

cyfd



Children Youth & Families Department

Progress &
Impact Report
2019-2021





Message from Secretary Blalock

When the Governor's Transition Team first approached me about being nominated as Secretary of the Children, Youth and Families Department in New Mexico, I was flattered to be considered as someone who devoted twenty years on the legal advocacy side of improving the lives of children and youth. We all knew that the task of transforming child welfare, juvenile justice and behavioral health systems was daunting. Investigations were backlogged, staff morale was low, the mental health system was shattered, there were too many children living away from their parents and relatives growing up in institutions, without a stable, permanent family not to mention looming lawsuits, obsolete computers and outdated technology systems.

Thanks to the dedicated staff and supporters of CYFD, I am proud to report that these issues have been addressed with many being resolved and some still being fixed. It is my privilege to work with so many talented, creative people.

I believe that tragedy reveals character. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen people come together to help each other across divisions, communities, and departments. I am pleased to say that CYFD has been a big part of this effort, working steadfastly and sometimes outside of our comfort zones to do what needs to be done to help. Our staff is helping New Mexicans come through the pandemic while also helping CYFD become stronger.

The following pages of this report describe the progress and impact of our work over the last two and a half years. Much more needs to be done to improve and transform CYFD, but the accomplishments have set us on a course to help New Mexico's children, youth and families to not just survive, but to thrive.

August 2021

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Executive Summary

As a part of the new Lujan Grisham Administration, Children, Youth and Family Department (CYFD) leaders made a commitment to address several urgent priorities. Significant progress has been made to address these priorities along with other important strategic goals, including:

- **Establishing additional safety measures** to help prevent child fatalities including expanding SafeSleep campaigns given that three fourths of child fatalities are due to the lack of safe sleeping arrangements.
- **Developing new protocols** to help staff better determine the risk levels of abuse and neglect inside a home; providing new training for staff and families to identify potential child/youth suicides; and adopting evidence-based safety programs that are now a part of CYFD's standard practices.
- **Reducing the backlog of investigations** as a critical step to support both the safety and well-being of the children and youth who come to the attention of Protective Services. In July 2021, 95% of the pending investigations of child abuse and neglect reports were conducted on-time, at or under 45 days for completion. This compares to only 37% of the pending investigations being on-time in January 2019 when the new administration took office.
- **Increasing the number of children and youth in kinship care placements** as required by federal and state law, including increasing the number of initial placements with kin from 4% in January of 2019 to 40% currently.

- **Making tangible progress focused on rebuilding the community-based mental health services delivery system** for children including substantial increases in high fidelity wraparound, infant mental health, and respite services and launching or re-launching a number of services including multisystemic therapy, mobile crisis intervention, and functional family therapy.
- **Launching extended foster care** with more than 160 participants to date, a 95% uptake rate, and 100% of participants are in stable housing.
- **Decreasing the number by more than half** of young people placed out-of-state in congregate care settings.
- **Overseeing emergency food and shelter needs** during COVID-19 pandemic for the state of New Mexico by providing more than 2.1 million pounds of food and more than 47,000 nights of medical shelter.
- **Making progress on replacing CYFD's antiquated, twenty-three-year-old data system** by launching two modules in early 2021 with an anticipated full replacement by October 2022 while also phasing out old technology that was a security risk.
- **Reducing vacancy rates for protective services front line worker positions** by half, from 23% in January 2019 to 15.8% in January 2021, and as of July 1, these rates have been reduced to 11%.

TRANSFORMING CYFD WITH A STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AND PRIORITIES

With an ambitious plan for New Mexico's children, youth and families outlined by Governor Lujan Grisham, her key cabinet secretaries came together in the first quarter of 2019 to solidify a strategic planning process. Each cabinet department and clusters of related agencies developed and implemented strategies under the umbrella of "Working Together for New Mexicans."

The Departments of Health (DOH), Human Services (HSD), Aging and Long-Term Services (ALTSD) and Children, Youth and Families worked collaboratively to develop a cross-agency strategic plan to complement the individual department-wide approaches.

The strategic planning process included a listening tour across the state among a wide range of stakeholders, service providers, community and Tribal leaders, families and young people who have experienced protective services, foster care, behavioral health programs and the juvenile justice system. The resulting strategic plan is built on four "pillars" of work: 1) *more appropriate placements* for children and youth, 2) *prevention* of institutionalization, homelessness and trauma 3) *optimization* of data, accountability and funding, and 4) *staffing* to lower vacancy rates, expand workforce development and increase staff training.

CYFD also faced a series of lawsuits by national and local child advocate organizations seeking a total overhaul of the agency, which influenced its strategic planning and priorities.

Throughout 2019, as part of a settlement agreement in the case of *Kevin S., et al. v. Blalock, et al.*, CYFD worked with the plaintiffs to formulate changes consistent with its strategic planning goals. The lawsuit was filed in 2018 before the new administration took office. The agreement was reached in March of 2020 and establishes a process for CYFD and the New Mexico Human Services Department to improve the current systems of care and outlines a set of implementation targets and outcomes.

CYFD PROGRESS & IMPACT: 2019-2021

The full version of this report describes the changes and advancements CYFD has made over the past two and a half years, examines the impact this work has had on children, youth and families in New Mexico and explains why these activities are so important.

The Timeline and Milestones section is a snapshot of the changes that have led to improving CYFD's three divisions that are working directly with children, youth and families: Protective Services, Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health Services along with the Office of Children's Rights that has been expanded to address concerns about the operations of the agency.

Below is a summary of activities and select highlights from this report.

IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR OUR CHILDREN, YOUTH, AND FAMILIES

Increasing Safety and Reducing the Investigation Backlog:

Over the past two years, CYFD has been working to implement a series of reforms to help prevent a tragedy before it happens. Of these, among the most important is examining the clusters of child deaths. CYFD's assessment includes tracking the causes of child fatalities between 2014 and 2020. For all children with CYFD involvement who died due to unnatural causes:

- Babies from birth to age one represented more fatalities than any other age group, with 77% of these deaths resulting from a lack of safe sleeping arrangements.
- Fatalities in the 11 to 17 age range were caused mainly by guns (43%) or suicides (38%).
- New Mexico ranks slightly below the national average of child abuse related fatalities, at 2.31 per 1,000, compared to 2.5 per 1,000 deaths nationwide. The New Mexico DOH reported that 11 children died of abuse or neglect in 2019.

Numerous steps are being taken to help keep our children and youth safe, including expanding campaigns for SafeSleep and suicide prevention..

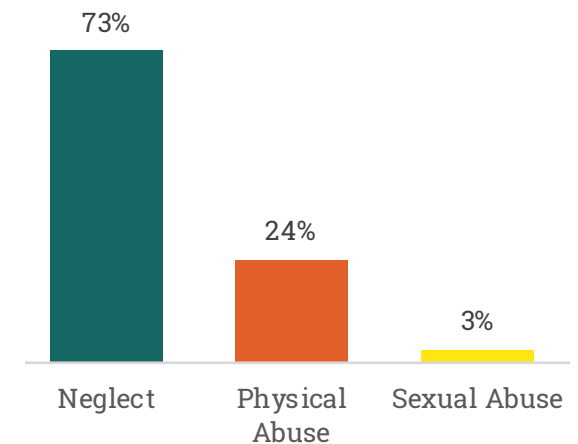
Reducing Backlogged Investigations of Child Abuse and Neglect:

A timely and high-quality investigation of a child abuse and neglect report is the foundation of CYFD's protective services.

In January 2019, 3,579 (63%) of the 5,668 pending investigations were considered overdue and pending for 45 days or more. Within two years, these point-in-time numbers dropped to 97 (5%) overdue investigations of the 1,864 pending investigations in July 2021.

During FY 2021 (between July 2020 and June 2021), there were 39,324 statewide reports of abuse and neglect resulting in 19,013 accepted as screen-in to be investigated and 20,308 that were screened out for reasons ranging from insufficient information to investigate, referral to another agency, lacking an allegation of risk of abuse or neglect. Of the 19,013 investigated cases in FY 2021, 4,624 (24.3%) were substantiated and 14,389 (75.7%) were unsubstantiated.

For the substantiated allegations in FY 2021, 73% were for neglect, 25% for physical abuse and 3% for sexual abuse.



The reporting trends in New Mexico follow those of most states in that a high proportion of reports (70 to 80%) are unsubstantiated. Likewise, a high proportion (70 to 80%) of reports are about neglect which in many cases can be remedied with appropriate services and supports to keep children safe and families together.

EXPANDING PREVENTION PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

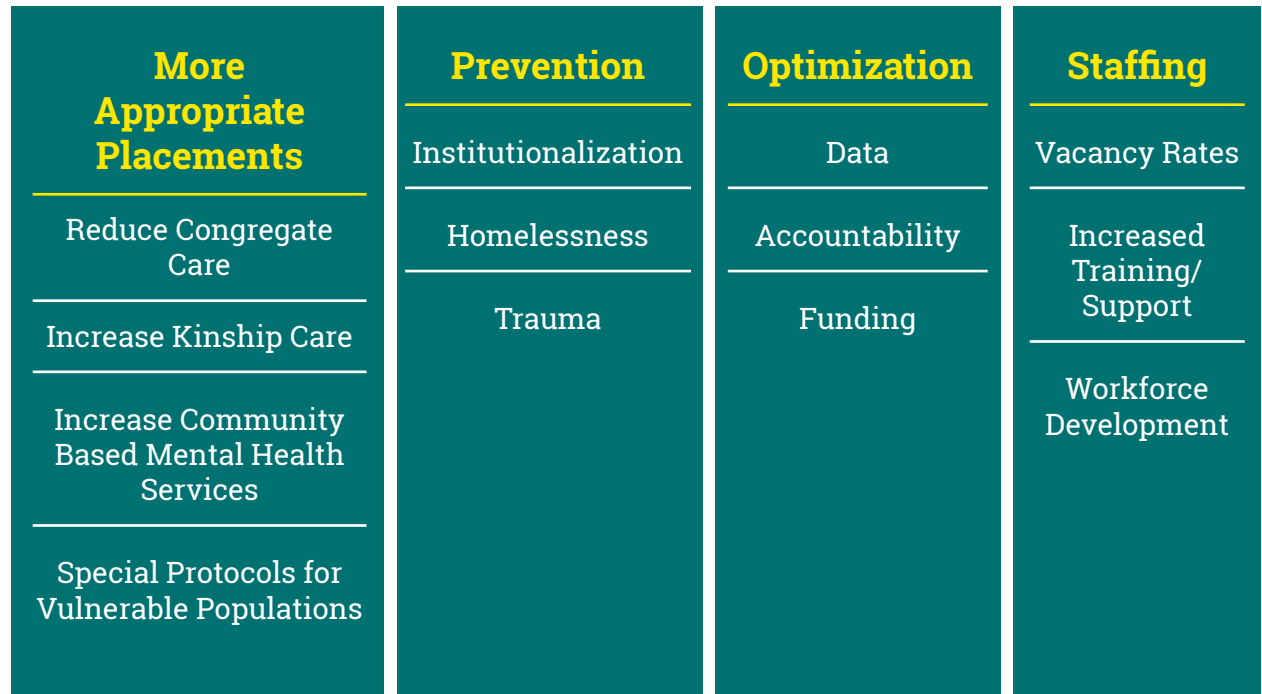
One of four pillars in CYFD's strategic plan is *Prevention*, with three key targets: preventing trauma, homelessness and institutionalization.

Increasing Child Abuse Prevention Services: Community-based agencies throughout the state have contracts with CYFD to provide Community Based Prevention, Intervention and Reunification (CBPIR) services to children, youth and their families. As of January 2021, contracts are in effect in all counties statewide to serve birth parents, relatives and extended family caregivers; families pursuing guardianship or adoption; and resource parents.

Ending Homelessness: Housing is a priority resource during a youth's transition to adulthood. Without stable, secure and affordable housing, other efforts to increase overall quality of life for young people are generally ineffective. Fostering Connections is the vehicle for engaging young people in a relational way based on their personal experiences in the child welfare system. It has become an important tool for eliminating homelessness among youth who would normally age out of foster care at 18. All participating youth are in stable housing.

Responding to Domestic Violence: In 2020, responsibilities for New Mexico's domestic violence programs were transferred to CYFD's Behavioral Health Division. These programs provide services to more than 10,500 residents each year who are affected by domestic violence, including survivors, perpetrators and their children. CYFD works with 46 non-profit and governmental organizations throughout the state to provide shelter and support services to families and individuals in need.

Strategic Plan Foundation



IMPROVING COMMUNITY-BASED MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

New Mexico experienced a major shake-up among its providers for community mental health services.

These actions left a shattered mental health system across New Mexico, as many providers were forced to close or dramatically reduce services to the children, youth and parents who most needed help.

At the beginning of the new administration in 2019, CYFD leaders focused and made progress on several goals by the end of FY 2021 by:

- Providing community-based access to services with a higher enrollment for wraparound supports;
- Increasing efforts in training and coaching;
- Expanding respite as a flexible family support service that provides short-term, temporary care;
- Adding mobile crisis teams which can be dispatched to any location based on the needs of the community;
- Increasing capacity for intensive family and community-based treatment utilizing Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) to address and mitigate serious behaviors, including possible substance abuse issues;

- Implementing Functional Family Therapy (FFT) as a short-term intervention and prevention program that offers in-home family counseling designed specifically to address problematic behaviors from a relational or family-based perspective; and
- Launching NMConnect to provide free 24-hour crisis and non-crisis support and access to behavioral health professionals who can text or talk via phone with individuals needing a listening ear or referrals to longer-term support. The app links users to the New Mexico Crisis Access Line (NMCAL), which provides safety net services statewide.

Intensifying Wraparound Services: Over the years, too often children and adolescents experiencing serious emotional disturbances and trauma have had very complicated plans from several different public and private agencies. Today, High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) provides assistance that will help a family coordinate their services and supports in a way that empowers them to meet their individual, self-defined needs.

As of the end of FY 2021, 281 children or youth are actively enrolled in HFW with an anticipated capacity of 356 clients. Sites providing Wraparound services have increased by more than 100% since 2018. Outcomes include reduced costs of care versus out-of-home placements, increased behavioral and emotional strengths and improved clinical and functional behavior among other positive results.

IDENTIFYING THE RIGHT PLACEMENT AT THE RIGHT TIME

Federal law requires that foster care placements must be in the child's best interest and in the least restrictive setting possible. Federal and state laws also require a preference for youth to be placed with relatives, either through the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 or New Mexico statute.

An important goal for CYFD has been to increase options for more appropriate placements that are safe and provide for the well-being and the right level of care to meet the needs of each individual child or young person.

Increasing Kinship Care: Relatives are an important part of CYFD foster care and juvenile justice systems – both in supporting children and youth that come into its custody and enabling them to avoid being placed in group settings or institutionalization.

With new procedures, additional resources and improved staff training, CYFD has increased the percent of children and youth placed with relatives, as a first placement, from 5.7% in the last quarter of FY 2018 (April to June) to 39.2% in the last quarter of FY 2021.

In New Mexico, CYFD recently strengthened a policy to notify Tribes of any investigation and potential removal of a child from their parents so that the Tribal leaders can be a part of the decision-making process.

Resource Families for Foster Care: CYFD developed the designation of resource families, which include foster parents, foster-to-adopt families and kinship caregivers. Resource parents are critical partners for our Protective Services workers because they provide care for children who cannot live with their parents, including a supportive role in reunification by mentoring birth parents on how to control anger; stop dangerous, violent behavior; and become better parents.

Resource parents are not substitute mothers or fathers; rather, their role is to work with birth parents and other relatives to provide a safe home environment and build quality, lasting relationships with the child, young person and their families. The Protective Services Division recruits, trains, licenses and supports resource families for placement of children in foster care, with an emphasis on placements with relatives.

Reducing the Need for Congregate Care and institutionalization: Therapeutic, in-patient, institutional placements are generally the most expensive and highest level of care for both physical and mental health supports. The key for New Mexico's children and youth who do need higher levels of care than what can be provided in a home by birth, foster or resource parents is to ensure they get the appropriate care for the right amount of time to best help them heal from trauma caused by abuse and neglect.

In New Mexico, CYFD has been working toward a "continuum of care" model that recognizes that every child and young person needs and deserves a caring, loving family to keep them safe and support their emotional, physical and social development. Residential treatment is an important component in a continuum of care, especially if a child or young person has a significant psychiatric diagnosis. But residential treatment should be a customized, therapeutic, short-term stabilization intervention designed to support children and youth so they can function successfully within families and receive outpatient services.

Bringing Our Youth Back Home with Fewer Out-of-State Placements: When the community behavioral health care system in New Mexico was dismantled in 2013, many of the critical services children and youth required for their emotional well-being disappeared across the state. Similarly, juvenile justice facilities reached full capacity, unable to accommodate more youth offenders. These and other conditions led to CYFD looking to other states for appropriate therapeutic, residential care. Two years ago, the new CYFD leadership conducted a review of the numerous out-of-state placements and took action to find homes locally that provided appropriate placement along the continuum of care for many of our children and youth.

Wraparound services have also helped ensure that customized programs are provided in New Mexico for children and youth needing specially tailored support and has resulted in reducing the need for out-of-state placements, allowing greater access to community-based services.

Updated policies now include ensuring children and youth in foster care maintain close relationships with their birth parents and other family members through regular visits and interactions as reunification efforts are underway.

Identifying Families for Children and Youth Waiting for Adoption: When a final determination is made by New Mexico's Family Court that a child or young person cannot be safely reunited with their parent(s), guardian or custodian, or if parents agree to a voluntary termination of their parental rights, CYFD's Protective Services Division works to identify an adoptive family or adult that will meet the child's individual unique needs and provide a nurturing, stable home environment.

In FY 2018, 311 adoptions were finalized. In FY 2019 the number was increased to 362, while in FY 2020 there were 331 adoptions and in FY 2021, 336 adoptions were finalized.

More Appropriate Placements for Special Populations: As New Mexico's population continues to diversify by race, gender identification, culture and lifestyles, so too must CYFD regularly re-examine its placement policies and procedures to ensure sensitivity across all divisions to myriad related issues. Still other emerging issues, such as increased awareness of the impact of sex trafficking, require CYFD to deploy new tools and systems to support victims.

Over the next year, CYFD is launching several new initiatives to address the needs of special populations including for LGBTQIA2S+ youth, victims of sex trafficking and undocumented children and youth.

On the Horizon for Best Placements with Quality Parenting: CYFD recently joined the Quality Parenting Institute (QPI) of the Youth Law Center, a national movement for foster care change, made up of a network of states, counties and private agencies committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships so they can thrive and grow. A launch event was held in May 2021, with full implementation underway now that the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

PARTNERING WITH TRIBES AND PUEBLOS WHILE ENHANCING RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRIBAL LEADERS

The federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 recognized that Indian nations, Tribes and Pueblos are sovereign nations and therefore self-governing entities with their own judicial structure, language, and unique customs and traditions.

CYFD has historically had a challenging and difficult relationship with Tribal leaders given that many times children and youth who experienced foster care were placed in non-Native adoptive households. Often times the placement of a Native American child or young person did not follow a Tribal customary adoption, which allows the Tribe to consider transferring custody of Native children to the care and protection of adoptive parents but does not terminate the rights of birth parents.

In 2019, the new administration conducted a full examination of the state's foster care and adoption policies to test compliance with federal and state ICWA. As part of the initiative, a new Office of Tribal Affairs was established and headed by the Director of Tribal Affairs.

Great strides have been made in rebuilding and securing government-to-government relationships with the Tribes and Pueblos of New Mexico.

PERCENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH LIVING WITH RELATIVES AS FIRST PLACEMENT
(Quarterly Reports of All Removals from Parent's Home)

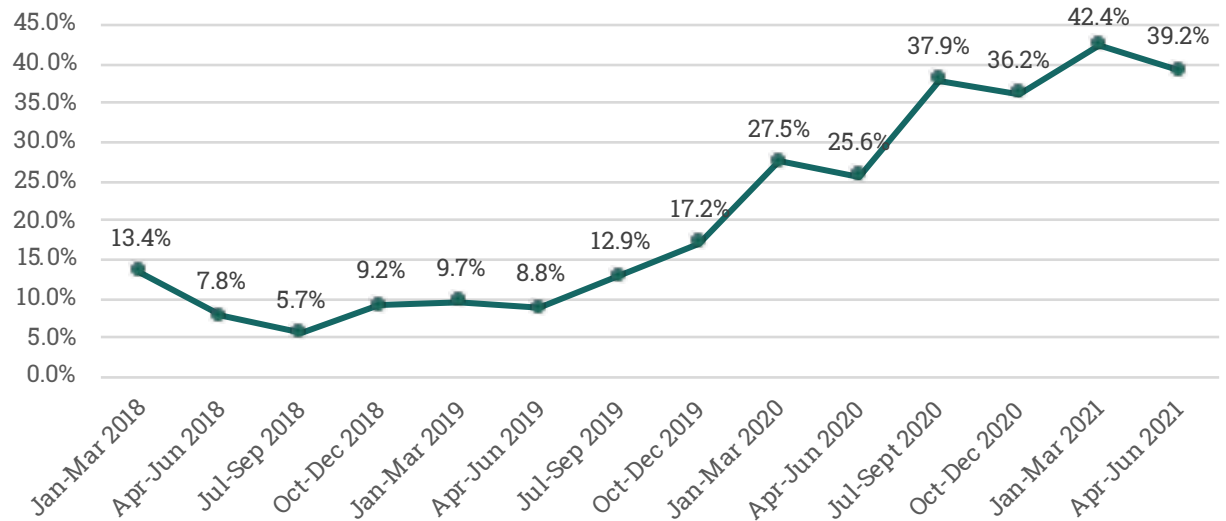


Chart: Data from FACTS/Results Oriented Management (ROM)

As the result of the adoption of many new policies and programs, many advancements have been made, including:

- Developing partnerships between the State of New Mexico, Tribes and Pueblos, off-reservation entities and federal agencies that mutually affect positive policy and practice outcomes for all Indian children and families.
- Working to ensure CYFD compliance with the State Tribal Collaboration Act and with Native American provisions in New Mexico law.
- Continuing to prioritize our commitment to the State Tribal Collaboration Act and CYFD reaching the ICWA standards of care.

CYFD has worked in collaboration with Tribes, Pueblos and the courts to create an ICWA Court within the Second Judicial District that now has a dedicated Hearing Officer, District Court Judge, Children's Court Attorney and Permanency Planning Unit.

SUPPORTING OLDER YOUTH

"Aging out" refers to a young person in the foster care system when they reach a certain age (18 years old in most states) and, therefore, are no longer considered eligible for supports from the state. This can result in the loss of housing, health care coverage and connections to supportive relationships for many young adults who are ill-prepared to support themselves in the adult world.

In 2019, 85 youth aged out of New Mexico's foster care system without the benefit of additional services. Fortunately, because CYFD acquired additional resources, and due to changes in New Mexico law, the situation changed for the better over the next year. By 2020, 95 foster youth in New Mexico, ages 18 and up, were able to benefit from extended services with access to health care, housing, food and other basic necessities.

By mid-year 2021, there are more than 160 young adults enrolled in extended foster care through age 21. In July 2020, CYFD launched Fostering Connections, New Mexico's first extended foster care program that expanded eligibility for the age of support and services from age 18 to age 21.

The extended supports now available to young adults include guaranteed housing, connection to community-based behavioral health supports, job assistance, food access and money for college.

HELPING FAMILIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Just about a year after the Lujan Grisham Administration took office and as a CYFD strategic plan was being implemented, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the United States.

Within days of the first COVID-19 cases being reported in New Mexico on March 11, 2020, CYFD was able to quickly shift communications and information services functions from in-person to online formats through regular telephone calls, video conferencing, texting and emailing via mobile phones and computers.

During the pandemic, improvements in technology resulted in safe, secure remote work for 80% of CYFD staff. Prior to the pandemic there were no employees working remotely. New protocols were effective in increasing the number of visits for children and youth in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems by using remote technology throughout the pandemic.

CYFD believes that all children and youth need a family and that they do best growing up in a family.

OPTIMIZING TECHNOLOGY, PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY AND SECURING NEW FUNDING

An important element of CYFD's strategic plan is the pillar on Optimization – to make the best and most effective use of available resources to improve efficiency for processing information and data, as well as respond to requests from the public on sensitive issues.

New Mexico Foster Child and Youth Bill of Rights:

Prior to 2019, if a child or young adult was being served by CYFD, few options were available to them to share concerns, grievances or complaints. In FY 2020, CYFD developed and adopted the New Mexico Foster Child and Youth Bill of Rights that includes a list of 29 specific rights extended to every child and youth in custody.

The CYFD Office of Children's Rights (OCR) was launched in January 2021, as part of the Governor's vision for better serving New Mexico's children and families. The core function of the OCR is to ensure the most vulnerable system-involved youth are receiving all available legal and financial entitlements and supports.

In 2020 through mid-2021, extensive changes were made to CYFD's internal procedures and protocols to create a Youth Grievance process. Internal procedures were completed in May 2021.

Addressing Constituency Concerns: The CYFD Constituency Office addresses constituent concerns via telephone, letters and referrals from the Protective Services Director's Office, Office of the Secretary and Office of the Governor. The liaisons who staff the office are primarily responsible for ensuring that complaints and concerns are addressed in a timely manner. Between June 1, 2020, and May 31, 2021, PSD received a total of 769 constituent concerns. This was a significant decrease from the previous year, when 985 were received.

Optimizing Technology: By 2018, many of the technology tools being used by CYFD were outdated and causing serious problems with access to accurate information as well as staff inefficiencies. CYFD's data system was 23 years old and written in COBOL, an archaic programming language so old that it was difficult to find contractors or staff who could make modifications or changes. CYFD's project to replace this data system had stalled and made little to no progress for almost two years prior to 2019.

By May of 2020, CYFD's IT Department, under new leadership, phased out 1,500 computers that were on average eight years old with outdated operating systems.

CYFD's project to replace its data system was completely overhauled under this administration. In early 2019, CYFD switched from trying to build a more costly custom system and a request for \$30 million in funding to do it, to following the advice of the Legislative Finance Committee and its own Project Team with an approach to purchase off-the-shelf software – a cheaper and faster fix to replace its aging data system. CYFD also created an Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) and within that office a dedicated project management team to lead the development of the database replacement.

The Project Team integrated the data system replacement process with the larger HHS 2020 project to create an integrated database, consisting of interoperable modules across multiple state departments in New Mexico with oversight and collaboration with HSD, Department of Information Technology (DOIT) and others. CYFD also contracted with a third-party vendor to provide Independent Verification and Validation (IV+V) services, which identify and assess risk so that the Project Team can focus on fixing those risks and increasing the likelihood of overall success of the project.

The Project Team successfully launched a pilot of two urgently needed modules, Licensing and Placement, in the fall of 2020 with full implementation statewide in winter 2020.

Improving Data Reporting and Tracking System:

As part of its data system replacement project, CYFD has partnered with Axxum, a premier provider of network communications and IT security solutions, to initiate an organizational change management (OCM) transformation throughout the agency. The agency endeavors to create a more responsive child well-being system to improve outcomes for all New Mexico children and their families. By replacing the existing case management system, the organization can better support a person-centric and “no wrong door” approach to human services.

Maximizing Funding Opportunities: When the new CYFD leadership team began to assess financial resources for existing programs and grant opportunities for new ones, they learned that New Mexico was far behind other states in securing additional federal and private funding beyond what the state legislature had allocated.

Over the past two years, CYFD has worked diligently across all its divisions to maximize federal dollars including allowances for claiming extended foster care for young people older than 18 years. Housing, transportation and other basic supports can now be covered by the additional dollars provided to the states.

BUILDING A STRONG WORKFORCE

A diverse, experienced and skilled workforce is essential to successful child welfare outcomes. One of the CYFD pillars has been workforce development through improved training, support and professional opportunities for advancement. These efforts were quickly converted into virtual trainings to allow for continued training under COVID work-from-home conditions.

By April 2020, Peer Learning Networks were launched for employees seeking to improve their child welfare practices, and mandatory coaching was established for all staff. And later in 2020, implementation started for an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) assessment for employees using coaching services tailored to each position within CYFD.

Trauma-Informed Training and Supports: Over the past two years, strategies for addressing trauma to help children and youth adversely affected by it have taken on greater priority for CYFD, including those implemented by the Behavioral Health, Juvenile Justice and Protective Services Divisions. As an agency, CYFD continuously works to provide trauma-responsive training, principles and practices that promote a sense of safety and well-being for children and youth.

Reducing Turnover and Vacancy Rates: Vacancy rates for protective services line worker positions have been cut in half, from 23% in January 2019 to 15.8% on January 1, 2021, and as of July 1, these rates have been reduced to 11%. A stable workforce, especially in Protective Services, is extremely important for children and youth who experience foster care.

Next Steps and Continued Priorities: In addition to evaluating ongoing initiatives, CYFD will continue implementing other key strategies, such as expanded flex schedules and more partnerships with state universities to help recruit and train qualified staff. CYFD continues to reinforce that the agency leaders want to hear from staff about how to improve operations in a manner that makes employees feel safe and comfortable in delivering feedback. The department also provides whistleblower protection training to staff, a training that is required for all management employees.

The full report gives more detailed information about each of the items listed above and those listed in the Timeline and Milestones section.

Timeline and Milestones: 2019

JANUARY

New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham is inaugurated.

FEBRUARY

Brian Blalock is confirmed as Secretary of the New Mexico Children, Youth and Families Department.

MARCH

The new Administration conducts a full review of its foster care and adoption policies to test compliance with federal and state Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) requirements. Additionally, a new Office of Tribal Affairs is established with additional staff to include a director-level position.

MARCH

CYFD identifies 3,439 (65% of pending investigations) backlogged investigations of child abuse and neglect cases. In response, a plan is established to triage and prioritize cases in order to decrease and ultimately eliminate the backlog. By June 2021, the number has been reduced to 97 cases (5% of pending investigations).

MARCH

In response to an unprecedented surge of migrant and refugee crossings at New Mexico's border with Mexico, CYFD works with the city of Deming to provide supports to families. Workers are trained in identifying child sexual exploitation and how best to provide direct support for services. Most families spent less than 48 hours at the Luna County shelter before making the trip to a sponsor family elsewhere in the United States.

APRIL

Working in concert with the Administration, the New Mexico legislature passes six major bills signed into law by the Governor to kick-start child welfare reform and guide the work of CYFD. There is a dedicated focus on reducing wait times for reporting child abuse and neglect through the Statewide Central Intake call system. After improving the system, wait times reduced from several hours to (on average) less than one minute for callers to speak to a representative.

MAY

CYFD initiates an assessment of staff training and develops a series of recommendations for improvements. Ongoing initiatives are focused on enhanced training to improve morale, reduce vacancies and lower turnover.

MAY

CYFD trains Juvenile Justice Division staff on Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) to help identify early-warning signs and prevent suicides among children and youth. CYFD's Protective Services Division train investigators with plans to include all field services workers and support staff.

JUNE

CYFD creates a kinship caregiver unit and launches kinship navigators throughout the state to help find relatives of children and youth needing temporary foster care. CYFD contracts with community advocacy agencies to increase legal services for relative caregivers and youth with disabilities.

SEPTEMBER

CYFD's Office of the Secretary launches a dedicated Immigration Unit which includes a director, staff liaison in Protective Services, Behavioral Health, and Juvenile Justice Divisions and a dedicated immigration attorney.

OCTOBER

A Child Protective Services Task Force is established by the Administration to work with CYFD leadership to make recommendations for positive changes to the Department. CYFD receives national recognition for its efforts associated with racial equity.

OCTOBER

Protective Services creates a Tribal Affairs Unit with additional staff, responsibilities and authority to develop internal expertise on ICWA to be more responsive to New Mexico's 23 Tribes and Pueblos.

DECEMBER

The Department initiates new training programs with new systems to make for a smoother transition to virtual work for CYFD's workforce.

Timeline and Milestones: January–June 2020

JANUARY

CYFD makes changes that align with federal law to help family members become licensed foster care providers including expedited background checks. CYFD works with the American Bar Association on updates and nationally recognized best practices while maintaining elements unique to New Mexico's culture and border state status.

JANUARY

The "Safety Assessment, Risk Assessment and Risk Reassessment Policy and Procedures Manual" is adopted by CYFD based on the Structured Decision-Making System® developed by the nonprofit Evident Change.

JANUARY

CYFD and the Second Judicial Court start hearing cases through the state's first ICWA Court with a dedicated hearing officer, District Court Judge, Children's Court Attorney and Permanency Planning Unit.

FEBRUARY

CYFD begins work developing a Foster Care Provider Grievance Process to provide objective reviews of concerns and complaints from foster parents, biological parents, relatives of children, and treatment foster care providers.

MARCH

Governor signs three child welfare bills to benefit children and youth in foster care, including an important kinship care bill that expands funding and supports to relative and kinship caregivers.

COVID-19 CASES

hit New Mexico (March 11); Schools close for an initial three-weeks (March 13); Governor orders agencies to develop contingency plans for first responders; (March 18); New Mexico's lock-down starts with statewide stay-at-home orders for non-essential workers. (March 24); CYFD starts facilitating family visits for children in foster care through video and telephone conferencing. (March 27).

MARCH

CYFD settles a major child welfare lawsuit that was initiated in 2018 under the Martinez administration, KEVIN S., et al. v. BLALOCK, et al., The agreement sets specific targets and a partnership with CYFD and Plaintiffs to guide reform efforts around foster care.

APRIL

To help children during the pandemic and assess their safety, CYFD expands phone and video technology to "over-visits" with youth in protective services and the juvenile justice system. CYFD sets up a system of secure networks with multifactor authentication in order to address the evolving needs of staff which went from zero to 80% of employees working from home. Peer Learning Networks are launched with coaching available for all employees to improve child welfare and juvenile justice services.

APRIL

Extended Foster Care is informally launched three months early to keep children from aging out of the system during the pandemic.

APRIL

NMConnect is launched and provides free 24-hour crisis and non-crisis support and access to behavioral health professionals who can text or talk via phone with individuals needing a listening ear or referrals to longer-term support. The app links users to the New Mexico Crisis Access Line (NMCAL), which provides safety net services statewide.

MAY

CYFD extends support for youth turning 18 in foster care during the pandemic. State agencies work together to provide resources for summer youth programs under the pandemic. New Mexico is the first state to offer the National School Lunch Program to those under age 18 regardless of income.

JUNE

CYFD establishes one of the most inclusive nondiscrimination policies in the country, with updates covering LGBTQIA2S+ youth in care. The directive was written with input from community stakeholders including Lambda Legal, NMCAN, True Colors United, Family Equality, and Equality New Mexico.

JUNE

A fiscal year total of 23,696 investigations of child abuse and neglect are completed. Of these, 25% or 5,951 were substantiated and 75% or 17,745 were unsubstantiated. In FY 2020 cases include, 74% for physical neglect, 23% for physical abuse and 2% for sexual abuse.

JUNE

CYFD installs two new modules to replace an outdated data system in order to improve accuracy of licensing and placement information that is servicing the state including three Pueblos.

JUNE

By mid-2020, 151 Native American children accessed funds under Behavioral Claims Open Fund Pool; seven enrolled in Hi-Fi Wraparound; 149 in Youth Support Services; 56 in crisis shelter care; and 430 in activity therapy.

Timeline and Milestones: July–December 2020

JULY

Responsibilities for New Mexico domestic violence programs are transferred to CYFD's Behavioral Health Division. Including 46 nonprofit and governmental organizations providing shelter and support services, the programs serve 10,500 residents each year.

JULY

High-Fidelity Services intensifies throughout the state with a doubling of available providers and services now offered in every region of the state.

JULY

Fostering Connections is launched as the first extended foster care program that expands support and services to young adults from age 18 to 21.

AUGUST

CYFD intensifies the planning process for implementation of Family First Prevention Services with three working groups: Congregate Care, Least Restrictive Settings and Prevention, allowing the Department to tap into new federal funding for programs that work to prevent foster care placements.

OCTOBER

CYFD, with the Public Education and Indian Affairs departments, identify, locate and contact families in which children have extensive absences from virtual school. The departments conduct interventions in order to ensure the children's safety and well-being and to provide for their continued learning opportunities during the pandemic.

NOVEMBER

The department prioritizes Individualized Development Plans for all employees using tailored coaching services to their CYFD positions.

DECEMBER

CYFD launches a new program, ReachNM, that enables youth to contact the department's Statewide Central Intake workers by texting 505-591-9444 to seek support and resources or report suspected abuse or neglect. Additional federal resources are provided to youth through COVID-19 Economic Relief.

DECEMBER

The SafeSleep campaign is expanded by CYFD, DOH and ECECD to help prevent infant fatalities and baby cradles are provided so families have a secure sleeping arrangement for their babies.



Timeline and Milestones: 2021

JANUARY

CYFD Office of Children's Rights is launched as part of the Governor's vision for better serving New Mexico's children and families.

JANUARY

All counties statewide now have contracted service providers to assist birth parents, relatives and extended family caregivers, families pursuing guardianship or adoption and resource parents in the prevention of primary and secondary child abuse and neglect.

FEBRUARY

Protective Services Division launches a new Supervisory Practice Framework that emphasizes a wholistic approach.

APRIL

New Mexico Administrative Code is amended to officially include a reference to the Office of Children's Rights *Youth Grievance Procedure*.

MAY

CYFD launches Quality Parenting Institute as a program that works with both birth and foster families to promote excellent parenting and lasting relationships so children and youth can thrive and grow.

JUNE

In Q3, FY 2021, the Behavioral Health Division already provided services to approximately 8,000 clients over nine months. This compares to 7,800 in the full fiscal year of 2019.

JUNE

A fiscal year total of 19,013 investigated cases are completed. Of these, 24.3% or 4,624 were substantiated and 75.7% or 14,389 were unsubstantiated. In FY 2021 cases include: 73% for physical neglect, 25% for physical abuse and 3% for sexual abuse.

JUNE

At the end of FY 2021, 281 children or youth are actively enrolled in High Fidelity Wraparound services. Wraparound services increased by 100% since 2018.

JUNE

CYFD increases the number of children and youth in foster care initial placement with kin and relative care to 40%, as compared to 4% in the month of January 2019.

JUNE

The number of adoptions finalized increases to 374 in FY 2021, as compared to 311 in FY 2018. This is the highest number of adoptions completed since the numbers were first compiled in 2013 and resulting in greater stability and permanency for New Mexico's children.

JUNE

Out-of-state placements for youth in Protective Services and Juvenile Justice reaches an all-time low of 26 and 19, respectively, down from FY 2019 with 61 in PS and 37 in JJ.

JUNE

Multi-systemic therapy (MST) is a therapeutic service covered by Medicaid to provide youth and families with a coordinated approach using multiple providers. In FY 2020, 342 youth and families received MST services and FY 2021 increased to 364 young people and families receiving services. The number of MST providers has also increased to 8 at the end of FY 2021, up from five in FY 2019.

JULY

Protective Services staff vacancy rates among case carrying line workers are reduced by half, from 23% in January 2019 to 11%. Staff turnover rates drop to an all-time low of 23%, just shy of the 20% target.

Strategic Planning Process and Priorities

In her first inaugural address, Governor Lujan Grisham shared a vision for the future of New Mexico that included challenging our state's citizens to seize the opportunity to work together. High on the list of priorities was creating a New Mexico in which together, New Mexicans focus on investing in and protecting our children, especially our most vulnerable, and together, the Governor added, "we stop those who would do them harm before they get the chance."

With an ambitious plan for New Mexico's children, youth and families outlined by Governor Lujan Grisham, key cabinet secretaries came together in the first quarter of 2019 to solidify a strategic planning process. Each cabinet department and clusters of related agencies developed and implemented strategies under the umbrella of "Working Together for New Mexicans."

The Departments of Health (DOH), Human Services (HSD), Aging and Long-Term Services (ALTSD) and Children, Youth and Families (CYFD) came together to develop a cross-agency strategic plan that would complement their individual department-wide approaches to achieving their goals.

The primary goal of the Child and Family Services Plan (CFSP) has been to ensure the safety and well-being of all children and youth who come to the attention of CYFD. If a child or youth is brought into CYFD's custody as a safety measure, it is the primary responsibility of CYFD to develop an individualized case plan to safely return that child or youth home to one or both of their parents or, alternatively, develop a permanency plan in order to limit time spent in the foster care system and identify safe living situations.

These plans are developed to help ensure the child or youth's safety, healthy development and overall well-being.

For 2019, CYFD prioritized issues that required immediate attention, including:

- Reducing the 3,000-case backlog of investigations of child abuse and neglect reports;
- Increasing kinship or relative placement if the Protective Services Division investigation and court review determined temporary foster care was in the best interest of the child or young person;

- Providing more supports for older youth and eliminating youth homelessness;
- Reestablishing community-based mental health services and expanding wraparound services; and
- Modernizing and rebuilding a broken communications infrastructure built on 23-year-old technology systems.

The strategic planning process launched in March 2019 with a state-wide listening tour beginning with state policy makers in Santa Fe, Gallup and Espanola, followed by sessions in April with 23 Nation Tribes and Pueblos in Farmington, Las

Strategic Plan Foundation

More Appropriate Placements	Prevention	Optimization	Staffing
Reduce Congregate Care	Institutionalization	Data	Vacancy Rates
Increase Kinship Care	Homelessness	Accountability	Increased Training/Support
Increase Community Based Mental Health Services	Trauma	Funding	Workforce Development
Special Protocols for Vulnerable Populations			

Cruces and Los Lunas. In May, meetings were conducted in Hobbs, Carlsbad, Artesia, Roswell, Deming, Albuquerque, Taos and Ruidoso. June sessions took place with visits to Las Cruces, Truth or Consequences, other parts of Albuquerque and Alamogordo, and final stops in Raton, Las Vegas and Santa Fe.

The CYFD Secretary and senior team members heard from a wide range of stakeholders, service providers, community and Tribal leaders, families and young people who have experienced protective services, foster care, behavioral health programs and the juvenile justice system.

Department leaders sought input from communities on strategic priorities for future planning. Numerous participants expressed concerns that child welfare and juvenile justice systems are not adequately focused on prevention, have tenuous or insufficient funding and lack a reliable safety net.

CYFD also faced a series of lawsuits by national and local child advocate organizations seeking a total overhaul of the agency, which influenced its strategic planning and priorities. Advocates stressed that the agency should be more trauma-responsive, increase the focus on safety and well-being of children and youth by addressing the low level (5%) of placement of children with relatives and clear the backlog of pending investigations.

CYFD heard from a wide range of stakeholders, service providers, community and Tribal leaders, families and young people who have experienced protective services, foster care, behavioral health programs and the juvenile justice system.

Throughout 2019, as part of a settlement agreement in the case of *Kevin S., et al. v. Blalock, et al.*, CYFD worked with the plaintiffs to formulate changes consistent with its strategic planning goals. The lawsuit was filed in 2018 before the new administration took office. The agreement was reached in March of 2020 and establishes a process for CYFD and the New Mexico Human Services Department to improve the current systems of care and outlines a set of implementation targets and outcomes regarding:

- A comprehensive trauma responsive system of care;
- Least restrictive and appropriate placements, giving priority to relatives;
- More consistent implementation of, and compliance with, the Indian Child Welfare Act; and
- An expanded array of behavioral health services.

CYFD continues to align work with the agency's strategic plan as it implements tasks outlined in the *Kevin S.* settlement agreement. CYFD's strategic plan is grouped into four "pillars" of work to ensure more appropriate placements for children and youth, increase prevention efforts, optimize use of data, address accountability issues, maximize the use of federal funding, expand workforce development and increase staff training.

This last pillar was included to enhance and stabilize a workforce focused on carrying out the mission and goals of CYFD.

The goals developed in 2019 for the 2020-2024 Child and Family Service Plan were quickly adjusted in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the national public health emergency. Since the outbreak of the coronavirus in March 2020, the majority of CYFD staff have worked from home using videoconferencing platforms. For case workers, this has meant adjusting to remote visitation, team decision-making sessions and court hearings. The COVID-19 pandemic also resulted in a decrease in state funding and loss of workforce due to sickness, staff turnover and a short-term hiring freeze for non-direct service positions.

The CYFD strategic plan including the four pillars continues to be a north star for agency staff across its four divisions: Protective Services, Juvenile Justice Services, Behavioral Health Services and Program Support, with performance monitoring for each.

The following Impact Report represents the four strategic pillars that are the foundation of the CYFD strategic plan with *More Appropriate Placements* and *Prevention* directly related to the first section, titled *Improving the Quality of Life for Our Children Youth and Families*. Section two focuses on *Building a Strong Workforce* and section three on *Optimizing Technology, Accountability and Funding Sources*.


Each section describes the progress CYFD has made over the past two and a half years, the impact this work has had on children, youth and families in New Mexico and explains why these goals and activities are so important.

Strategic Priorities: Progress & Impact 2019-2021

Improving the Quality of Life for Our Children, Youth and Families

The first two pillars of the CYFD's Strategic Plan are More Appropriate Placements and Prevention. The next section of this report—pages 17-37, includes the progress and impact of the many advancements made to support these two pillars under Improving the Quality of Life for Our Children and Families.

Strategic Plan Foundation

<p>More Appropriate Placements</p> <hr/> <p>Reduce Congregate Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Kinship Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Community Based Mental Health Services</p> <hr/> <p>Special Protocols for Vulnerable Populations</p>	<p>Prevention</p> <hr/> <p>Institutionalization</p> <hr/> <p>Homelessness</p> <hr/> <p>Trauma</p>	<p>Optimization</p> <hr/> <p>Data</p> <hr/> <p>Accountability</p> <hr/> <p>Funding</p>	<p>Staffing</p> <hr/> <p>Vacancy Rates</p> <hr/> <p>Increased Training/Support</p> <hr/> <p>Workforce Development</p>	
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Increasing Safety and Eliminating the Backlog

UNDERSTANDING CHILD FATALITIES, TEEN SUICIDES AND OTHER TRAGEDIES

Anyone who has ever been a child welfare director carries forever the memories of getting that midnight call or learning from the media that a child in his or her jurisdiction has died from abuse or neglect. ... Now, as in the past, media headlines about fatalities too often drive policy and practice, and that policy is almost always reactive.

—Opening Message, National Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities

The 2016 report by the National Commission to Eliminate Child Abuse and Neglect Fatalities, initiated by President Obama and Congress, included findings and recommendations so that child welfare agencies could move from reacting to child deaths to proactively working to prevent fatalities. Over the past two years, CYFD has been working to implement these and other recommendations in order to better prevent a tragedy before it happens. Secretary Blalock's Office regularly examines each individual child death, as well as clusters of fatality incidents, including taking a public health approach to finding solutions. CYFD's assessment began by tracking the causes of child fatalities between 2014 and 2020.

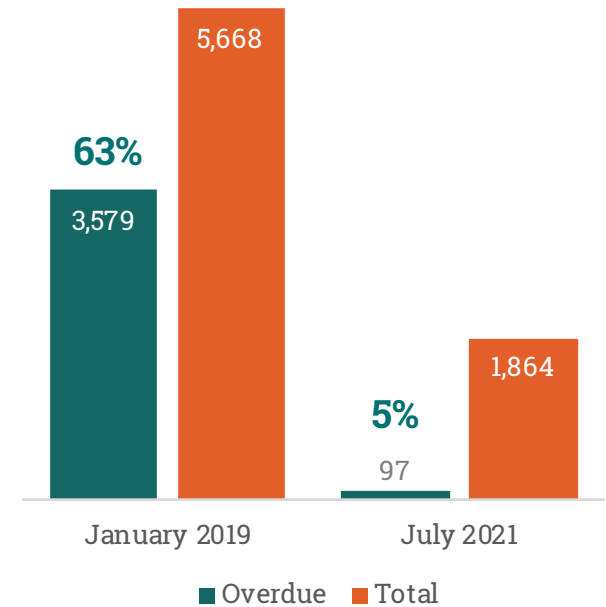
Nationally, infants and toddlers are at high risk of an abuse or neglect fatality compared to other age groups, and the same is true for New Mexico. For all children with CYFD involvement who died due to unnatural causes:

- Babies from birth to age one represented more fatalities than any other age group, with 77% of these deaths resulting from a lack of safe sleeping arrangements, either due to a parent rolling over onto the baby or sudden infant death syndrome, also known as SIDS or crib death.
- Fatalities in the 11 to 17 age range were caused mainly by guns (43%) or suicides (38%).
- New Mexico ranks slightly below the national average of child abuse related fatalities, at 2.31 per 1,000, compared to 2.5 per 1,000 deaths nationwide. The New Mexico Department of Health reported that 11 children died of abuse or neglect in 2019.

CYFD's leadership and staff mourn the death of each child in the community, as do family, friends and the public, regardless of the cause or circumstance. But it is important to learn from these tragedies and work to prevent future fatalities. Numerous steps have been taken to help keep our children and youth safe and healthy, including:

- Having CYFD managers regularly study the child fatality review board findings of each case and make recommendations for changes to CYFD procedures and practices, as needed.
- Educating parents and promoting safe sleep. CYFD, the Department of Health (DOH) and Early Childhood Education and Care Department (ECECD) have worked collaboratively on the SafeSleep campaign, focusing on how best to prevent SIDS and promote other best sleeping practices
- Initiating efforts, as part of the SafeSleep program, to provide baby cradles to families, so that infants would have a secure place for sleeping. The SafeSleep campaign and support services have been expanded beyond access

PENDING INVESTIGATIONS: January 2019 versus July 2021



through home visiting programs, and are resources available to any family in need of the services.

- Submitting funding applications to expand these programs to target expectant mothers through birth centers and hospitals.
- Having DOH and CYFD work together on a suicide prevention campaign that includes expanded training for frontline investigators and intake workers. In 2020, DOH trained CYFD staff on Question, Persuade, Refer (QPR) — three key steps to preventing suicides — which was developed by the QPR Institute and used successfully throughout the United States. CYFD workers were trained to identify early stages of suicidal behavior and how best to connect families to help.

- Creating medical plans of care for babies that are born substance exposed including 1,105 case plans in 2020 and 626 by mid-2021.
- Training CYFD staff and our juvenile justice youth in using NARCAN, a nasal spray that rapidly reverses an opioid overdose, and which has saved several lives in the past year, in response to likely drug abuse.

ADOPTING NEW SAFETY STANDARDS TO HELP PREVENT CHILD FATALITIES

In January 2020, CYFD adopted the Safety Assessment, Risk Assessment and Risk Reassessment Policy and Procedure based on the Structured Decision Making® System (SDM) developed by the nonprofit Evident Change, formerly the Children’s Research Center.

The purpose of the safety assessment is to (1) help assess whether any child is likely to be in imminent danger of serious harm or maltreatment that will require a protective intervention, and (2) determine what interventions should be initiated or maintained to provide appropriate protection.

A *safety assessment* differs from a *risk assessment* in that it assesses the child’s risk of imminent and serious harm, and the interventions needed to protect that child. In contrast, a risk assessment looks at the likelihood of any future maltreatment. The SDM risk assessment classifies families into low-, moderate- or high-risk groups based on the overall probability of experiencing future CYFD involvement.

By completing the risk assessment for each family, CYFD workers obtain an objective appraisal of the likelihood that they will have repeat system involvement in the ensuing 18 to 24 months. The differences between risk levels are substantial. Families classified as high-risk have significantly higher rates of subsequent referral and substantiation than families classified as low-risk. These and other tools have helped to improve the safety outcomes for children and families.

ASSESSMENTS OF PERFORMANCE IN IMPROVING SAFETY OUTCOMES

Various indicators are used by CYFD to review progress as part of data-driven reform efforts, including Performance Improvement Plans (PIP) conducted by the Children’s Bureau of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

States are required to submit PIPs when their child welfare services are determined to be out of conformity on any of seven outcomes or seven systemic factors assessed in the Child and Family Services Reviews. New Mexico was first required

to submit a PIP report in 2017. Fortunately, in 2019 due to an improvement in outcomes in New Mexico, the Children’s Bureau afforded CYFD multiple opportunities to exit the PIP requirements.

Several factors contributed to CFYD no longer under PIP requirements. Safety Outcome 1, “Children are first and foremost protected from abuse and neglect,” increased substantially from a rating of 85.1% for calendar year 2018 to 90.57% in CY 2020. The new target was reset in 2020 for the next four years (to 2025) at 92%. Likewise,

SAFETY OUTCOMES 1 AND 2 AS REPORTED IN THE CYFD 2021-2022 ANNUAL PROGRESS AND SERVICE PLAN, RELEASED JUNE 30, 2021

Safety Outcomes 1 & 2	CY 2016 Data	CY 2017 Data	CY 2018 Data	CY 2019 Data	CY 2020 Data	Target
Safety Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.						
Item 1: Timeliness of initiating investigation of reports of child maltreatment						
At least 92% of cases reviewed will be rated as “substantially achieved” on Safety Outcome 1 and Item 1	89%	85.5%	85.1%	88.4%	90.57%	92%
Safety Outcome 2: Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.						
Item 2: Services to family to protect children in the home and prevent removal or re-entry into foster care						
At least 83% of cases reviewed will be rated as “substantially achieved” on Safety Outcome 2	56%	53.2%	52.2%	60.65%	71.88%	83%
Item 3: Risk and safety assessment and management						
At least 80% of cases reviewed will be rated as “substantially achieved” on Item 3	57%	57.1%	54.5%	63.87%	71.88%	80%

for Safety Outcome 2, "Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate," the new PIP data showed significant improvement from 52.2% in 2018 to 71.88% in 2020. And data in Item 3 showed an increase from 54.5% in 2018 to 71.88% in 2020.

These improvements are due in part to CYFD's Protective Services team's regular data-driven assessment of its work through ongoing comprehensive case reviews that include a review of quantitative data and qualitative information. The data can be used in conjunction with the state's management information system to identify areas of strengths and areas requiring improvement.

CYFD continued to partner with the National Center on Crime and Delinquency (NCCD) to implement Safety Organized Practice and a new Safety and Risk Assessment tool that was launched in 2019.

All protective services supervisors have been trained in these new tools, and the practices continue to be implemented. With better assessment of risk and safety, and safety planning, New Mexico's outcomes should continue to improve with children, youth and families benefiting from new standards and policies.

REDUCING BACKLOGGED INVESTIGATIONS

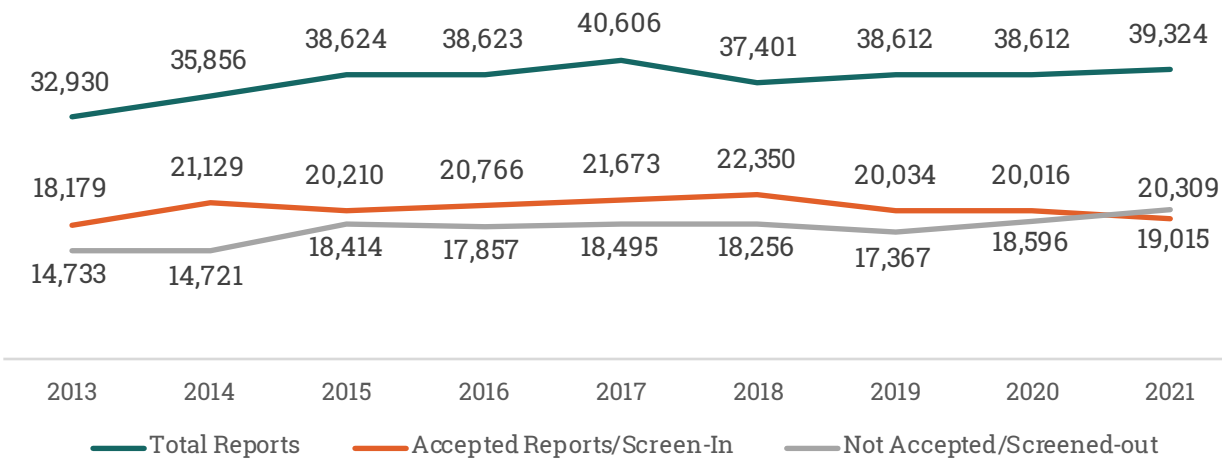
A timely and high-quality investigation of a child abuse and neglect report is the foundation of CYFD's Protective Services. At the beginning of 2019, the investigative unit was seriously backlogged by 3,000 cases causing New Mexican children, youth and their families to wait anxiously for the results of a pending investigation in which a parent or guardian was accused of physical or sexual abuse, or neglecting their children's basic needs. By July 2021, CYFD staff reduced this backlog to 97 overdue investigations statewide of the 1,864 pending investigations for that month.

The investigations of low-risk reports (those involving children who are not at imminent, dangerous risk of injury or death) are to be completed within 45 days. Two years ago, CYFD was not meeting the standards set by both the federal government and New Mexico's legislature for timely investigations, with some families waiting six to nine months to learn the agency's findings.

The new administration identified the timely investigation of these open reports as a top priority. In 2019, CYFD immediately took the steps necessary to clear the backlog, which included conducting more in-depth training, adding more staff, providing better systems for tracking investigations and improving the decision-making processes to determine what would be in the best interest of the child or young person.

Timely investigations and informed determinations about each case are essential to the safety and well-being of New Mexico's children and youth. These decisions are imperative in determining whether CYFD should 1) dismiss and close the case as unsubstantiated and without abuse or neglect; 2) provide services and supports for keeping families together for substantiated cases, especially for reports of neglect; or 3) take temporary custody of the child or youth, and remove them from their home with a placement into foster care. These are some of the toughest decisions CYFD staff must make on a regular basis.

STATEWIDE CENTRAL INTAKE REPORTS OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT



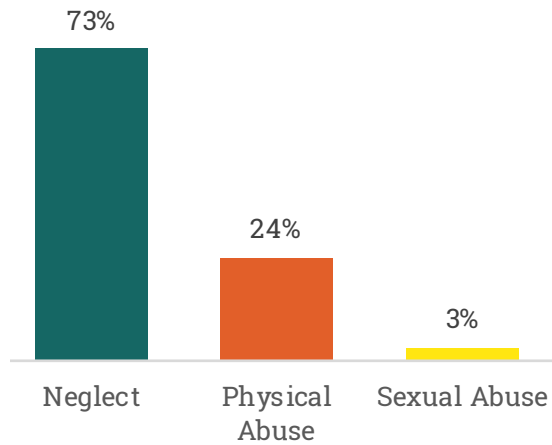
INVESTIGATIONS OF CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT BY THE NUMBERS

In January 2019, 3,579 (63%) of the 5,668 pending investigations were considered overdue and pending for 45 days or more. Within two years, these point-in-time numbers dropped to 97 (5%) overdue investigations of the 1,864 pending investigations in July 2021.

During FY 2021 (between July 2020 and June 2021), there were a total of 39,324 statewide reports of abuse and neglect resulting in 19,015 accepted as screen-in to be investigated and 20,309 as not accepted or screened out for reasons ranging from insufficient information to investigate to a referral to another agency and no allegation or risk of abuse or neglect.

Of the investigated cases in FY 2021, 4,624 (24.3%) were substantiated and 14,389 (75.7%) were unsubstantiated.

For the substantiated allegations in FY 2021, 73% were for physical neglect, 24% for physical abuse and 3% for sexual abuse.



The reporting trends in New Mexico follow those of most states in that a high proportion of reports (70% to 80%) are unsubstantiated. Likewise, a high proportion (70% to 80%) of reports are about physical neglect, which, in many cases, can be remedied with appropriate services and supports to keep children safe and families together.



Expanding Prevention Programs and Services

One of four pillars in CYFD's strategic plan is *Prevention*, with three key targets: preventing trauma, homelessness and institutionalization.

UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING TRAUMA

As described by the United States Children's Bureau: "Trauma refers to a deeply stressful experience and its short- and long-term impacts. Because exposure to trauma can cause a host of problems with lifelong consequences, early screening and intervention is essential. Widespread recognition of trauma's harmful impacts and the related consequences for children, families and society has resulted in Federal, State and local initiatives over the last decade to promote trauma-informed care."

Traumatic events have a profound sensory impact on young children. Their instincts are not as developed, and therefore they are unable to anticipate danger. Further, in most cases they lack the ability to protect themselves and are therefore particularly vulnerable to the effects of exposure to trauma. Young children depend exclusively on parents and caregivers for survival and protection—both physical and emotional. They may blame themselves or their parents for not preventing a frightening event or for not being able to change its outcome.

When trauma involves their own parent, it can significantly affect the relationship between the adult and child. Without the support of a trusted parent or caregiver to help them regulate their strong emotions, children may experience overwhelming stress, with little ability to effectively communicate what they feel or need.

They often develop symptoms that parents, family members and others don't understand and may display uncharacteristic behaviors, making it difficult for adults to know how to respond.

Not unlike many other states, in New Mexico, we have renewed our focus on preventing trauma by developing expertise with trauma-informed training, team decision-making, engagements and treatment options. With a rate of 18%, national data shows that New Mexico is among the states at the highest level for the number of individuals with four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in their background. Statistics show that for individuals with four or more ACEs through childhood, the likelihood of chronic pulmonary lung disease increases 390 percent; hepatitis, 240 percent; depression, 460 percent; and attempted suicide, 1,220 percent.

The greatest tool CYFD's caseworkers can bring with them on the job is an inquisitive spirit—one in which they truly seek to understand the unique situation of each of the families with whom they work. Trauma-responsive training helps to build this in our caseworkers, so that they go beyond asking standard questions in order to give more meaningful consideration to what factors are impacting the family. A "trauma-responsive" system is one that does not ask what is wrong with you but instead asks what has happened and how can we help.

In the next two years, CYFD will be developing training programs on bio-psycho-social-spiritual assessment. Our Juvenile Justice Secure Facilities and our community probation and parole personnel are already performing ACE assessments on the clients we serve with plans for rollout within the Protective Services Division in FY 2022. This and other advanced training will enhance our caseworkers' skills in employing an inquisitive spirit to gather deeper information, understand family dynamics, identify strengths and supports, and determine referral needs with specificity. This assessment training complements

the training received by all employees to use the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) as an ongoing tool with our children and youth.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION

Community-based agencies throughout the state have contracts with CYFD to provide Community Based Prevention, Intervention and Reunification (CBPIR) services to children, youth and their families. This sets the standard for a continuum of care for child abuse and neglect prevention services, supports and activities.

As of January 2021, contracts are in effect in all counties statewide to serve birth parents, relatives and extended family caregivers; families pursuing guardianship or adoption; and resource parents. Thus, many more families throughout the state have access to both primary and secondary child abuse and neglect prevention services and supports.

Since each region of the state is unique, these contracts give local organizations the flexibility to develop strategies, activities and outreach events that will be most effective within their individual cities and towns.

CYFD programs provide services to more than

10,500

residents each year who are affected by domestic violence, including survivors, perpetrators and their children.

The goal is to maximize outreach to community members, increase awareness about child abuse/neglect and educate people about the effect child maltreatment has on individuals, families and communities.

For the most recent contract period, due to restrictions related to the COVID pandemic, service providers were deliberate in the design of their awareness activities. With health and safety in mind, each group fulfilled their contractual requirement in their respective communities, which included billboards and physically distanced educational and informational events.

ENDING HOMELESSNESS

Housing is a priority resource during a youth's transition to adulthood. Without stable, secure and affordable housing, other efforts to increase overall quality of life for young people are generally ineffective.

Fostering Connections (see page 34) is the vehicle for engaging young people in a relational way based on their personal experiences in the child welfare system. It has become an important tool for eliminating homelessness among youth who would normally age out of foster care at 18. All participating youth are in stable housing. They are connected to community behavioral health services to use at their discretion. Preventing homelessness and supporting healthy transitions to adulthood are key components of the program. A subset of youth in the Juvenile Justice system and Indigenous youth who are eligible and represent each tribe meet regularly with CYFD staff who help provide services and support.

Currently, CYFD administers the Transitions Supportive Housing program that addresses the needs of young adults aging out of foster care who are having difficulty obtaining safe and stable housing. This program provides scattered site apartment vouchers for young people exiting either foster care or a secure juvenile justice facility. Young adults ages 18 to 21 who have



a behavioral health diagnosis are eligible to participate in the program, which connects youth with supportive services as needed. It takes a housing-first approach, focusing on tenancy and empowering youth to make their own choices regarding the supports they need.

CYFD, in partnership with Annie E. Casey Foundation and other community-based groups, has begun to build a comprehensive youth and young adult housing array that better meets the needs of youth in New Mexico. This includes expansion of both transitional and permanent housing opportunities for youth across the state. In 2020-2021, CYFD expanded transitional living programs from 20 to 60 slots, increased the number of supportive housing resources and improved access to the federal Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) and Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers across the state. CYFD recently partnered for a "homelessness scan"

with the City of Albuquerque, Bernalillo County, Pacific Institute for Research and Evaluation (PIRE) University of New Mexico Office for Community Health, and University of California San Diego Children and Adolescent Services Research Center, for which a comprehensive report of results will be published later this year.

As a result of CYFD-supported statutory changes during the prior year's legislative session, in 2020, CYFD implemented Extended Foster Care (EFC) in New Mexico, including as it relates to tribal youth. Fostering Connections requires that young people ages 18 to 21 who opt into the program will be provided with guaranteed housing opportunities to prevent homelessness. In partnership with Annie E. Casey Foundation and Case Commons, CYFD has successfully implemented a youth engagement model that focuses on a coaching approach that incorporates authentic youth participation and feedback.



In the coming year, CYFD is committed to growing the new Office of Transition-Age Youth and Youth Homelessness, which will employ youth with lived experience as full-time, regular policy staff. The Office will be responsible for facilitating the department's direct engagement with transition-age youth, with a continued commitment to the full implementation of Extended Foster Care.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

In 2020, responsibilities for New Mexico's domestic violence programs were transferred to CYFD's Behavioral Health Division. These programs provide services to more than 10,500 residents each year who are affected by domestic violence, including survivors, perpetrators and their children. CYFD works with 46 non-profit and governmental organizations throughout the state to provide shelter and support services to families and individuals in need.

Domestic Violence Victim Service Providers offer immediate shelter and supportive services for victims of family violence, domestic violence and dating violence and their dependents. Supportive services include 24-hour hotlines, crisis intervention, advocacy, individual counseling, support groups, criminal and civil legal advocacy, transitional housing, transportation, specialized

services for children and more. Their goal is to help families recover from the trauma that arises from experiencing or being a witness to violence.

CYFD oversees programs focused on interventions and treatment relating to the coercive behaviors of violent perpetrators. Referrals for the *Domestic Violence Offender and Treatment Programs* (DVOTP) are received from New Mexico courts for people who violate any of the following: the Crimes Against Household Members Act, the Harassment and Stalking Act and the Family Violence Protection Act. These include acts of violence and threats of violence, as well as stalking. DVOT programs are 52 weeks in length and include intake, ongoing assessment and frequent reports back to referring agencies. DVOT programs provide the tools and resources to help individual offenders identify strategies and coping mechanisms as alternatives to violent behaviors. They require the ongoing partnership with the courts, probation offices and other agents to successfully change perpetrator behavior.

FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT

Signed into law in February 2018, the Family First Prevention Services Act provides new federal funding for programs that prioritize child placement with family members rather than into

traditional foster care. States must develop a plan that promotes keeping the family together and children safe. These include restrictions on the use of federal funding for congregate or group settings but does make funding available for mental health and substance use services to parents of children who may otherwise be candidates for foster care.

With the support of consultants, CYFD is currently in the process of planning its implementation of the law, and has formed three workgroups: Congregate Care, Least Restrictive Settings and Prevention. These groups meet monthly and coordinate necessary adaptations to the continuum-of-care services. Community collaboration will play a prominent role in developing programming around the Family First Prevention Services Act that includes all of the CYFD divisions.

CYFD is also working with partners at our sister agency, the Early Childhood Education and Care Department, to implement well-supported programs under the Families First Act, including but not limited to Nurse/Family Partnerships, Parents as Teachers and Healthy Families America.

With a rate of 18%, national data shows that New Mexico is among the states at the highest level for the number of individuals with four or more Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) in their background.

Improving Access to Community Based Mental Health Services

Nearly one in five U.S. adults lives with a mental illness. More women than men are afflicted, though mental health issues cross all racial and ethnic groups, and an estimated 49.5% of adolescents have experienced a mental disorder as reported by the National Institute of Mental Health.

In 2013, New Mexico experienced a major shake-up among its providers for community mental health services. An award-winning documentary was produced entitled *The Shake-Up*, which chronicles the cause and effect of a governor wrongly accusing New Mexico's mental health system of fraud — allegations that were never proven.

These actions left a shattered mental health system across New Mexico, as many providers were forced to close or dramatically reduce services to the children, youth and parents who most needed help. Several Arizona behavioral health providers established operations in New Mexico to help address the void in services created by the unproven fraud allegations against the local providers, but only one remained open for more than a year.

With the COVID-19 pandemic, the effects of mental illness have been magnified. Too often people feel stigmatized and are hesitant to seek medical help, especially if services are not easily available or affordable.

Failure to address mental health concerns early among children and youth can have damaging consequences over a lifetime.

Someone who does not adequately deal with mental health problems in adolescence, for example, may find that conditions worsen throughout adulthood, with potential negative implications for holding down a good job, managing finances and raising a family.

When Governor Lujan Grisham took office, it was clear that New Mexico's mental health system needed to be rebuilt. Any expansion would require investment in infrastructure for a successful process and long-term sustainability. At the beginning of a new administration in 2019, CYFD leaders focused on several goals:

- Providing community-based access to services with a higher enrollment for wraparound supports;
- Increasing efforts in training and coaching;
- Expanding respite as a flexible family support service that provides short-term, temporary care;
- Adding mobile crisis teams to be dispatched to any location based on the needs of the community;
- Increasing capacity for intensive family and community-based treatment utilizing Multi-Systemic Therapy (MST) to address and mitigate serious behaviors, including possible substance abuse issues, and
- Implementing Functional Family Therapy (FFT) as a short-term intervention and prevention program that offers in-home family counseling designed specifically to address problematic behaviors.

CYFD Behavioral Health Services (BHS) is the behavioral health authority for all children in New Mexico and works in collaboration with Protective Services and Juvenile Justice Services in supporting programs that are trauma informed, evidence based, culturally competent, and youth and family driven.

...mental health issues cross all racial and ethnic groups, and an estimated 49.5% of adolescents have experienced a mental disorder as reported by the National Institute of Mental Health.

As of Q3 in FY 2021, approximately 7,954 clients have already been provided with behavioral health-related services through the programs funded by CYFD BHS. This number has increased with more people served part-way through the fiscal year from a total of 7,800 in FY 2019.

Over the past two years, CYFD has developed or expanded programs in several critical areas:

INFANT MENTAL HEALTH (IMH) SERVICES

Designed specifically for infants and young children ages 0 to 5 years who have experienced trauma, mental health issues, attachment challenges and/or behavioral problems, IMH targets the caregiver-infant relationship as the vehicle for restoring and protecting the infant's or young child's mental health. Providers are trained in Child Parent Psychotherapy, which facilitates clinical supports to infants and their caregivers. In sum, the Infant Mental Health Team works to restore and repair the caregiver-infant relationship.

CYFD's Foster Parent Program works with infants and their foster parents to address developmental needs and concerns by providing developmental guidance in order to decrease the risk of multiple placements.

The Child and Adolescent Subcommittee (CASC) is co-chaired by CYFD staff and makes recommendations to the Behavioral Health Planning Council and the Governor on system-level changes to improve the lives of children, adolescents and their families in New Mexico.

WRAPAROUND SERVICES

Over the years, children and adolescents experiencing serious emotional disturbances and trauma too often have had very complicated plans from several different public and private agencies. Today, High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) provides assistance that will help a family coordinate their services and supports in a way that empowers them to meet their individual, self-defined needs.

High Fidelity Wraparound (HFW) services involve a structured, high-quality, team-based process that uses an evidence-based, nationally recognized approach. Families partner with providers to develop a family-driven plan for the safety and well-being of their children that incorporates their priorities. This process is intended to keep families together and children safe in their own homes by teaching them about planning for the future around their specialized needs.

The goals of the HFW process include:

- Creating a plan to help meet the behavioral health needs prioritized by the youth and family;
- Improving the youth and family's ability to manage their own services and supports with a focus on optimism and self-efficacy;
- Developing and strengthening the youth and family's natural social support system over time; and
- Integrating the work of all child-serving systems and natural supports into one organized and effective plan.

In 2007, state funds became available for CYFD to explore HFW options for New Mexico's families but with many starts and stops. However, in 2018, in partnership with New Mexico State University (NMSU), CYFD developed the Center of Innovation (COI). The intention was to create a self-sustaining business model for HFW. By 2019, a Wraparound certification process was developed and CYFD received permanent state general funding (which previously had been temporary grants) for positions to provide coordination, evaluation and oversight of HFW services statewide. Plans are being developed to ensure sustainability and statewide expansion beyond the current 10 sites, with potential funding sources including a Medicaid waiver by the federal government.

As of the end of FY 2021, 281 children or youth are actively enrolled in HFW with an anticipated capacity of 356 clients. Sites providing Wraparound services have increased by more than 100% since 2018. Outcomes include reduced costs of care versus out-of-home placements, improved school attendance and performance, increased behavioral and emotional strengths, improved clinical and functional outcomes, reduced suicide attempts, and decreased contacts with law enforcement.

CYFD staff involved in HFW recognize that participants will make positive changes if they are acknowledged for their strengths and if they believe their underlying needs are being met.

CYFD-BHS in cooperation with New Mexico Human Services Department's Medicaid Assistance Division is pursuing an amendment to the Medicaid 1115 waiver to make Wraparound Medicaid reimbursable. Once achieved, this will create fiscal sustainability and a pathway for new behavioral health providers to implement Wraparound Services.

In anticipation of potential growth associated with Wraparound, CYFD-BHS has partnered with NMSU to develop the Center of Innovation to increase Wraparound training and coaching capacity in New Mexico. CYFD-BHS has partnered with the University of New Mexico (UNM) to develop a consolidated database to track information related to Wraparound administrative, enrollment, outcome and fidelity data. This is a strategic step to monitor the growth of the program while maintaining fidelity practice and adjusting training and coaching needs.

7,954

clients have already been provided with behavioral health-related services through the programs funded by CYFD BHS.

RESPIRE SERVICES

Respite care provides short-term relief for primary caregivers that can include foster parents. It can be arranged for just an afternoon or for several days or weeks and is a critical service especially for those families that have children with special needs or mental health challenges. Behavioral health partners have advocated for a higher rate of pay for respite providers in New Mexico. CYFD-BHS in cooperation with the New Mexico Human Services Department's statewide family organization, Families ASAP, and behavioral health providers are working jointly to review the current respite service definition and rate. This group will be making recommendations to update the definition and rate.

CYFD-BHS received a Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services federal grant to expand respite services in three counties in New Mexico: Chaves, Valencia and Sandoval.

MULTI-SYSTEMIC THERAPY (MST)

In recognition of MST's efficacy as a youth-based intervention, in 2020 the state legislature approved an allocation of non-recurring funds to support additional services in New Mexico. With this funding, University of Denver's Center for Effective Interventions (UD-CEI), which is a licensed Network Partner to administer MST, developed a rebuilding program that will both increase outreach to New Mexico's underserved youth and support the sustainability of all MST teams. This plan is being accomplished in close collaboration with CYFD and the evaluation team at the University of New Mexico.

Over the last few months, UD-CEI and CYFD disseminated a Request for Application (RFA), reviewed all applicants and chose five viable candidates. All five candidates have been fully vetted and approved through UD-CEI, are in the process of training and have begun recruiting staff.

FUNCTIONAL FAMILY THERAPY (FFT)

CYFD has identified FFT as a priority to be implemented statewide with a dedicated work group. A Memorandum of Understanding has been developed with the Behavioral Health Services Division to identify opportunities and challenges to provide FFT services throughout New Mexico.

NMCONNECT

NMConnect provides free 24-hour crisis and non-crisis support and access to behavioral health professionals who can text or talk via phone with individuals needing a listening ear or referrals to longer-term support. The app links users to the New Mexico Crisis Access Line (NMCAL), which provides safety net services statewide. *NMCAL is available via phone 24/7 toll-free by calling 1-855-NMCRISIS (1-855-662-7474).*

Department collaboration across state agencies is a top priority for the administration. As such, CYFD is actively partnering with its sister agencies for a connected and collaborative public sector. This has included shared priorities with New Mexico Human Services Department and the Department of Health's Behavioral Health Collaborative in rebuilding the community-based mental health services for children in New Mexico.



Identifying the Right Placement at the Right Time

Every child has a basic right and need to grow up with a stable continuous relationship with at least one adult who is a trusted, committed parent figure.

Healthy attachments with a parental figure are necessary for children of all ages and help to reduce problem behavior and interpersonal difficulties.

—Policy Statement, American Orthopsychiatric Assoc.

When CYFD Child Protective Services and the courts determine that children or youth are not safe in their homes and must be removed to protect them from abuse and neglect, research and experience show that they do best when placed with relatives in kinship care, extended family members, or with trained resource foster families. Core values of CYFD's Child Protective Services and Juvenile Justice Services are that all children and youth need a family and that they do best growing up in a family.

Federal law requires that foster care placements must be in the child's best interest and in the least restrictive setting possible. Federal and state laws also require a preference for youth to be placed with relatives, either through the Indian Child Welfare Act of 1978 or New Mexico statute.

Prior to 2019, CYFD was not prioritizing placement with relatives and a concerning number of young people were in congregate or institutional care, often in out-of-state facilities; and many children and youth who were legally available for adoption were in holding patterns, losing hope for a permanent family.

Since the change in administration, an important goal for CYFD has been to increase options for more appropriate placements that are safe and provide for the well-being and the right level of care to meet the needs of each individual child or young person.

INCREASING KINSHIP CARE

Emily Martin, CYFD acting Deputy Director for Programs, recounted how she often talks about relative or kinship care and starts by saying, "as a parent," and adds, "I would apply the "my son test" to all children and youth including those in the child welfare system. Because if something were to happen to me and I could not take care of my son, I know it would be much less traumatic for him to live with someone he already knows and trusts – likely his granny, his nana, his grandpa, an aunt or uncle or our best friends. He would know them and they would know him."

WHY KINSHIP CARE IS SO IMPORTANT FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Relatives are an important part of CYFD foster care and juvenile justice systems – both in supporting children and youth that come into its custody and enabling them to avoid being placed in group settings or institutionalization.

Research shows that children and youth in the care of relatives have fewer negative emotions about being in foster care than those living with non-relatives; are less likely to run away; have more frequent and consistent contact with birth parents and siblings; and are less likely to be moving from place to place once in the custody of CYFD's Protective Services.

Improving the outcomes for children and youth in our protective services and juvenile justice systems hinges on supporting kinship caregivers. Adequate social services and financial support for relatives are critical to the health of our system by improving child safety and well-being, relying less on restrictive group settings, reducing the number

of placement changes and ensuring every child is raised in a family that leads to permanency as quickly as possible.

In 2019, increasing the number of kinship or relative placements for children and youth in CYFD's custody was an important goal.

With new procedures, additional resources and improved staff training, CYFD has increased the percent of children and youth placed with relatives, as a first placement, from 5.7% in the last quarter of FY 2018 (April to June) to 39.2% in the last quarter of FY 2021.

KINSHIP CARE IN NEW MEXICO

Two options are available for kinship care placements:

Informal Voluntary Kinship Care involves CYFD Protective Services but without a formal foster care case being opened, as long as the child or young person would be living with a relative through a Probate Court Guardianship agreement or an informal arrangement.

Formal Kinship Foster Care involves a child or young person who is in foster care and living with a relative either through a court ordered removal from their parents or a Voluntary Placements Agreement with the parents, kinship caregiver and CYFD. The Voluntary Placement Agreement is a formal, time-limited, contractual agreement between parent, caregiver, and CYFD that requires the agency to provide additional support and funding to the caregiver.

CYFD believes that all children and youth need a family and that they do best growing up in a family.

PERCENT OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH LIVING WITH RELATIVES AS FIRST PLACEMENT
 Quarterly Reports of All Removals from Parent's Home

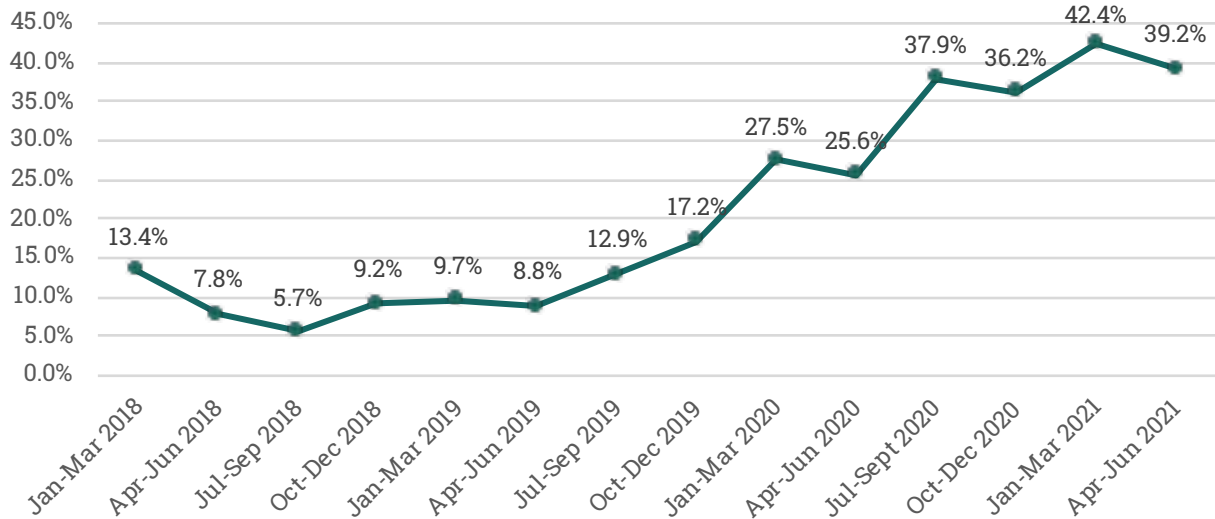


Chart: Data from FACTS/Results Oriented Management (ROM)

And, importantly, the parent can end the agreement at any time. CYFD will work with the family to support the reunification of the family or transition to permanent guardianship.

Both informal and formal relative care options are important so that any medical or educational decisions including access to social services can be made by the adult relative who has custody of the child or young person.

In addition, federal law requires agencies to exercise due diligence and notify all adult grandparents and other adult relatives of the child's situation and to give preference to an adult relative over an unrelated caregiver when determining placement, assuming the kinship caregiver meets New Mexico's child protection standards.

In New Mexico, CYFD recently strengthened a policy to notify Tribes of any investigation and potential removal of a child from their parents so that the Tribal leaders can be a part of the decision-making process.

Over the past two years, in order to increase relative placements, if after an investigation Protective Services or Juvenile Justice staff and the courts determine that a child cannot remain safely with their parents, workers first attempt to identify potential relatives through personal contacts or new software to assist in identifying a possible relative placement.

Specialized sessions are facilitated by the appropriate CYFD staff to determine what is in the best interest of the child or young person. This is usually done by convening a meeting among all interested parties, including birth parents, relatives, extended family members, community or Tribal

leaders or others with a personal relationship with the child. A full and open needs assessment is made to determine appropriate services for the "kinship care triad," including the older child or young person, their birth parents and the relative who will provide a temporary home.

For adolescents and youth not being placed with relatives, a special meeting is held with them and Protective Services supervisors to ensure that the search for relatives and an appropriate relative placement are under future consideration. If it is determined that living with a family member or close friend is not possible or not in the child's best interest, Protective Services calls upon one of the resource families in New Mexico to provide a temporary foster home for the child or youth – either until they can return home safely to their birth parents after reunification services or until the parent's rights have been terminated and they are able to be adopted or in the permanent custody of an adult. The latter situation often results in the resource parents adopting the child or young person to whom they have provided foster care.

RESOURCE FAMILIES FOR FOSTER CARE

CYFD recently developed the designation of resource families, which include foster parents, foster-to-adopt families and kinship caregivers. Resource parents are critical partners for our Protective Services workers because they provide care for children who cannot live with their parents, including a supportive role in reunification, often by mentoring birth parents on how to control anger; stop dangerous, violent behavior; and become better parents.

Resource parents are not substitute mothers or fathers; rather, their role is to work with birth parents and other relatives to provide a safe home environment and build quality, lasting relationships with the child, young person and their families.

The Protective Services Division recruits, trains, licenses and supports resource families for placement of children in foster care, with an emphasis on placements with relatives. Both relative and non-relative foster care applicants are required to complete the same set of licensing criteria, including a criminal records check, training, a home safety check list, and a mutual assessment process to identify the strengths of the applicant and their appropriateness for caring for children in state custody. Monthly support payments are made to resource families as financial reimbursement for the care of children placed in their home, which is covered by both state and federal funds.

The Resource Parent Recruitment and Retention Coach is a new position whose responsibilities include developing strategies utilizing a community engagement model rather than a marketing model to improve outreach to families from marginalized communities. Ongoing training of resource parents focuses on managing grief and loss, building supportive networks and increasing skills in trauma responsive approaches.

REDUCING THE NEED FOR CONGREGATE OR GROUP CARE

A heavy reliance on congregate or group care is associated with poor outcomes for youth. Studies show that the youth who experience foster care living in group settings:

- have increased rates of arrest;
- have higher rates of re-entry into foster care after family reunification than those reunified from family-based care; and
- are less likely to graduate high school and more likely to drop out of school than children and youth in family-based care.

Therapeutic, in-patient, institutional placements are generally the most expensive and highest level of care for both physical and mental health

supports. The key for New Mexico's children and youth who do need higher levels of care than what can be provided in a home by birth, foster or resource parents is to ensure they get the appropriate care for the right amount of time to best help them heal from trauma caused by abuse and neglect.

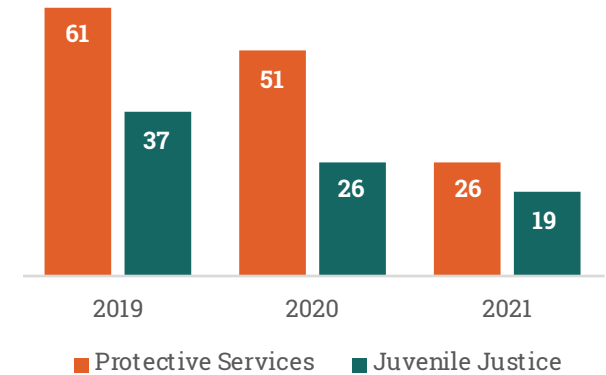
In New Mexico, CYFD has been working toward a "continuum of care" model that recognizes that every child and young person needs and deserves a caring, loving family to keep them safe and support their emotional, physical and social development. Residential treatment is an important component in a continuum of care, especially if a child or young person has a significant psychiatric diagnosis. But residential treatment should be a customized, therapeutic, short-term stabilization intervention designed to support children to function successfully within families.

BRINGING OUR YOUTH BACK HOME WITH FEWER OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENTS

When the community behavioral health care system in New Mexico was dismantled in 2013, many of the critical services children and youth required for their emotional well-being disappeared across the state. Similarly, juvenile justice facilities reached full capacity, unable to accommodate more youth offenders. These and other conditions led to CYFD looking to other states for appropriate therapeutic, residential care. Two years ago, the new CYFD leadership conducted a review of the numerous out-of-state placements and took action to find homes locally that provided appropriate placement along the continuum of care.

Wraparound services have also helped ensure that customized programs are provided in New Mexico for children and youth needing specially tailored support and has resulted in reducing the need for out-of-state placements and allowing greater access to community-based services. As a result, New Mexico's youth are likely to have improved school attendance and performance,

BRINGING OUR YOUTH BACK HOME CYFD OUT-OF-STATE PLACEMENTS



increased behavioral and emotional strengths, improved clinical and functional outcomes, reduced suicide attempts, and decreased contacts with law enforcement.

Updated policies now include ensuring children and youth in foster care maintain close relationships with their birth parents and other family members through regular visits and interactions as reunification efforts are underway. In addition, CYFD's Protective Services recently revised procedures to require that all cases in which children or youth are being considered for out-of-state placement must be reviewed internally by a community behavioral health clinician and require the approval of Cabinet Secretary Blalock.

IDENTIFYING FAMILIES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH WAITING FOR ADOPTION

A final determination is made by New Mexico's Family Court that a child or young person cannot be safely reunited with their parent(s), guardian or custodian, or if parents agree to a voluntary termination of their parental rights.

CYFD's Protective Services Division then works to identify an adoptive family or adult that will meet the child's individual unique needs and provide a nurturing, stable home environment. As with the department's foster care policy, the preferred primary adoption is by relatives. Both relatives and non-relatives have the same licensing requirements, which includes criminal records checks, child abuse and neglect checks, pre-service training, home safety checks and a mutual assessment process. Protective Services staff work to minimize the trauma associated with changes in living arrangements by encouraging adoption of children by their current resource foster families.

Adoption promotion and support services are conducted through a combination of CYFD staff and contracted services. For example, La Familia-Namaste, Inc. has a multi-year contract to provide home study services statewide for the agency and post-adoption family support services for adoptive families.

In FY 2018, 311 adoptions were finalized. In FY 2019 the number was increased to 362, while in FY 2020 there were 331 adoptions and in FY 2021, 374 adoptions were finalized. Under federal law, states are required to initiate court proceedings to release a child for adoption once that child has been waiting in foster care for at least 15 of the most recent 22 months. There are exceptions in which states can begin the adoption process more quickly in extreme cases.

MORE APPROPRIATE PLACEMENTS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS

As New Mexico's population continues to diversify by race, gender identification, culture and lifestyles, so too must CYFD regularly re-examine its placement policies and procedures to ensure sensitivity across all divisions to myriad

related issues. Still other emerging issues, such as increased awareness of the impact of sex trafficking, require CYFD to deploy new tools and systems to support victims.

Over the next year, CYFD is launching several new initiatives to address the needs of special populations.

- LGBTQIA2S+ youth are at significant risk of maltreatment. They are disproportionately represented among homeless youth and those that attempt or commit suicide. CYFD is currently reviewing and revamping its training, practices, and policies regarding support for LGBTQIA2S+ in collaboration with Lambda Legal and NMCAN.
- The CYFD's Office of Children Rights is hiring youth advocates to be a voice on behalf of these vulnerable populations and ensure their needs are being met by the Department and also by other state departments and agencies.
- A new position, a Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC) Director, will develop policies for working with survivors of child sex trafficking. This will include statewide deployment of a CSE identification tool to be incorporated into training for Protective Services and Juvenile Justice staff. In the upcoming fiscal year, two residential facilities for commercially sexually exploited youth are slated to be established. CYFD's Behavioral Health Services is working with officials in Bernalillo County to set up a safe home that will serve adult survivors of trafficking, who will be able to remain there for 90 days so that they can transition into an appropriate residence and receive trauma-informed services. Similar services are being developed for children age 12 to 18 who have experienced sex trafficking.

- With renewed attention focused on immigration reform, undocumented children and youth are a vulnerable population for which CYFD recognizes a continued need for thoughtful care. An Immigration Director, a dedicated immigration attorney and support staff have been hired to review and revamp policies and procedures in working with undocumented families. These efforts began with the creation of a process to license relative caregivers without consideration of immigration status. New relationships and a memorandum of understanding have been formed with the Mexican consulate in Albuquerque, and CYFD has participated in consulate-sponsored events.

ON THE HORIZON FOR BEST PLACEMENTS WITH QUALITY PARENTING

CYFD recently joined the Quality Parenting Institute (QPI) of the Youth Law Center, a national movement for foster care change, made up of a network of states, counties and private agencies committed to ensuring that all children in care have excellent parenting and lasting relationships so they can thrive and grow. QPI is built on the belief that excellent parenting with strong, positive relationships is the best intervention we can offer children to enable them to heal as they grow up to become adults. Creating a system that ensures excellent parenting requires the support and involvement of birth families, relative caregivers, foster families, young people, and others in the child welfare system. A launch event was held in May 2021, with full implementation underway now that the COVID-19 restrictions have been lifted.

Partnering with Tribes and Enhancing Relationships with Tribal Leaders

The Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) of 1978 was passed by Congress in response to the forced removal of Native American children from their parents and Tribes and Pueblos. Historically, despite federal and state policies that were founded on a Western concept of "family," these concepts were not extended to Tribal communities, whose families were devastated and disrupted by the displacement of Native children.

Through the adoption of the ICWA, Congress recognized that Indian nations, Tribes and Pueblos are sovereign nations and therefore self-governing entities with their own judicial structure, language, and unique customs and traditions. Through customary practices rooted in extended family relationships and traditions, Indian nations, Tribes and Pueblos protect the best interests of Native American children.

Tribal laws and codes have been adapted to federal and state policies, while recognizing Native customs and traditions. These laws include provisions for the safety and protection of Native children, including relinquishment or termination of parental rights and adoption for children who cannot be returned to their families, but in ways that put the welfare of children as a concern for the entire Tribal community.

CYFD has historically had a challenging and difficult relationship with Tribal leaders given that many times children and youth who experienced

foster care were placed in non-Native adoptive households. These separations from cultural and linguistic ties were a continuation of the wholesale theft of Tribal children who were forced to adopt Western culture and values in BIA Indian Schools that began in the 1800s. Often times the placement of a Native American child or young person did not follow a Tribal customary adoption, which allows the Tribe to consider transferring custody of Native children to the care and protection of adoptive parents but does not terminate the rights of birth parents. The State of New Mexico has more recently acknowledged historical traumas on Tribal communities, including the theft of generations of children forced to Anglicize, learn English and be punished for using traditional languages, and in many cases converted to a Western religion. Efforts to codify the federal ICWA as outlined below are just a small attempt to prevent that dark era of our history from ever repeating itself in the state.

In 2019, the new Administration conducted a full examination of the state's foster care and adoption policies to test compliance with federal and state ICWA. As part of the initiative, a new Office of Tribal Affairs was established and the previous CYFD Native American Liaison became the Director of Tribal Affairs.

Great strides have been made in rebuilding and securing our government-to-government relationships with the Tribes and Pueblos of New Mexico.

In fiscal year 2020, CYFD Protective Services (PS) Division created a Tribal Affairs Unit and added additional Tribal Coordinator positions, not only within PS but also as part of all service-providing divisions, including Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health. This new unit specializes in addressing needs of Tribal families, identifying culturally relevant services, developing intergovernmental agreements, providing technical assistance to the Tribes and Pueblos, and providing consultation and training for CYFD staff in their interactions with Native children, youth and families, the use of cultural compacts, and cultural considerations.

Great strides have been made in rebuilding and securing our government-to-government relationships with the Tribes and Pueblos of New Mexico. Over the last two years, as the result of the adoption of many new policies and programs, significant advancements have been made, including:

- Developing partnerships between the State of New Mexico, Tribes and Pueblos, off-reservation entities and federal agencies that mutually affect positive policy and practice outcomes for all Indian children and families.
- Working to ensure CYFD compliance with the State Tribal Collaboration Act and with Native American provisions in New Mexico law.
- Continuing to prioritize our commitment to the State Tribal Collaboration Act and CYFD reaching the ICWA standards of care.

Important activities for the Office of Tribal Affairs included conducting a review of all cases and developing procedures to ensure preferred placements (as defined by the ICWA) with relatives of the child or young person, members of their Tribe or Pueblo, other Tribal or Pueblo members or a living arrangement approved and licensed by their Tribe or Pueblo. This review process was launched in February 2021 and extended statewide over the following months.

Each out-of-preferred placement is reviewed every 30 days until the child or youth can be living in an ICWA preferred placement. Improvements among Native American children and youth are anecdotal and qualitative since preliminary data is too recent to accurately reflect quantifiable outcomes. As CYFD's data system is modernized, this information will be tracked more thoroughly and released on a regular basis.

INDIAN TRIBAL WELFARE COURT WITH A DEDICATED ICWA UNIT

New Mexico has the second-highest population per capita of Tribal individuals in the country, and CYFD has worked in collaboration with Tribes, Pueblos and the courts to create an ICWA Court within the Second Judicial District. CYFD simultaneously created a dedicated ICWA Unit to develop internal expertise on ICWA matters and to be more responsive to the needs of New Mexico's 23 Tribes and Pueblos. The Unit officially began operating in October of 2019.

The ICWA Court and CYFD ICWA Unit have a dedicated Hearing Officer, District Court Judge, Children's Court Attorney and Permanency Planning Unit.

The Judges of the Children's Court are committed to ensuring that the federal and state protections for Indian families are being followed and that services for Native children and their families are being provided with cultural competence. The ICWA Specialty Court works to rigorously adhere to a legal framework that documents every decision based on the federal requirements of ICWA and the requirements of our state's Children's Code.

Families eligible for the ICWA Specialty Court have an assigned team consisting of service providers, social workers, attorneys and, ideally, tribal representatives dedicated to improving outcomes, with the Court providing regular judicial oversight.

CYFD SERVICES DEVELOPED WITH THE SPIRIT OF ICWA IN MIND

Many of these services are described more fully elsewhere in this progress report and have been enhanced to take into account the culture, customs and traditions of New Mexico's 23 Tribes and Pueblos. These services include:

- Behavioral Health Services (BHS) Claims Open Fund Pool is intended to pay for services for children and youth who are not covered by Medicaid, do not have commercial insurance or do not have any other sources of funding. In FY20, approximately 151 Native American children and youth accessed these funds.
- High-Fidelity Wraparound Services are designed to meet the family's needs and reach their desired outcomes as developed and defined for what is best for individual children and youth. In SFY20, seven Native American children and youth were enrolled in Hi-Fi Wraparound.
- Youth Support Services (YSS) promotes wellness for eligible New Mexico youth to help steer a course toward a healthy adulthood, free of substance disorders or unrecognized and untreated mental health disorders. In SFY20, 149 Native American youth were served by YSS coaches.
- Infant Mental Health: Socorro Parent Infant Psychotherapy (PIP) service provisions are delivered in the Alamo Reservation, and the majority of the Gallup PIP services are provided to Navajo families. New Mexico's eight Northern Pueblos as well as San Felipe Pueblo now offer Infant Mental Health on Pueblo land. Infant Mental Health Services provided supports to four Native American children in SFY20.
- Community Behavioral Health Clinicians consult, assess, coordinate, team and advocate internally and externally for the target population children and youth in Protective Services and Juvenile Justice Services, to include eligible



Tribal leaders, child welfare advocates and court representatives celebrate the announcement of the 2nd Judicial District's specialty ICWA Court at Sandia Resort in October, 2019.

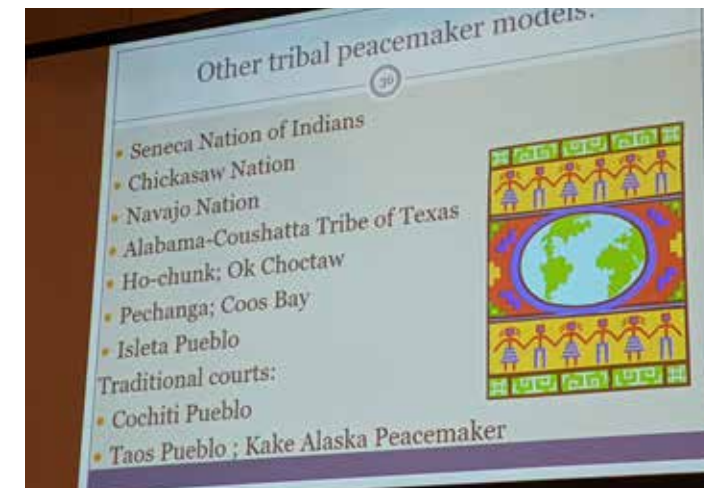
Native American children and youth. CBHCs engage youth to gain a greater understanding about their cultural connections and prioritize providing support to further these connections. In SFY20, CBHCs served approximately 173 Native American youth involved with CYFD Juvenile Justice Services.

- Crisis Shelters and community-based shelter care are provided on a 24-hour-a-day basis, including on-site supervision, by qualified staff in a safe and stable environment to children and adolescents up to 18 years of age. In SFY20, BHS served 56 Native American children and youth in shelter care.
- Family Peer Support Workers are primary caregivers who have "lived experience" with being actively involved in raising a child or youth who has experienced emotional, behavioral, mental health and/or substance use challenges. CYFD Behavioral Health Service has trained individuals from the Acoma, Santo Domingo and San Felipe Pueblos to be FPSWs who currently provide support through the community health centers.
- Cultural Humility & Linguistic Responsibility Training has been developed for the CYFD staff and specifically for clinicians. The training focuses on New Mexico's culturally diverse population and raising consciousness on the need for cultural and linguistic humility when working with other ethnic and linguistic groups.
- Activity Therapy services build social competencies, positive values and identity development to increase resiliency of youth and prevent and reduce or ameliorate the symptoms of a diagnosed substance abuse or mental health disorder. The Therapeutic Adventure Program uses a strength-based, positive youth development approach to provide intervention and prevention services to at-risk youth. In SFY20, approximately 430 Native American children and youth participated in the program.

- Transitions Supportive Housing Program in Bernalillo County provides 20 supportive housing vouchers to young adults with mental health diagnoses. In SFY20, this program provided housing vouchers to three Native American transition-age youth.
- The CYFD Domestic Violence Unit was transferred to CYFD's Behavioral Health Division in SFY20. Of the 10,818 survivors and their dependents who were served by CYFD-funded domestic violence service providers during that year, 11.2% (1,210 people) self-identified as American Indian or Alaska Native. Of the 1,317 people in offender treatment programs, 15.2% (200 people) self-identified as American Indian or Alaska Native.
- The Coalition to Stop Violence Against Native Women is funded in part by CYFD to provide training and technical assistance to all service providers in the state, with a focus on Tribal programs and Tribal survivors. In SFY20, the Coalition provided new advocate training with a focus on Tribal and Pueblo communities, and facilitated technical assistance and support to tribal domestic violence programs throughout the state on a daily basis.
- The two existing Binti/MMIS placement and licensing modules are available to tribes in New Mexico free of charge. Binti is also offering data sovereignty to the Tribes and Pueblos so the state will not have access to any Tribal data without their voluntary release directly to the department. By June 2021, two Tribes are implementing these modules, with more to join on as our MMIS replacement offerings become more robust.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2021, a team led by the state's Tribal Nations and Pueblos, with support from CYFD, initiated the first-ever attempt to codify some of the federal standards in ICWA into New Mexico statute. Recognizing the local significance of the importance of language and culture in our state, a state ICWA law would allow for further Native collaboration and guarantee these New Mexican values and rights regardless of the federal law. CYFD and the Tribes and Pueblos will continue to work to pass this important legislation in future legislative sessions.



Supporting Older Youth

"Aging out" refers to a young person in the foster care system when they reach a certain age (18 years old in most states) and, therefore, are no longer considered eligible for supports from the state. This can result in the loss of housing, health care coverage and connections to supportive relationships for many young adults who are ill-prepared to support themselves in the adult world.

Nationwide statistics demonstrate poor outcomes for youth who have aged out of the foster care system:

- One in four will be incarcerated within the first two years after they leave the system;
- Over one-fifth will become homeless at some time after age 18;
- Only 58 percent had a high school degree at age 19, as opposed to 87 percent of comparable non-foster youth nationwide; and,
- Of youth who aged out of foster care and are over the age of 25, less than 3 percent earned their college degree, compared with 28 percent of the general population.

In 2019, 85 youth aged out of New Mexico's foster care system without the benefit of additional services. Fortunately, because CYFD acquired additional resources, and due to changes in New Mexico law, the situation changed for the better over the next year.

By 2020, 95 foster youth in New Mexico, ages 18 and up, were able to benefit from extended services with access to health care, housing, food and other basic necessities. By mid-year 2021, 161 youth qualified for, and began receiving, extended services. Here's why:

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS

In July 2020, CYFD launched Fostering Connections, New Mexico's first extended foster care program that expanded eligibility for the age of support and services from age 18 to age 21.

Some of the extended supports now available to young adults include guaranteed housing, connection to community-based behavioral health supports, job assistance, food access and money for college.

Fostering Connections is part of a legislative package to help transform foster care in New Mexico, and was first passed in the 2019 legislative session, with updates in the 2020 session. CYFD opted in for the increased supports and funding, which were made possible by a 2008 federal law by the same name.

By 2020, 95 foster youth in New Mexico, ages 18 and up, were able to benefit from extended services with access to health care, housing, food and other basic necessities.

The New Mexico Fostering Connections bill passed unanimously in the state House and Senate, thanks to the leadership of Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, the bipartisan sponsorship of Senator Michael Padilla and Senator Candace Gould and the many young people who spoke in support of the legislation.

The first year of implementation of Fostering Connections (July 1, 2020, to June 30, 2021) focused on extending foster care services to youth who turn 18 in 2021, and covered 161 young people, including Tribal youth, in a variety of living arrangements ranging from kinship care to college dorms.

The program will be extended to those age 19 in FY2022, when an additional 100 youth are expected to be covered, and be joined by young adults up to the age of 21 in 2023. The graduated introduction allows CYFD to develop administrative functions associated with the program, and for continuous quality improvement efforts related to the services provided.

In December 2020, additional federal financial resources were provided under the COVID-19 Economic Relief bill, which included flexible funding for housing, food, transportation and other basic needs for older youth who are, or had been, in foster care. CYFD has now taken full advantage of these federal funds, and is working to ensure that New Mexico taps into the maximum amount authorized by Congress. As additional government funds were allocated to youth in foster care,

CYFD was able to provide more financial support. Approximately 250 young people, ages 18 to 21, who had been in the foster care system, received \$175 a month throughout the pandemic, and another 130 older youth, ages 21 to 26, received checks in the \$1,200 range to help with their housing, food and other essentials.

The law allows for voluntary participation in Fostering Connections, so young adults can opt in to receive benefits. Eligible youth are also allowed to exit and re-enter the program at any time through their eligibility period.

ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

Without stable and secure housing, other efforts to support a young person as they age out of the foster care system are generally ineffective. Housing is a priority resource during their transition to adulthood, which is why CYFD is implementing a plan to address youth homelessness.

Efforts to fill the gaps in services that can prevent homelessness include:

- Extending foster care eligibility to age 21 or older;
- Partnering with community providers to connect transition-age youth with existing housing resources; and,
- Developing new and innovative resources to increase housing opportunities for youth leaving foster care.

NEW STRATEGIES AND TECHNOLOGY TOOLS FOR ENGAGING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

New engagement strategies and a coaching practice model, designed by a team at CYFD, have proven tremendously beneficial in attracting young people, resulting in a high number of youth participants with access to needed supports.

In December 2020, CYFD launched ReachNM, a new program that enables youth to contact Statewide Central Intake workers by texting 505-591-9444 to seek support and resources or report suspected abuse or neglect. New Mexico is the first state to create a system to intake reports of child abuse and neglect completely by text message.

The needs of young people ages 16 to 26 are very different than those of children and adolescents in foster care. Young people are in an interesting and exciting, but often stressful, time of their

life as they continue to develop physically and emotionally, while many of them are still recovering from trauma from their experiences in the foster care system, as well as abuse and neglect.

CYFD staff worked to build, what is called in child welfare systems, a practice model that focuses on the foster youth population making a transition to adulthood. This is an important step because many jurisdictions around the country that are engaged in improving their systems for children, youth and families start by developing, improving and implementing a “practice model.” A United States Children’s Bureau publication on the issue defines a child welfare practice model as *a conceptual map and articulated organizational ideology of how agency employees, families and stakeholders should partner in creating a physical and emotional environment that focuses on the safety, stability, permanency and well-being of children and their families.*

CYFD staff found that success is based on sharing power, coaching and providing the space for young people to succeed, fall behind or fail safely, knowing that support will be there to help them navigate the situation.

A NEW GRIEVANCE POLICY AND BILL OF RIGHTS

Young people worked with CYFD to create a new youth grievance process for those in care, as well as those over 18 who aged out of the system, up to age 26. As these programs were developed, youth were at the table, not only providing input, but also helping to write two key policies: a new Youth Grievance Policy and Procedure document and the New Mexico Foster Child and Youth Bill of Rights, first released in December 2020, and revised in March 2021. Both are posted on the CYFD website.

NEXT STEPS FOR INCREASING SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS TO ADULTHOOD

Over the next fiscal year, activities are in development to expand resources for young people, especially as they relate to ending homelessness, including:

- Identifying youth with lengthy crisis shelter placements, so that appropriate actions can be taken on their cases for better placement options;
- Developing a contractual obligation with shelters receiving CYFD funding to ensure that an appropriate level of care is available within a program, and that young people receive priority placement within the level of care, rather than remaining in the shelter;
- Supporting CYFD Community Behavioral Health clinicians to develop a coordinated protocol within each shelter to ensure that discharge plans are developed early in the youth’s shelter stay – to reach a more stable placement quickly and efficiently; and
- Implementing the CSE-IT Tool to identify potential human trafficking victims entering shelter care, including training on how best to work with victims.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Young people who are “aging out” of foster care report that being connected with a supportive adult makes a substantial difference in their well-being. The related supports include assistance with basic life skills such as job searches, encouragement to succeed and a home for the holidays, fostering an improved quality of life for these young people and for generations to come.

Helping Families During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Just about a year after the Lujan Grisham Administration took office and as a CYFD strategic plan was being implemented, the COVID-19 pandemic struck the world with challenges never before faced by present-day government leaders. In March 2020, social services around the United States were upended, including CYFD and the children, youth and families being served by Protective Services and those in our Juvenile Justice programs.

Within days of COVID-19 being reported in New Mexico on March 11, 2020, CYFD was able to quickly shift our communications and information services from in-person to an online format through regular telephone calls, texting and emailing via mobile phones and computers.

By late March, CYFD began facilitating family visits for children and youth in foster care and youth in juvenile justice centers through video

and telephone conferencing as Zoom technology became more readily available. During the pandemic, improvements in technology resulted in safe, secure remote work for 80% of CYFD staff – an impressive feat given that prior to the pandemic there were no employees working remotely. New protocols were effective in increasing the number of visits for children and youth in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems by using remote technology throughout the pandemic.

within three days of the state issuing mandatory telework and stay-at-home orders, CYFD was able to transform the delivery of employee training, including special programs about the coronavirus, into virtual sessions. Supervisors developed drop-in trainings, at least one daily, with current topics and updated information as the virus ravaged the country.

Expanded partnerships were formed with other state government agencies specific to health, education, housing, food and other essential needs. CYFD staff worked closely with schools, hospitals, community health centers and law enforcement. For example, CYFD and the Aging and Long Term Services Department worked to stabilize family situations by providing emergency food and shelter to families and homebound seniors. These operations addressed food scarcity throughout the state during the pandemic, including significant efforts toward ensuring food access to Tribal communities.

In addition to these important partnerships, ESF-6, a FEMA-structured emergency support function of multiple state agencies led by the Human Services Department (HSD), Department of Health (DOH), and Children, Youth, and Families Department (CYFD) and supervised by Cabinet Secretary Brian Blalock, assumed statewide shelter and food operations and is an example of how state government can work cohesively to respond to the urgent needs of our communities.

Between March 27, 2020 and February 25, 2021, a total of 2,686,672 lbs. of food were delivered to 72 Tribal locations and 3 towns. Early in the pandemic, many CYFD staff assisted in the sorting, packaging and delivering food to those most in need including Tribal partners and communities that experienced normal grocery delivery disruptions or mandatory stay at home orders.

CYFD operations addressed food scarcity throughout the state during the pandemic, including significant efforts toward ensuring food access to Tribal communities.

Shelter operations were needed to help individuals with COVID isolate and quarantine in state-provided sites for those unable to stay home safely. By July 2020, the state Emergency Support Function built isolation and quarantine shelter sites specifically for Tribal communities with CYFD's Community Behavioral Health Coordinators providing behavioral health support. A total of 230 shelter placements were made, with 434 rooms available for non-congregate shelter, 75 for specialist shelter, and 383 for medical shelter. More than 46,000 nights of medical shelter have been provided to New Mexicans and Tribal members over the course of the pandemic.

Until a vaccine was available, COVID-19 testing was an important tool to help curb the virus so birth and foster parents, their children and youth could receive early medical treatment.

2,686,672

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CYFD juvenile justice agencies used several different strategies to mitigate the spread of the virus among those living together in state facilities. Processes were established for viral testing of youth when they entered a center, including those who exhibited symptoms, and those who had a known exposure to a positive case and through contract tracing.

CYFD also provided support during the COVID-19 pandemic to its various providers, residential facilities, shelters and other care providers to ensure continuity of behavioral health services and supports, shelter and housing services, as well as workforce development and training.

Efforts included:

- Weekly and ongoing calls and emails with providers to address ongoing COVID-19 issues with accurate, updated information;
- Consultation and provision of technical guidance to address staff and client fear, stigma, depression, anxiety and trauma, which often accompany major infectious disease outbreaks;
- Revision of visitation, therapy and treatment team interactions to include telemedicine, videoconference and phone communications;
- Personal Protective Equipment monitoring and tracking;
- Response to respiratory illness and infection symptoms with screening and testing; and
- Quarantine alerts utilizing CDC and DOH guidelines;
- Surveillance of COVID-19 testing and tracking participants;
- Monitoring of supplemental incident reporting information for positive COVID-19 tests; and
- Tracking of all incident reports to screen for any COVID-19 positive tests and COVID-19 symptoms.

CYFD increased measures to ensure adequate support for youth amid the COVID-19 pandemic, including those young adults about to turn or who turned 18 years old during the pandemic and were at risk of losing critical support services. Many of the young people who “aged out” of foster care between February and July 2020 were able to continue receiving housing and financial support from CYFD during the pandemic, including those from Tribal communities.

CYFD, in collaboration with New Mexico's Public Education Department and the Indian Affairs Department, worked with families and youth to help re-connect disconnected students back to school and to access other support services. For many families, it can be difficult to navigate school work during the pandemic. Protective Services staff reached out to approximately 650 families and connected almost 100 to supportive services and educational resources and referred 30 additional families to Engage New Mexico. Likewise, Juvenile Justice Services staff connected to families by helping them utilize the services of Engage New Mexico which has a contract with PED for intervention activities in schools. The targeted effort successfully worked to re-engage students who for a variety of reasons struggled to succeed in a learning environment that shifted to virtual or remote schooling.

In addition to technology improvements that helped to connect parents with their children, the CYFD Workforce Development Bureau designed and implemented emergency plans that helped prevent the spread of the virus. By providing masks, information regarding testing resources and assistance with accessing vaccinations for families engaged with CYFD, mitigation and prevention efforts were robust.

Optimization

OPTIMIZING TECHNOLOGY, ACCOUNTABILITY AND FUNDING SOURCES

An important element of CYFD's strategic plan is the pillar on Optimization – to make the best and most effective use of available resources to improve efficiency for processing information and data, as well as respond to requests from the public on sensitive issues.

PROMOTING ACCOUNTABILITY TO IMPROVE CYFD'S PERFORMANCE

Because child welfare systems across the country must meet certain federal confidentiality standards to protect parents and children, there are limits to what can and cannot be disclosed publicly about individual cases. At the same time, CYFD recognizes its status as a public agency funded primarily by taxpayers, for which there is a duty and responsibility to demonstrate the best use of public funds. CYFD must strike a balance between confidentiality laws that protect the privacy of the children, youth and families served and accountability to the public, which includes elected officials, the court system, other government agencies and the media.

Similarly, state confidentiality rules and laws generally provide protections as it relates to the identity and circumstances of the children, youth and families who are part of child welfare and juvenile justice systems. The Children's Bureau of the United States Department of Health and Human Services Department tracks state confidentiality laws that range from strict gag rules on agencies for releasing any information about cases to more liberal policies under which

Strategic Plan Foundation

<p>More Appropriate Placements</p> <hr/> <p>Reduce Congregate Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Kinship Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Community Based Mental Health Services</p> <hr/> <p>Special Protocols for Vulnerable Populations</p>	<p>Prevention</p> <hr/> <p>Institutionalization</p> <hr/> <p>Homelessness</p> <hr/> <p>Trauma</p>	<p>Optimization</p> <hr/> <p>Data</p> <hr/> <p>Accountability</p> <hr/> <p>Funding</p>	<p>Staffing</p> <hr/> <p>Vacancy Rates</p> <hr/> <p>Increased Training/Support</p> <hr/> <p>Workforce Development</p>
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agencies can release basic information to clarify facts and prevent dissemination of misinformation.

NEW MEXICO FOSTER CHILD AND YOUTH BILL OF RIGHTS

Prior to 2019, if a child or young adult was being served by CYFD, few options were available to them to share concerns, grievances or complaints. In FY 2020, CYFD developed and adopted the New Mexico Foster Child and Youth Bill of Rights

that includes a list of 29 specific rights extended to every child and youth in custody. First and foremost, these rights must be explained by the caseworker to every child and youth upon entering custody in a manner they can understand, with reviews provided at a minimum of every six months. Additionally, these rights are documented and posted in all CYFD offices, on CYFD.org and PullTogether.org, and provided to all staff working with foster children and youth, and with all resource/foster parents.

REGULAR REVIEW AND UPDATES TO THE BILL OF RIGHTS GRIEVANCE PROCESS

In March 2021, a six-page memo was issued to protective services staff related to the implementation of the child and youth grievance process. The purpose of the grievance process is to ensure all children and youth who are in CYFD custody, eligible adults enrolled in Fostering Connections and young people receiving post-18 services from the Fostering Connections Bureau are empowered to advocate for their rights. The Bill of Rights provides an avenue to voice their concerns and to create stronger communication with CYFD staff and other social support providers.

OFFICE OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

The CYFD Office of Children's Rights (OCR) was launched in January 2021, as part of the Governor's vision for better serving New Mexico's children and families. The core function of the OCR is to ensure the most vulnerable system-involved youth are receiving all available legal and financial entitlements and supports. Services offered to youth include educational advocacy to make sure youth have access to school and special supports, such as an Individualized Education Program (IEP), and ensuring the child remains in their school of origin. The OCR includes staff focused on disability rights advocacy for issues related to Social Security's Supplemental Security Income, supports for individuals with developmental disabilities and for accessibility issues. Finally, OCR has hired youth with lived experience to help create the office and to advocate on behalf of young people in CYFD's care. This team includes a Youth Ombudsperson Office, the first youth ombuds office in the state of New Mexico.

Multiple milestones were achieved by mid-2021, including appointing a new director and hiring two additional attorneys to work in OCR alongside investigators and youth peer supports. Currently, CYFD is conducting promotional activities in the form of an OCR educational campaign to reach every New Mexico youth.



The goal is to conduct at least 12 sessions by the end of calendar year 2021. As part of the same set of goals, youth 14 years and older will be provided the Youth Bill of Rights and Grievance Process, and Permanency Planner Workers will explain the process for filing a formal grievance or for reaching out to OCR with any issues, questions or concerns. A review of the Youth Bill of Rights will continue to be conducted with these youth every six months.

Beginning in 2020 through mid-2021, extensive changes were made to CYFD's internal procedures and protocols to create a Youth Grievance process. Internal procedures were completed in May of 2021. The New Mexico Administrative Code (NMAC) was amended to include a reference to the Office of Children's Rights Youth Grievance Procedure, developed with youth input and collaboration.

ADDRESSING CONSTITUENCY CONCERNS

The CYFD Constituency Affairs Office addresses constituent concerns via telephone, letters and referrals from the Protective Services Director's Office, Office of the Secretary and Office of the

Governor. The liaisons who staff the office are primarily responsible for ensuring that complaints and concerns are addressed in a timely manner. The primary types of concerns received are from parents related to delayed phone calls, lack of clarity on the steps required to reunify with their child, legal timelines and court hearing information (especially for hearings online due to pandemic restrictions), and challenges they experience with child visitations. Concerns with COVID-19 transmission rates created visitation issues throughout the year, with families initially limited to outdoor visits, and eventually only virtual visits were allowed. CYFD and the courts collaborated to find a balance between appropriate COVID safety measures and the least-restrictive visits.

It remains the department's contention that if parents are engaged through regular communication with their children who are living with other relatives or extended family members and are educated regarding policies and procedures, constituent concerns will decrease.

Between June 1, 2020, and May 31, 2021, PSD received a total of 769 constituent concerns. This was a significant decrease from the previous year, when 985 were received. New resource parent and biological parent grievance processes implemented in the last year have also helped the department be more responsive to concerns.

OPTIMIZING TECHNOLOGY

By 2018, many of the technology tools being used by CYFD were outdated and causing serious problems with access to accurate information as well as staff inefficiencies. Many of the agency's computers were eight-year-old desktops still running older versions of Windows with serious security vulnerabilities due to the lack of support for such outdated technology. Further, CYFD's data system was 23 years old and written in COBOL, an archaic programming language so old that it was difficult to find contractors or staff who could make modifications or changes. Worse, CYFD's project to replace this data system had stalled and made little to no progress for almost two years.

By May of 2020, CYFD's IT Department, under new leadership, phased out 1,500 computers that were on average eight years old and running Windows 7 and replaced them with new machines running updated and more secure operating systems.

Additionally, CYFD's project to replace its data system was completely overhauled under this administration. In early 2019, CYFD switched from trying to build a more costly custom system and a request for \$30 million in funding to do it, to following the advice of the Legislative Finance Committee and its own Project Team with an approach to purchase off-the-shelf software (aka SAAS, or Software as a Solution) – a cheaper and faster fix to replace its aging data system. CYFD also created an Enterprise Project Management Office (EPMO) and within that office a dedicated project management team to lead the development of the database replacement.

The Project Team integrated the data system replacement process with the larger HHS 2020 project to create an integrated database, consisting of interoperable modules across multiple state departments in New Mexico with oversight and collaboration with the Human Services Department (HSD), Department of Information Technology (DoIT) and others. CYFD also contracted with a third-party vendor to provide Independent Verification and Validation (IV+V) services, which identify and assess risk so that the Project Team can focus on fixing those risks and increasing the likelihood of overall success of the project. The Project Team also successfully launched a pilot of two urgently needed modules, Licensing and Placement, in spring of 2021, with a full implementation statewide in summer of 2021. The full data system replacement is expected to be completed in late 2022. CYFD is also offering free access to the data system software for all New Mexico Tribes.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home policies went into effect, CYFD quickly put in place emergency measures so that children, youth and families could continue to be monitored and receive needed services. In many ways, this was like fixing a train while it was running down the tracks at high speed.

New systems were installed or upgraded successfully in a very short timeframe as staff moved from 0% to 80% remote work during the pandemic. Specific actions included:

- Expanding and mandating the use of Virtual Private Networks (VPNs) for remote work and increasing the security of our VPNs through Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA).
- Using an Adaptive MFA, which allows for dynamic policy changes and step-up authentication – significant controls in securing critical data. For instance, users may be prompted for a higher-assurance second-

factor (or even a third-factor) verification before obtaining access to deeply sensitive information.

- Expanding the use of secure protocols for data encryption to keep the organization safe from malicious attacks, data breaches and other security incidents. This includes using HIPAA (HHS Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) compliant and secure messaging applications.
- Moving away from outdated and expired software to technologies that integrate more easily with CYFD's Active Directory that is protected with highly effective encryption.
- Mandating the use of video conferencing for many meetings during the pandemic, utilizing Zoom subscriptions and Microsoft Teams tools, which provide a robust set of security features and practices for safe and confidential collaboration.
- Moving to the more secure and supported Windows 10 on all work machines and eliminating the use of earlier versions.
- Enhancing remote work options to allow workers on an emergency response to access information from the field that in the past would require a visit to an office to review before going to visit the home. Remote access also allows workers to remain productive if they are required to wait for law enforcement escorts – some situations may require the worker to wait for hours to approach situations that may be unsafe, often due to domestic violence.

UPDATING TECHNOLOGIES TO HELP OUR CHILDREN, YOUTH AND FAMILIES

In December 2020, CYFD launched ReachNM, a new program that enables youth to utilize texting to contact the department's Statewide Central Intake workers (by sending a text message to 505-591-9444) to seek support and resources or report suspected abuse or neglect.

New Mexico is the first state to create a system in which reports of child abuse and neglect may be taken completely by text message. ReachNM makes specially trained personnel available to answer questions from youth and connect them with the support they need 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

According to research conducted by Arizona State University, the average child now has a cell phone by age 11 and texting is their most comfortable form of communication. ReachNM allows CYFD to connect at a one-on-one level to offer support and resources. Youth who send text messages to ReachNM are connected directly with an advocate who asks some initial assessment questions, including what is going on and how the youth is feeling. The worker then connects the child with appropriate resources in their community. If suspected abuse or neglect is disclosed, the text engagement worker will complete an official Statewide Central Intake report so investigators can respond based on the potential severity of the situation. The same process applies if a notification is received through the department's #SAFE/855-333-SAFE telephone numbers.

In March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic stay-at-home policies went into effect, CYFD quickly put in place emergency measures so that children, youth and families could continue to be monitored and receive needed services.

CYFD worked with vendor iCarol to start the ReachNM abuse and neglect texting system, which allows people to send a Short Message Service (SMS) or text message.

Engagement experts can also use the system to connect those in need with the wide range of supports and services available, such as food banks or assistance with transportation to and from medical appointments.

IMPROVING DATA REPORTING AND TRACKING SYSTEM

As part of its data system replacement project, CYFD has partnered with Axxum, a premier provider of network communications and IT security solutions, to initiate an organizational change management (OCM) transformation throughout the agency. The agency endeavors to create a more responsive child well-being system to improve outcomes for all New Mexico children and their families. By replacing the existing case management system, the organization can better support a person-centric and "no wrong door" approach to human services.

The Medicaid Management Information System (MMIS)/Comprehensive Child Welfare Information System (CCWIS) Modernization Project is part of a larger overhaul of all health and human services agencies. A key component of the technology overhaul is a shift in the overall organizational structure of the department and associated business processes.

This strategic vision will be delivered along two Innovation Pathways:

- Enterprise Optimization: Improve the quality and usefulness of data and effectiveness for accountability and reporting that allows for additional financial support for New Mexico families, providers and other stakeholders.
- Prevention: Reduce duplication while aligning business operations within the department

to support an integrated trauma-informed treatment plan for youth and families.

CYFD is working to ensure a smooth transition with all contractors who are assisting in moving the agency from an outdated and inefficient system to a modernized, web-based module platform that includes tools for appropriate assessment, individualized treatment and other critical services for children in the care of the state of New Mexico.

MAXIMIZING FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

When the new CYFD Leadership Team began to assess financial resources for existing programs and grant opportunities for new ones, they learned that New Mexico was far behind other states in securing additional federal and private funding beyond what the state legislature had allocated.

Over the past two years, CYFD has worked diligently across all its divisions to maximize federal dollars under Title IV-E, which remains one of the only uncapped entitlement programs for children. Recent updates made to the entitlement program includes allowances for claiming extended foster care for young people older than 18 years. Housing, transportation and other basic supports can now be covered by the additional dollars provided to the states.

CYFD has also worked to update monthly payment rates to increase incentives for foster placement with relatives especially for youth in Treatment Foster Care who otherwise might require institutionalization due to lack of services in that young person's community.

New Mexico is working to access additional Medicaid funds for the Juvenile Justice and Behavioral Health divisions. CYFD has identified promising funding opportunities from a variety of federal government agencies along with private foundations.

Staffing

BUILDING A STRONG WORKFORCE

A diverse, experienced and skilled workforce is essential to successful child welfare outcomes. One of the CYFD pillars has been workforce development through improved training, support and professional opportunities for advancement. These were especially true during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

PRIORITIZING WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

In May 2019, CYFD's special projects coordinator conducted an assessment that compared CYFD training with that of multiple child welfare agencies across the country. Division leaders, managers, supervisors, field staff, and coaching and training personnel were interviewed and asked to share their honest and unvarnished opinions with regard to what was working, as well as identifying areas for improvement.

The assessment found:

- Training is sufficient in the key areas of social service practice that focus on working with children, youth and families, and the number of hours required for this type of training is appropriate.
- A newly implemented coaching program was not adhering to the professional development field standards, likely inhibiting intended outcomes.
- Older employee training curriculum should be updated for increased relevancy to the workers' jobs and their specific tasks and responsibilities.

Strategic Plan Foundation

<p>More Appropriate Placements</p> <hr/> <p>Reduce Congregate Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Kinship Care</p> <hr/> <p>Increase Community Based Mental Health Services</p> <hr/> <p>Special Protocols for Vulnerable Populations</p>	<p>Prevention</p> <hr/> <p>Institutionalization</p> <hr/> <p>Homelessness</p> <hr/> <p>Trauma</p>	<p>Optimization</p> <hr/> <p>Data</p> <hr/> <p>Accountability</p> <hr/> <p>Funding</p>	<p>Staffing</p> <hr/> <p>Vacancy Rates</p> <hr/> <p>Increased Training/Support</p> <hr/> <p>Workforce Development</p>
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- Self-care training within CYFD is generic, rather than specific, to the needs of social services employees who work with children and families.
- Training schedules were not developed strategically to meet multiple levels of professional development.
- Training in agencies other than CYFD had been a useful tool for recruitment and retention and should be utilized by the department.
- Many of CYFD's training programs were conducted by external providers, which resulted in duplication and overlap of key concepts and not enough specialized training for employees.

INCREASING STAFF TRAINING AND SUPPORT WITH A NEW WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BUREAU

In order to address these concerns and improve the professional development capacity of CYFD, a new bureau was formed. The Workforce Development Bureau included multiple existing training and coaching programs and added needed expertise to meet the full spectrum of training opportunities for the CYFD workforce.

New programs began in late 2019, and by the time employees were required to work from home due to COVID, beginning in March 2020, enough progress had been made concerning policies and implementation that training was easily shifted to virtual sessions for new employees and for all Protective Services Division staff, including those individuals working directly with families.

By April 2020, Peer Learning Networks were launched for employees seeking to improve their child welfare practices, and mandatory coaching was established for all staff. In addition, the training program for resource parents shifted to the Bureau, which created a new preservice training curriculum and assumed responsibilities for organizing the Annual Resource Parent Conference in a virtual setting.

By fall 2020, the Bureau had begun implementation of an Individualized Development Plan (IDP) assessment for employees using coaching services tailored to each position within CYFD. These IDPs have proven especially important for increasing the effectiveness of protective services related to critical provisions in the Indian Child Welfare Act that outline specific culturally and linguistically appropriate supports and services.

Trainings are designed to support safety, permanency and child well-being, and they are conducted through individual and group development that is role-specific and focused on trauma resiliency.

TRAUMA-INFORMED TRAINING AND SUPPORTS

Over the past two years, strategies for addressing trauma to help children and youth adversely affected by it have taken on greater priority for CYFD, including those implemented by the Behavioral Health, Juvenile Justice and Protective Services Divisions.

As an agency, CYFD continuously works to provide trauma-responsive training, principles and practices that promote a sense of safety and well-being for children and youth. A trauma-responsive component has been designed to assist employees in addressing trauma experienced by the child, birth family or legal guardian, the resource parents as well as the secondary trauma experienced by workers themselves.

This staff training program is based on a continuum of professional development strategies that include self-paced learning, training, coaching, culture shift, and development through supervision. Trainings are designed to support safety, permanency and child well-being, and they are conducted through individual and group development that is role-specific and focused on trauma resiliency. Individual training requirements and completion are tracked through a learning management system called Cornerstone.

In February 2021, Protective Services launched the new Supervisory Practice Framework that trains supervisors to develop a wholistic approach to managing employees, which is trauma-responsive in the areas of administration, support and education. New supervisors are required to complete training within 90 days of their hire or promotion.

CYFD Behavioral Health Services (BHS), in collaboration with PSD, is committed to providing quality behavioral health services and supports that are trauma-responsive, evidence-based, culturally aligned, and youth- and family-driven. The comprehensive training plan will be built on a foundation of a trauma-responsive system of care.

CYFD staff are often exposed to, and witnesses to, traumatic events, and they are not immune from the lasting impact of these situations. Specialized training has been developed for a resilience curriculum and a self-care lab, intended to increase retention, prevent burnout and address vicarious trauma. In 2021, a formalized training and coaching plan was implemented to increase trauma-responsive practices throughout CYFD to better serve children, youth and families within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as CYFD staff. CYFD leadership has prioritized developing trauma-responsive training for CYFD staff over the course of the next fiscal year, with a phased plan over the next three years, to fully integrate trauma-responsive training to all staff.

REDUCING TURNOVER AND VACANCY RATES

Vacancy rates for protective services line worker positions have been cut in half, from 23% in January 2019 to 15.8% on January 1, 2021, and as of July 1, these rates have been reduced to 11%.

This reduction in turnover rates is in large part due to several initiatives that have been implemented in the past two years, including the new supervisory framework that emphasizes staff support and skill-building; an overhaul of the protective services pre-training curriculum; the hiring of regionally based coaches to provide ongoing one-on-one support and skill development training to staff; and annual staff surveys to identify key factors and trends related to staff morale, job knowledge and gaps in training and support.

A stable workforce, especially in Protective Services, is extremely important for children and youth who experience foster care. Having a well-trained, caring Protective Services social worker or other frontline staff member can make all the difference to a child or teen.

SUPPORTING OUR WORKFORCE DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Thanks to the Workforce Development Bureau leadership, the full cooperation of CYFD staff and collaboration with the Department of Health, an emergency plan for the COVID-19 pandemic was quickly implemented in response to the pandemic. The plan was instrumental in issuing guidance, helping to prevent the spread of the virus and assisting with vaccinations for families in our systems. Specifically, CYFD has been able to:

- Transform new employee training into virtual sessions consistent with mandatory telework;
- Offer educational leave for CYFD employees pursuing a higher degree in social work;

- Offer drop-in trainings, at least once daily, with topics suggested by supervisors;
- Coordinate weekly mindfulness and self-care drop-in sessions;
- Provide training to support workers in the shift to telework (Strategies for Teleworking, Self-Care in a Teleworking Environment, Confidentiality While Teleworking, Managing Up, and Supervising a Teleworking Staff);
- Publish biweekly updates to support supervisors with the shift to telework;
- Create a training course for educators in recognizing possible abuse in virtual settings; and
- Revise new employee training to be in alignment with virtual training best practices.

NEXT STEPS AND CONTINUED PRIORITIES

In addition to evaluating the ongoing initiatives described above, CYFD will continue implementing other key strategies, such as expanded flex schedules and more partnerships with state universities to help recruit and train qualified staff who are pursuing degrees in related fields, such as social work. The Protective Services Division will also implement a new exit interview strategy in FY 2021 to better understand the factors that lead to job dissatisfaction and decisions to leave the agency, and to build initiatives around areas identified as high priority using a weighted gap analysis of the survey data.

CYFD continues to reinforce that the agency leaders want to hear from staff about how to improve operations in a manner that makes employees feel safe and comfortable in delivering feedback.

During COVID-19, a dedicated email inbox was established for staff to ask questions, make requests for items most needed during the pandemic, or recommend ways to better serve employees and their families. Concerns raised by workers led to direct changes to supervisor training for remote work and other refinements over time.

The department also provides whistleblower protection training to staff, a training that is required for all management employees.

Vacancy rates for protective services line worker positions have been cut in half, from 23% in January 2019 to 15.8% on January 1, 2021, and as of July 1, these rates have been reduced to 11%.

Moving Forward to 2022 and Beyond

As outlined in this report, tremendous improvements have been realized across all CYFD units between January 2019 and June 2021, the end of the 2021 fiscal year. CYFD is committed to the ongoing efforts required to ensure that progress is continuous in the areas of child welfare and juvenile justice reforms over the next few years as the CYFD transformation moves forward. These include:

- Continuing to grow and expand trauma-responsive, community-based mental health services throughout the state of New Mexico so that young people have the therapeutic supports *they need, when they need them, and wherever they need them.*
- Continuing to build strong relationships with New Mexico's 23 Tribes and Pueblos in partnership with Tribal leaders and Tribal courts.
- Prioritizing placement with relatives first for children and youth who need temporary out-of-home care through the Protective Services or Juvenile Justice systems, including grandparents, aunts and uncles. But, if this living arrangement is not possible, identifying extended family members or close friends, godparents, teachers or other people with whom children in CYFD custody consider kin.
- Whenever age appropriate, including the voices of youth at the center of the transformation process so young people with relevant life experience have the opportunity to help CYFD identify family and other supports.

- Expanding the Quality Parenting Initiative launched in 2021 statewide, in order to establish positive relationships between birth and foster families, resulting in lasting, meaningful connections for CYFD's children and youth in protective services.
- Continuing to reduce staff vacancy and turnover rates through creative recruitment efforts and expanded, individualized training programs that provide incentives and career opportunities for the CYFD workforce.
- Expanding Fostering Connections as a way to reach all of our older youth in Protective Services and Juvenile Justice programs.
- Building on the promise of Fostering Connections as a way to take real, meaningful steps to end youth homelessness for those aging out of foster care at age 18 and to provide expanded housing and supports for youth ages 21 to 25 across New Mexico.
- In partnership with advocacy organizations throughout the state, strengthening protections for vulnerable New Mexico youth through an expanded Office of Children's Rights.
- Implementing billing reimbursement to the federal Department of Health and Human Services to better leverage Medicaid and foster care funding, including increasing Medicaid billing by at least \$1 million in FY 2022 and supporting legislative changes to make federal foster care funding available for juvenile justice involved youth.
- Increasing transparency and accountability of all youth-serving systems in New Mexico through fully staffing the Office of Children's Rights, including the Office of Youth Ombudsperson and expanding online access to outcome measures and associated data.
- Launching an Office of Performance and Accountability to centralize data and training efforts across all divisions of CYFD.
- Completing the decommissioning of the archaic and unreliable 23-year-old data system and replacing these obsolete systems with new, mobile, modern technology.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, to Governor Lujan Grisham and her team who have fully supported transformational change for CYFD and always have had children, youth and families as the priority, especially for those who experience and are touched by protective services and foster care, juvenile justice systems and community-based behavioral health programs.

CYFD would like to extend its heartfelt appreciation to the Annie E. Casey Foundation's Family Well-Being Strategy Group for its support and technical assistance.

Senior management at CYFD have been the guiding light for the important reforms and outcomes described in this report along with the hard work of an amazing staff, too numerous to mention by name, who during the worst of the Coronavirus pandemic kept providing critical services in-person and virtually from their homes, cars, vans and other places to ensure the safety and well-being of the children, youth and families service by CYFD.

And, most importantly, the front-line workers who have embraced new initiatives and programs, provided honest feedback, and improved the lives of the children and families they serve. These workers have adapted to every challenge brought by the pandemic and helped to ensure the state's children and families were not alone through sometimes bleak and uncertain times.