

# TALBOT COUNTY

Department of Social Services

## 2024 Annual Report



**Maryland**

Department of Human Services

TALBOT COUNTY

Department of Social Services



## Vision

We envision a diverse, interdependent, resilient and welcoming community in which people support themselves, their families and one another.

## Mission

We collaborate with people in need, protect children and vulnerable adults and promote safety, well-being and equity in our community.

## Guiding Principles

- We serve our community with excellence.
- We value and support our employees by creating a culture of health, well-being and safety.
- We collaborate with community partners to ensure delivery of comprehensive services.
- We commit to, invest in and work toward racial equity and inclusion in our agency and in our community.
- We cultivate a deeper understanding of our role and our shared responsibility with the community to support and protect children, families and vulnerable adults.

## Executive Leadership Team

Linda Webb, LCSW, Director

Christine Abbatiello, LCSW-C, Assistant Director of Child Welfare and Adult Services

Juana Blue, Assistant Director of Family Investment

Monique Sykes-Moore, Assistant Director of Child Support

Ben Pittsley, Assistant Director of Administration

## Management Team

Debbe Fairbank, LCSW-C, Adult Services Supervisor

Nikki Robey, LCSW-C, In-Home Services Supervisor

Erika Fenske, LCSW-C, Child Protective Services Supervisor

Danielle Burkey, LCSW-C, Out of Home and Adoptions Supervisor

Lauren Krasko, LCSW-C, CAC Supervisor

Allayne Deshields, Family Investment Supervisor

Leonard Palmer, Family Investment Supervisor

Lorraine Johnson, Family Investment Supervisor

Cherelle LaBove, Family Investment Supervisor

Paris Quillet, LCSW-C, Special Projects Coordinator

Traci Corbin, Human Resources Supervisor

Meloney Morris, Human Resources Officer

Kelley Werner, Executive Assistant

## FY 2024 Social Services Board Members

Victoria Gomez Lozano, Chair

Elaine Wilson, Vice Chair

Pete Leshar, County Council ex officio

Andrew Hollis

Sarah Cloxton

Sandy Brown

Rev. Susan Browning

Samantha Jeter

Dorri Gowe-Lambert



# MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Friends and Colleagues,*

*Welcome to the Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCDSS) Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report.*

*2024 was a busy year of stabilization and forward motion! We expanded our community outreach and education, grew our Children's Advocacy Center team, and saw a slight reduction in the turnover we've experienced in our Child Welfare program staff.*

*In fiscal year 2024, we implemented the first year of our most recent 3-year strategic plan, and we fully engaged our Management and Performance and Quality Improvement Teams to implement our strategic priorities. This strategic plan has as its primary goals:*

- Cultivating a diverse and compassionate organization that provides equitable access, services and opportunities to staff and the community.*
- Attracting, developing, and retaining staff with the skills, knowledge, and ability to work collaboratively to serve the community.*
- Supporting and promoting the health and well-being of staff, customers, and the community.*
- Continuing to serve our community as a high performing organization.*

*You will see throughout this report the ways in which we implemented strategies to achieve these goals. Of note, we continued our equity journey through grant-funded and other training, conversations on race, ongoing participation in the Talbot County Equity Coalition, information gathered through our annual equity organizational assessment, the development of an equity data dashboard, and the work of our Equity Team. This year, we used an inclusive process to develop an agency equity statement, which you will see later in this report. This journey, while at times difficult, is necessary if we are to serve all members of our community in a way that is kind, effective, and sensitive to individual needs. So, we learn, we grow, and we continue on this journey together.*

*As I say each and every year, we could not have accomplished what we did last year without the heroic work of the TCDSS team, every member of which contributed to our ability to achieve our mission and serve our most vulnerable neighbors in the Talbot County community. Nor could we have served our community without you, our many community partners, who demonstrate daily the depth of your*



*commitment to supporting us in achieving our vision of a diverse, interdependent, resilient and welcoming community in which people support themselves, their families and one another. You have our most sincere gratitude for the support you have provided year after year.*

*The following pages will provide more detail about the ways in which we have continued to meet individual and community needs with your help. I submit this for your review, acknowledging the hard work and commitment of the TCDSS staff with the support of our Social Services Board, Talbot Community Connections, the Talbot County Council and county government, and our many partners, including government agencies, non-profit and faith-based organizations, resource families and other generous individuals. It is with the deepest gratitude for each individual and community contribution that I offer this brief overview of our 2023 accomplishments.*

*Linda C. Webb, LCSW*



# ACHIEVEMENTS

- The Human Resources team at TCDSS was creative this year in their recruitment and retention activities with the goal of attracting and retaining a high performing workforce. Staff were provided with information about openings, how to assist others in connecting with human resources staff and accessing the state websites for application. The team increased the agency’s social media presence by posting flyers on the TCDSS Facebook page, college and university websites, and networking with existing staff. An employee referral incentive policy was developed, allowing for existing staff to become engaged in the recruitment process. TCDSS staff can now receive a financial incentive if the agency hires a candidate they referred. This incentive is designed specifically for positions deemed “difficult to fill”. There are specific criteria to meet in order to receive the financial incentive, which is disbursed over a one-year period.
- In June 2024, TCDSS partnered with the Talbot County Department of Emergency Services to conduct an emergency shelter exercise. TCDSS employees staff and operate emergency shelters opened to accommodate short-term emergency situations that require large numbers of county residents to leave their homes (e.g., long-term power outages). Emergency shelters are operated in partnership with many other organizations, including Talbot County Public Schools, Talbot County Health Department, Talbot Humane Society, and others. The shelter exercise provides an opportunity for TCDSS and community partner staff to understand the basics of emergency shelter layout and operations.
- TCDSS has been accredited by the Council on Accreditation since 2003. We successfully maintained our accreditation through our annual maintenance of accreditation submission of evidence in January 2024.



# COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- Beginning in November 2023, TCDSS expanded its partnership with the Talbot County Free Library by having staff in the Easton Branch each Monday afternoon to provide information on TCDSS programs and services and provide information on other community resources.
- Throughout the year, TCDSS partnered with the local NPR radio station WHCP 91.7 FM to run a series of radio interviews highlighting the programs and services offered by the agency. There were eight interviews aired covering the Empower Me program, Family Investment Programs/ Workforce Development, Child Protective Services and the Nurturing Parenting Program, TCDSS Community Outreach, Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center and Talbot Community Connections, Foster Care, Kinship and Adoptions, Adult Services and Long-Term Care, and Child Support and the Non-custodial Parent Employment Program. Each segment shared highlights of the programs, how to access them, and ways for the community to support the agency's work.
- TCDSS's Public Education and Advocacy Team (PEAT) participated in a wide variety of community events. These opportunities ranged from client-focused events, community education, recreational support, and community partnerships. An exciting new partnership was formed with the Talbot County Health Department Outreach Team. TCDSS worked alongside them at each of their health fairs hosted in underserved communities providing information and connection to community resources. These communities included rural areas, seniors, watermen, LGBTQ+, Latino and African American communities. In addition to community events, PEAT has remained committed to outreach in a variety of forms and has supported open houses for our Children's Advocacy Center, interviews with media, press releases, presentations at the County Council, and program-related presentations to individual community partners. PEAT completed 60 outreach events and presentations this year, in addition to the weekly outreach at the Talbot County Free Library and school-wide Empower Me programs. The increased use of social media remains a strategy to reach the community virtually and share resources, opportunities, education and event information.

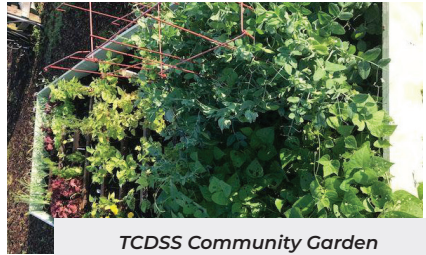


*Social Services Board Member  
Sue Browning helping with  
outreach at the annual  
Multicultural Festival in  
Easton, MD*

- Empower Me is a child abuse prevention program adopted in Talbot County in 2014 as a community initiative. TCDSS has remained the lead agency and has been diligent about carrying the message of personal safety. This year, all of the established school-based programs continued at Saints Peter and Paul Elementary and Middle School, Polaris Village Academy, Talbot County Public Schools (1st grade) and the Presbyterian Pre-School. A pilot was launched this year for regional DSS staff training. Two sessions were held, providing an opportunity for staff across the five Mid-Shore counties an opportunity to learn about the program. Staff from all five jurisdictions in all divisions of the local departments participated. Evaluations reflected that this outreach was very impactful and will be repeated on an annual basis. This year, Empower Me delivered presentations directly to 874 individuals, both children and adults. The Empower Me Steering Committee continued to provide education, resources and presentations throughout the county, as well as technical assistance to other organizations interested in implementing the program.
- The Family Investment Program increased its outreach and engagement in partnership with the Public Education and Advocacy (PEAT) team. Family Investment staff delivered presentations at Brooklett's Place Senior Center, the Easton library, and participated in multiple community resource fairs. In July, the Family Investment team hosted their 2nd annual resource day, which brought together nearly 30 community members and representatives from seven local service providers. Fun activities were available for children and lunch was provided. Attendees were able to spend time with each provider to learn about health, mental health, employment, and other services available in the community.
- TCDSS partnered with Dorchester County Health Department's (DCHD) mobile unit to provide health information and services to TCDSS staff and community members. The van was available to the community alternating Fridays throughout FY24 in the agency's parking lot. Services included take-home COVID-19 tests, take-home HIV testing, family planning supplies, and information on STI, HIV and Hepatitis-B testing and resources. The service ended in June of 2024 due to changes in funding.
- In 2024, the Wellness Committee developed a plan to offer an opportunity for staff to explore wellness in a unique way - through gardening! In alignment with the agency strategic plan, the team prioritized exploring ways in which employee wellness efforts could transfer to community wellness, directly supporting our customers. The committee entered into partnership with the Community Garden at the Presbyterian Church of Easton, renting two 4' by 8' raised beds to be planted and maintained through the 2024 growing season. The team harvested lettuce, onions, basil, oregano, sugar



peas, green beans, yellow beans, tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, and spinach. Staff also learned about companion planting, growing marigolds, zinnias and nasturtium to support nutrient health. Once harvested, the vegetables were placed in the TCDSS lobby for customers to enjoy. This was so well received by the customers that the garden couldn't keep up with the demand! Additional produce was provided by agency staff from their private home gardens to continue the mission of supporting our customers with access to free, local produce. Sixteen members of the agency took turns maintaining the community garden by planting, watering, weeding, watering, harvesting, watering (it was a hot and dry summer!) and sharing knowledge and resources.



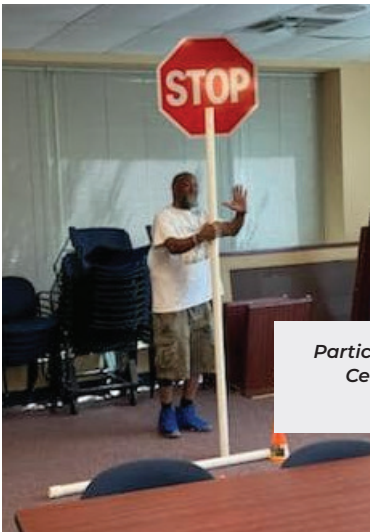
*TCDSS Community Garden  
2024 Wellness Project*

- TCDSS and the Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center recognized Child Abuse Awareness month in April 2024 in collaboration with the staff, the CAC multidisciplinary team, and the community. Blue pinwheels, which are a national symbol of child abuse prevention, were set up along sidewalks. Yard signs and a large banner were displayed outside of TCDSS providing statistical information about the number of children served at the Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center (TCCAC) this year. Two group photographs were organized highlighting these efforts and the photographs were posted on social media to support and promote child abuse prevention. Additionally, two TCCAC tours were offered to community organizations to educate community partners about child abuse, share the TCCAC mission, and showcase the new space and services offered by the TCCAC.
- The Out-of-Home services unit organized its first reunification event for National Reunification Month (June) at the Talbot Agricultural Center. The event included a crab feast and time for fellowship for families that were either reunified or cared for kin through Guardianship.



*National Reunification Month Event  
June 8, 2024*

- Summer youth employment is a supported employment opportunity for youth engaged in child welfare programs among the local Department of Social Services on the Mid-Shore. The program offers soft skills training, job placements, field trips, socialization, hourly pay and a closing ceremony. The local Departments partnered with Delmarva Community Services to serve the youth in fiscal year 2024. TCDSS had three youth participate in the program this year.
- TCDSS helped provide education excitement and resources about careers in human services through career and job fair events. Social work staff in the child welfare unit participated in two career fair events at Easton High School. One of the events was a traditional career fair; the other was for students with specific interests in the field. Social workers were able to attend and highlight opportunities in child welfare, as well as the need for new social workers to join the profession. Additionally, the agency hosted a large job fair with specific recruitment for a new program that was launched at the end of the fiscal year, adding ten new staff to the agency to support the SUN Bucks program.
- The TCDSS Non-custodial Parent Employment program (NPEP) hosted its first Flagger Certification class. This class was offered to participants in the NPEP program in Talbot County. Additionally, a drawing was held for a community member to participate to fill a last-minute vacancy. TCDSS was excited to offer this opportunity and provide residents with specialized training that can support gainful employment.



*Participant in the NPEP-sponsored Flagger Certification Program held at TCDSS  
June 2024*

## Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

In fiscal year 2024, Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCDSS) continued its equity journey in a number of ways.

First, we were selected to participate in a Child Welfare Study to Enhance Equity with Data (CW-SEED) case study supported by the federal Administration for Children and Families' Office of Planning, Research, and Evaluation (OPRE) in collaboration with the Children's Bureau. This study, conducted by Mathematica with the Center for the Study of Social Policy and the University of North Carolina School of Social Work, explored current and promising data practices that child welfare agencies and their partners are using to advance equity and support underserved populations. The case study involved staff and community partner interviews and a review of our practices and in-house equity database.



*Equity Committee event: Walking tour in Easton's historical "The Hill" community*

With the support of a Talbot Family Network Equity Grant, TCDSS developed an agency equity statement that boldly declares TCDSS's commitment to diversity, inclusion, belonging and justice internally and in the community. The grant helped fund a partnership with Dr. Nathalie Edmond of the Sage Wellness Group who supported agency staff in developing the statement, as well as an internal and external rollout plan. The process included multiple brainstorming and writing meetings. Staff provided input through virtual feedback sessions and/or surveys. Feedback from all of these forums was combined with that from the Social Services Board leading to a finalized statement in April 2024. The work this year concluded with the finalization of the plan to share the statement and begin to develop opportunities for action and accountability.

## Talbot County Department of Social Services

# Equity Statement

April 25, 2024

Talbot County Department of Social Services is committed to cultivating a diverse and compassionate antiracist organization that provides equitable access, services and opportunities to staff and the community. We will continue to be intentional in applying an equity perspective to our practices, policies, programs and relationships. It is important to fulfill our role in creating a just society by finding ways to disrupt systems of oppression, such as racism and income inequality, cultivating solidarity with those who have been historically marginalized and supporting individuals in realizing their own power to do the same.

We acknowledge that, while many human service agencies intend to be helpful, their impact has often led to the trauma and marginalization of communities of color and other historically minoritized groups. Through ongoing analysis of power dynamics and historical inequities, we are recognizing how our processes have caused harm to those who feel excluded, undervalued, or dismissed. We aim to address this by focusing on disrupting systems of oppression.

As an organization shaped by this history, we are advocating for more equitable systems with urgency. In our work we are centering age, neurodiversity, 2SLGBTQIA+, race/ethnicity, gender, citizenship, differing ability, environmental justice, religious inclusion, and socioeconomic status as a starting point. We specifically wish to continue connecting with and learning from the most marginalized members of our community to improve understanding and partnerships. We recognize that building trust takes time, and we commit to continually educating ourselves about diversity, equity and inclusion and our role in these contexts. We want to continue creating opportunities for full and active participation by both staff and the community. We will continue to review the impact that our existing and new strategies have on those we serve. We invite accountability, partnership, and constructive dialogue in order to create a space of belonging and safety for all.







# 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. In-Home Family Services works with families to provide stabilization services with the goal of minimizing risk and reducing future out-of-home placements.

In-home Family Service programs are designed to promote the safety and well-being of children and their families, enhance a parent's ability to create a safe and stable home environment, and maintain permanency while preserving family unity. In-home Family Services are designed to enable a child to remain safely at home while receiving intervention services. The In-Home Family Services unit conducts Risk of Harm and 30-day assessments, assessments of families of Substance Exposed Newborns, and a continuum of services designed to prevent out-of-home placements

### **From July 2023 through June 2024, we:**

- Held 21 Family Team Decision Making meetings, which convene family members during key child welfare decision points. The purpose is to establish a team to engage families and their support network to assess the family's needs and develop service plans.
- Provided Consolidated (CIHS) and Interagency Family Preservation (IFPS) to 14 families. Consolidated In-Home Services is a continuum, initiated following a CPS investigation, 30-day assessment, Risk of Harm or Substance Exposed Newborn assessment or a transfer from another ongoing child welfare service, such as Out-of-Home Placement. Interagency Family Preservation Services are offered to prevent an out-of-home placement of a child at imminent risk of removal.
- Conducted 15 Risk of Harm and 30-day assessments, which are assessments to determine if a child is safe and identify risk factors. Services are provided for families whose needs can be addressed within 30 days and to evaluate a family's need for ongoing services. Coordination and referral to community resources is an important aspect of this service.
- Conducted 6 Substance Exposed Newborn (SEN) assessments, which involve determining the safety and risk of harm to a substance exposed newborn and the interventions or services that may be needed. Services are developed to address the risks and needs of the entire family, reduce the number of

substance exposed newborns placed in out-of-home placements, increase the number of families engaged in community resources, and increase access to treatment resources and community resources across a broad continuum.

Child maltreatment allegations meeting investigative criteria can be addressed through two different pathways - investigative response or alternative response. The investigative response is the traditional forensic approach to the investigation of child maltreatment allegations in which a finding, or investigative determination, is made and a maltreater is identified. The alternative response is a collaborative approach, utilized for allegations of low-risk neglect and physical abuse allegations, in which the family's needs and circumstances are assessed, and services are implemented to reduce the risk of future maltreatment. In fiscal year 2024, we

- Responded to 63 reports of child abuse or neglect using an investigative response.
- Responded to 33 reports of child abuse or neglect using an alternative response.
- Received 541 reports of child abuse or neglect and 26 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.

#### **From July 2023 through June 2024, TCCAC:**

- Conducted 39 medical examinations for the children in the five Mid Shore counties (Talbot, Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, Dorchester) and provided a full chart review of 12 children's medical histories to assist investigators in identifying chronic abuse patterns.
- Conducted 98 forensic interviews for the Mid Shore counties.
- Provided Victim Advocacy services:
  - 213 children and non-offending caregivers served.
  - 744 victim advocacy sessions provided.
- Provided emergency financial assistance to 63 children and 27 caregivers to support stabilization after disclosure of abuse.
- Provided traditional mental health or alternative therapy services:
  - 59 children were referred to mental health providers.

- 46 sessions of Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy were provided to victims of child abuse.
- Received a conviction or plea deal on 8 cases.
- Because individualized options allow for individualized recovery, TCCAC also offers access to a variety of alternative therapies and services:
  - Two 8-week therapeutic art groups were held this year. Fourteen children between the ages of 13 and 18 years participated in the groups, which focused on building connections between the mind and body, included spiritual components of healing, and helped participants understand their feelings and create a path towards healing.
  - 1 caregiver retreat and 1 victim retreat were conducted.
- 24 members of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) were sent to 73 training sessions and 9 conferences focused on improving the investigations, prosecution, and treatment of child abuse. Members from all disciplines represented on the MDT were trained this year.
- 26 case staffings were held with the goal of increasing the sharing of information, ideas and resources and facilitating joint problem solving, networking, and the collaborative development of a specific plan to investigate and treat child abuse.
- To ensure the wellbeing of the MDT, a TCCAC mental health therapist provided 20 therapeutic sessions to members of the MDT.
- 1 team building event was held for 16 members of the MDT.





## *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).

### **From July 2022 through June 2024, we:**

- Provided foster care services to 19 youth
  - 9 of these youth were aged 14-20 years old, considered the transitional age.
  - 7 youth had their cases closed through the achievement of permanency:
    - Adoption (2)
    - Exited foster care at age 21 (2)
    - Reunification (2)
    - Relative/Kin Guardianship (1)
- Held 19 Enhanced Youth Transition Planning meetings using the Achieve My Plan (AMP) youth engagement model with transition aged youth in foster care. This enhanced planning process is designed to help youth aged 14 to 21 years of age prepare for a successful transition out of foster care.
- Collaborated with the Child Welfare Academy to help plan the Annual Resource Parent conference which was held virtually in April 2024. Additional virtual training events that were planned through other agencies and organizations were shared with resource families throughout the year.
- Held 5 Resource Parent Appreciation events.
- Offered a virtual monthly support group facilitated by Families Connected.



*Ellie enjoying her time with Santa at the 2023 TCDSS Resource Parent Holiday Party*

## *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 17 children from 12 families.
- Provided 299 overnight episodes of respite.



*TCDSS Resource Parents  
enjoying the Annual Regional  
Resource Parent Appreciation  
Crab Feast at Tuckahoe State  
Park in Ridgely, MD*

## *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.

- Held two 9-week sessions of parenting education at the Talbot Interfaith Shelter, continuing this valuable partnership.
- Held four 10-week virtual parenting education sessions.
- Served a total of 40 parents and 71 children from 12 families with a total of 382 units of service/personal contact in both program formats.

## *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.

The Adult Services unit consists of three different service delivery programs. The first - Adult Protective Services (APS) - provides investigative services to the elderly and vulnerable adults to protect them from abuse, neglect, self-neglect, and financial exploitation. Referrals for financial exploitation and self-neglect represent approximately 50% of referrals received.

The second - the Social Services To Adults (SSTA) program - is a case management service that provides assessment, service planning and connection to community resources. Finally, the In Home Aide Services (IHAS) program serves adults who need assistance with activities of daily living to remain in their own home and maintain independence when possible.

**From July 2023 through June 2024, we:**

- Conducted 165 Adult Protective Services (APS) investigations and assessments.
- Conducted two Adult Public Guardianship review board meetings, reviewing the cases of 9 individuals.
- Provided services to a monthly average of 12 APS cases, 11 IHAS cases, and 14 SSTA cases.
- Provided services that supported the ability of 96% of the adults served to remain safely in the community.
- Maintained one provider 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.

## From July 2023 to June 2024 we:

- Awarded \$5,050.00 in job retention bonuses to individuals for retaining employment for 30, 60 and 90 days after receiving benefits. Out of 21 participants, 6 retained employment for 60 days and 15 retained employment for 90 days.
- Served 21 households by paying a total of \$4,970.84 in past due water and wastewater bills through the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), which ended in March 2024.
- Completed 2,401 applications for income support.
- Issued a combined annual total of \$7,942,956.00 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to a monthly average of 4,175 individuals.
- Issued a combined annual total of \$391,331.00 in Temporary Disability Assistance (TDAP) benefits to a monthly average of 85 individuals.
- Served a monthly average of:
  - 759 individuals receiving Community Care Medical Assistance
  - 571 individuals receiving SSI Medical Assistance
  - 98 individuals receiving Long Term Care Medical Assistance
- Issued a combined annual total of \$536,400.00 to a monthly average of 42 adults and 123 children receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA).
- Issued a combined annual total of \$5,410.00 to a monthly average of 6 individuals receiving Public Assistance to Adults (PAA).
- Issued a total of \$4,116.93 in Emergency Assistance for Families with Children (EAFC) for 8 households.
- Issued a total of \$650.00 in Burial Assistance for 1 household.
- Answered a total of 6,802 calls on our customer service phone line.
- Provided interpreter services 968 times during the year.



*Family Investment Staff participating in community outreach at the 2023 Resource Expo*



# 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.

The Child Support program operates on the federal fiscal year (October 1 through September 30). This year, we collected and disbursed a total of \$2,505,619.00 in current child support and arrears.

Talbot County Child Support Performance Federal Fiscal Year 2024				
	Establishment of Paternity	Establishment of Child Support Order	Current Collections	Collections on Arrears
Goal	100.00%	92.51%	69.02%	73.92%
Actual	102.52%	92.71%	68.19%	72.03%

## 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), which provides one-on-one case management services to non-custodial parents by identifying, assessing, and addressing barriers to economic stability and employment. NPEP provides referrals to community partners for services in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, job readiness, and employment resources. Although the NPEP Coordinator position was vacant for 6 months, the following was accomplished between July 2023 and June 2024:

- Enrolled 10 parents.
- Served a total of 14 parents.
- Assisted in 7 full-time job placements.
- Collected \$15,697.77 in child support from parents participating in the program.
- Celebrated family and connection by hosting a trip to Jolly Rogers Splash Mountain and Amusement Park in Ocean City, MD for five families consisting of 3 adults and 9 children.



Community Outreach at 2024  
Annual BAAM Fest



### *Responsible Fathers Program*

The Responsible Fathers Program provides peer support and education sessions for men and women incarcerated at the Talbot County Detention Center with goals of reducing recidivism and strengthening family relationships. Responsible Fathers utilizes the evidence-based curriculum Inside Out Dad for men and Understanding DAD for women.

#### **From July 2023 through June 2024, we:**

- Held 67 classes for 13 men.
- Held 3 in-person graduations for the men's group.
- Held 32 classes for 4 women.
- Held 3 in-person graduations for the women's group.
- Conducted 1 community presentation.

# 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.

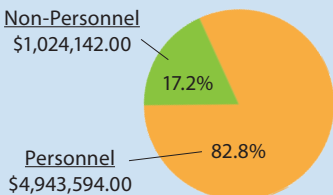
## From July 2023 through June 2024, we:

- Continued to provide IT equipment, training and support for employees both in the office and on telework status.
- Provided support to 72 individuals, including TCDSS employees and
  - 1 Talbot County Health Department employee who provides substance abuse screening and peer support onsite
  - 1 Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care employee by providing office space.
- Supported employees in continued professional development
  - 2 Employee obtained a Masters in Social Work license.
- Added and filled 10 state contractual position in the Family Investment unit.
- Added and filled 1 state merit position for a supervisor for the Children’s Advocacy Center.
- Recruited for 11 positions that were vacated.
- Filled 23 positions.
- Promoted 2 individuals to advance their careers and fill internal vacancies.
- Hired a former social work intern to fill one of our social work vacancies.

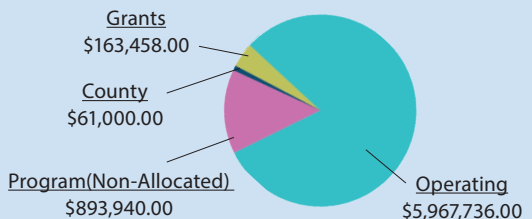


*40 years of Service awarded to Debbe Fairbank, Supervisor of Adult Services, by Director Linda Webb*

## FY2024 Operating Budget Personnel vs. Non-Personnel



## FY2024 Overall Budget



# PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (PQI)



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 PQI 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 PQI process. All staff members are encouraged to participate in PQI activities.

**From July 2023 through June 2024, our PQI Central Council and Performance Improvement Teams (PIT) accomplished the following:**

## *PQI-CENTRAL COUNCIL (PQI-CC)*

- Hosted its fifth annual training on the PQI process. This year the training was a part of the annual All Staff Development Day and included a presentation as well as an interactive game.
- Focused on supporting agency-wide engagement. All Staff meetings were held as a required in-person meeting beginning in January 2024.
- Focused on increased staff knowledge, comfort and use of the agency's short term planning process. An infographic to outline the process was developed and shared, and an agency activity leading up to the All Staff Development Day increased cross-program knowledge of short-term plans. Additionally, a new short term planning template was developed and approved for use in fiscal year 2025.
- Continued the enhanced PQI orientation process this year. The process includes group orientation, shadowing and individual meetings. New staff continued participating in agency orientations and in-person PQI-CC meeting observation as a part of new hire orientation. New members of the team completed individual orientation sessions prior to beginning their term.
- Updated the PQI-CC bylaws to create an additional Ex-Officio position for the LGA Assistant Director. The previously added finance member term ended.
- Surveys and distribution processes for each were reviewed and adapted by the PQI-CC team. Following the aggregation of survey response data, survey results were shared throughout the agency and process summary reports

outlining actions taken were used consistently. This year's surveys included the community partner survey, resource parent survey, customer survey, racial equity survey and employee engagement survey.

- The customer survey distribution process was changed significantly with the development and implementation of a year-long distribution process, which included increasing access by including paper, text, email and QR codes. This year's distribution gathered the largest number of responses to date. PQI-CC reviewed and helped program teams adjust to the new process.
- Led the oversight of the review and updating of all agency SOP's. This was a year-long project and will be completed annually moving forward.
- Reviewed and revised the Care to Share process, which provides employees with a way to share suggestions for improvement. The submission process was changed from paper to a Google form. Shortcuts to the form were uploaded onto all staff computers. The process for review remains unchanged and the responses and updates remain accessible on the Google Shared Drive. All submitted Care to Shares for this year have been resolved.
- Quarterly presentations on community resources were organized by Performance Improvement (PIT) teams and available to all agency staff, and feedback was reviewed by PQI-CC. This year, three quarterly presentations were delivered.
- PQI-CC supported the agency's LGA/Administration leadership in developing a plan to reconvene an LGA PIT team for FY25. Staff leadership was identified, and individual orientations and planning were conducted in advance of the launch in the new year.
- PQI-CC provided recommendations to Human Resources from PIT team collaboration on suggested questions and topics for new employee focus groups. The focus groups were a strategy to support the agency's strategic goals of retaining a highly qualified, high-functioning workforce by learning from those recently hired about their onboarding and orientation and their experiences as they integrated into our agency.



*Staff completing a wellness activity at the Annual All Staff Development Day 2024*





## *PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT TEAMS*

### **Family Investment Improvement Team (FIIT):**

- Increased access and efficiency of service to customers was a focus of the team. FIA created a group chat with receptionists to increase timely responses to customer calls and walk-ins. Additionally, a receptacle with applications was placed outside of the building for access by customers outside of office hours in response to information gathered in the annual community partner survey.
- TCA program compliance and enhancements were explored with multiple strategies implemented. The team reviewed compliance data regularly and identified areas for improvement when compliance rates were not met. This included analysis of incentives for TCA job retention, resulting in a significant increase in job retention after 90 days.
- TCA volunteer opportunities were enhanced. An individual receiving TCA entered a volunteer placement at TCDSS and then advanced to full-time employment. Additionally, outreach to community partners such as the community centers and Habitat for Humanity were explored to increase volunteer placement opportunities.
- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) dashboard data was collected for TCA programs and reviewed in Family Investment unit meetings. Additional areas for data collection for FY25 were identified and plans for collection were developed.

- Holiday food and gift matching was completed, serving 184 individuals and 4 families this year. All referrals were matched.
- The team supported the agency's efforts to improve the onboarding process for new employees. They developed questions for future new employee focus groups as well as an acronym list to be used by all staff.
- The team strategized how to best collect customer survey responses in the new year-long distribution model. This included adding links in email signatures, providing paper copies, posting QR code signs in the interview rooms and regular review of FIA response rates.
- The team prepared for the addition of 10 new positions to operate the new SUN Bucks program requiring reorganization of staff, a team building focus and identifying needs for future internal cross-program learning.

### **Services Excellence Team (SET):**

- To support retention of new staff, a process was developed to provide welcome baskets to new hires as well as a one-on-one peer introduction to the opportunities for PQI involvement at the agency. This has increased participation of new staff in the PQI process and administrative teams.
- The team supported the agency's efforts to improve the onboarding process for new staff. They developed questions for future new employee focus groups as well as an acronym list to be used for all staff.
- Retention of licensed social workers was supported by continued reimbursement of licensing fees and associated costs. The team organized training to meet the Ethics and Implicit Bias continuing education requirements.
- Building the workforce remains a top priority for this team due to declining workforce in the field of social work. This year the SET team was able to participate in two events to promote the awareness of the social work field and provide education and connection with future students at a local high school. Social Work interns have been maintained and exploring partnership with community college programs has been identified as an additional recruitment strategy.
- Staff cohesion was identified as an area of needed attention. The team organized team lunches and small group after-hours gatherings. Combined unit gatherings were planned to increase staff connection across units. The team remains committed to carrying on and prioritizing these efforts in FY25.
- The team identified a need for increased knowledge, review of data and practice shifts related to equity. This year the team discussed what the needs were, identified barriers and surveyed staff for setting, ideas and comfort. The team shared recommendations with leadership and will be moving forward with implementing plans for enhanced equity learning in FY25.

- Challenges in internal case transfers within the Services unit were identified. The team developed a subcommittee and drafted a procedure and accompanying forms to enhance the current practice. It is under review with leadership and is projected to be finalized and implemented in FY25.
- The Kinship Navigator presented “Building Connections” to Services staff to outline the Kinship Navigation and Family Finding services available.
- Increasing public awareness of the needs and experiences of vulnerable adults remained a priority for the team. Presentations on financial exploitation were provided in the community with multiple partners. Outreach increased in the Bay Hundred area, including partnerships with the Mobile Food Bank, Talbot County Health Fairs and participation in the First Tuesdays program in Tilghman.

### **Child Support Improvement Team (CSIT):**

- The team reviewed critical updates, legislation and practice changes monthly. They underwent the transition to the Way2Go card and prepared for the October 2024 implementation of HB435, which involved the modification of child support orders for incarcerated obligors.
- The use of the Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP) program was impacted for part of the year due to staff vacancy. During the interim, the team developed a plan to refer clients to the regional RISE program to minimize the impact of the vacancy on those served. Once the NPEP position was filled, referrals and services resumed.
- The early intervention process was reviewed, and it was determined that no changes were needed, and the process continues to be effective at achieving the intended outcomes of diversion of non-custodial parents from court interventions.
- The team supported the agency’s efforts to improve the onboarding process for new staff. They developed questions for future new employee focus groups as well as an acronym list to be used for all staff.
- Additional training needs to support understanding equity were identified in the FY22 Systems Analysis. Staff in the CSIT team committed to deeper learning this year. They reviewed and discussed the 1619 Project Podcast to enhance their knowledge in the areas of history and equity.
- Wellness was a key focus area for CSIT and included regular sharing of self-care plans, wellness walks, participation in team wellness learning opportunities and individual participation in the Wellness 360 program. Members shared their learning with peers to get the maximum benefit during monthly meetings. The team tracked a total of 748 staff walks for the year!

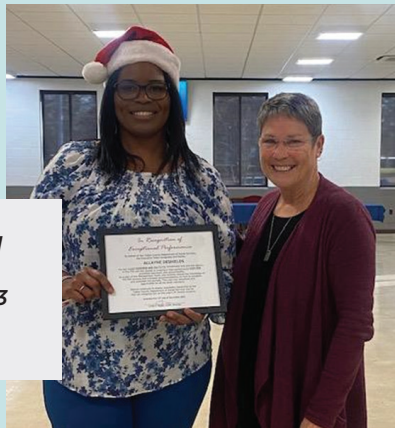
*TCDSS staff gathered together to observe the natural phenomena - 2024 Lunar Eclipse*



*TCDSS staff giving back through community "Empty Bowls" project to help support the elimination of food insecurity in Talbot County*



*Allayne Burke awarded the Annual Executive Team Award at the 2023 All Staff Holiday Party*







*TCDSS Resource Family participating in Annual Talbot County Fishing Rodeo*



*TCDSS Resource Parent attendees at the Car Seat and Infant Massage training*





*Resource Parents attending the “watch Party” for the Annual Resource Parent Conference 2024*



*Resource Parent Appreciation Event July 2023 “Shorebirds Night!”*



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