compliance goals despite numerous obstacles including heavy caseloads, new staff, and implementation of health Care Reform. Staff was recently awarded the Department's Silver Spoon Award for meeting goals in application timeliness, pre-review and SNAP challenge participation.

CHILD SUPPORT ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION

Child Support Collections

Six (6) agents managed 1,658 cases in fiscal year 2014, of which 1,472 have orders (88.78%)

Amount disbursed — \$3,162,683 (July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014)

Tax intercepts — \$244,783 (July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014)

Children with paternity established — 1,231 (101.99%)

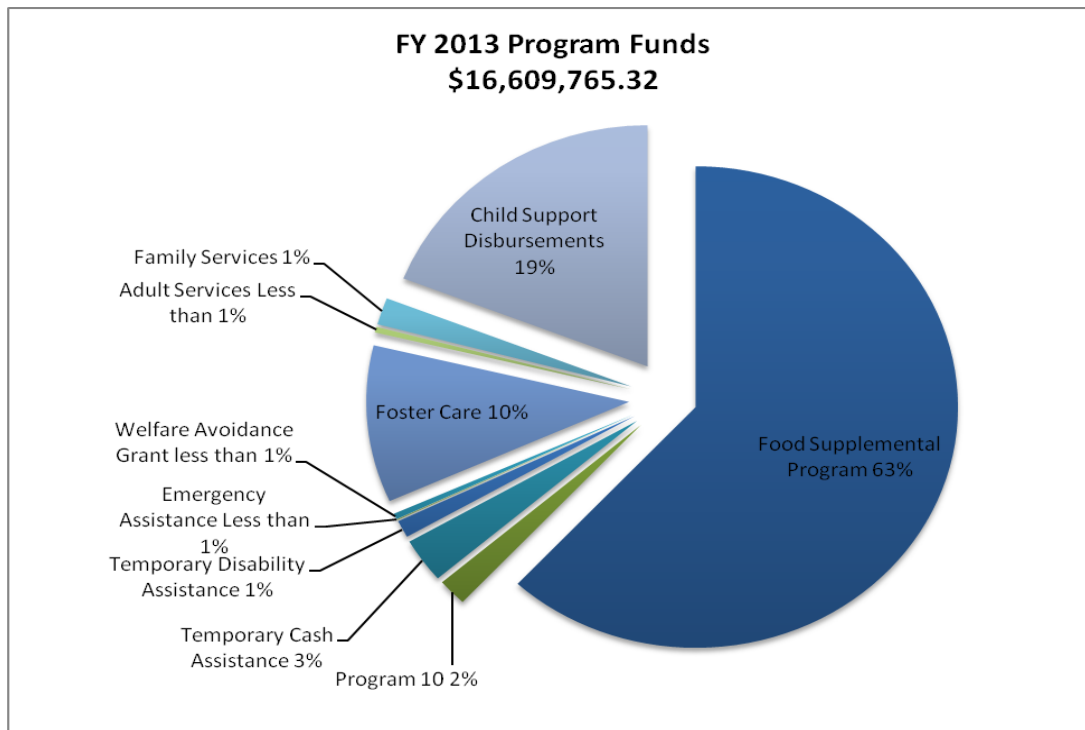


~ The Worcester County Child Support Office has had great success during the past year with the Financial Institution Data Match program. This program identifies financial accounts owned by non-custodial parents who are delinquent in their child support obligations. These accounts are subject to garnishment to satisfy arrears owed in child support cases. In one specific case, the amount of \$11,373.00 was collected in January 2014 and distributed to the custodial parent of a 7 year old daughter. The non-custodial parent resides in Florida and all other enforcement actions through the State of Florida had been unsuccessful. This lump sum payment was the first payment received in this case in a year.

~ Over many years the Worcester County Child Support Office struggled to get a non-custodial parent to pay regular child support payments. Because of this she accrued a balance of over \$13,000.00. Criminal charges were filed and she even received and served a one-year sentence. However, in January 2014, she was signed up for the Payment Incentive Program which encourages obligors to make consistent payments by reducing a portion of the arrears due to the State. Payments have been received every week since the agreement was made.

ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

The Local General Administration (LGA) is responsible for Administration and Finance. The Finance office supports Family Investment, Social Services, and Child Support for accounting operation and budgeting. Administration is responsible for personnel, procurement, inventory, fleet, and computer technology and facilities management. In the past year the unit has effectively utilized resources to meet all agency needs without creating a deficit. The unit continues to streamline some procedures in fiscal, fleet, and personnel to create efficiencies in operations.



~ Administration's FY14 year presented some great opportunities such as advancement in Information Technology with the addition of Adult Services into DHR's network; Human resources moving forward with the Statewide Personnel System allowing the application processes to now be automated.