



Department of Social Services

TALBOT COUNTY

2023 ANNUAL REPORT





Vision

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

Mission

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

Guiding Principles

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

Executive Leadership Team

Linda Webb, LCSW, Director

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

Juana Blue, Assistant Director of Family Investment

Dawn Coleman, Assistant Director of Child Support

Ben Pittsley, Assistant Director of Administration

Management Team

Debbe Fairbank, LCSW-C, Adult Services Supervisor

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

Erika Fenske, LCSW-C, Child Protective Services Supervisor

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

Allayne Deshields, Family Investment Supervisor

Dianne Heffernan, Family Investment Supervisor

Leonard Palmer, Family Investment Supervisor

Lorraine Johnson, Family Investment Supervisor

Paris Quillet, LCSW-C, Special Projects Coordinator

Kelley Werner, Executive Assistant

Meloney Morris, Human Resources Officer

Traci Corbin, Human Resources Officer

Social Services Board

Victoria Gomez Lozano, Chair

Elaine Wilson, Vice Chair

Pete Leshner, County Council ex officio

Andrew Hollis

Sarah Cloxton

Sandy Brown

Rev. Susan Browning

Samantha Jeter

Brenda Wooden

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Friends and Colleagues,

Welcome to the Talbot County Department of Social Services (TCSSS) Fiscal Year 2023 Annual Report.

Before jumping in, I'd like to provide some background. In FY 2023, we wrapped up our transitional strategic plan - a plan that we considered to be our evolutionary roadmap to post-pandemic operations and organizational culture. Through this 2-year strategic plan period, we adapted our processes, practices, and - frankly - our thinking to respond to a world that had in so many ways changed. And, yet, we saw our community and our workforce continue to have the same needs and wants, although perhaps heightened by our collective and unprecedented experience.

During this year, we gathered feedback from our community through our customer and community partner surveys and through direct and personal contact. We continued regular check-ins with the workforce to identify what was going well and where additional attention was needed. We moved from an employee satisfaction survey model to a research-based employee engagement survey. And, with the information gathered, we continued to refine our practice and approach to best meet the needs of our community and our employees in this new world.

This year, we experienced staff turnover the likes of which we'd not seen to date. While this provided opportunities for assessing our work and our organization through a new set of eyes, it also presented challenges in many areas. We have adapted our new employee onboarding, orientation, and supervision; asked for employee feedback; strategically offered in-person opportunities; and increased flexibility where possible to reverse this trend. We are learning more every day and applying those lessons in the workplace.

And we continued our equity journey through grant-funded and other training, conversations on race, participation in the newly formed Talbot County Equity Coalition, information gathered through our annual equity organizational assessment, and the work of our Racial Equity Team. This journey, while difficult, is necessary if we are to serve all members of our community in a way that is kind, effective, and sensitive to individual cultural needs. So, we learn, we grow, and we continue on this journey together.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- TCDSS continued its equity journey in several ways in fiscal year 2023. An equity grant from Talbot Family Network supported equity coaching provided by Sage Wellness Group to our executive, management, human resources, and equity team members. We also received a grant from Aramark to provide a foundational equity training for new employees. We continued quarterly conversations on race for agency staff, added our equity focus to our new employee orientation, and joined the newly formed Talbot County Equity Coalition. We developed a dashboard to identify and monitor any disproportionalities that may exist in our work and to support data driven decision making around changes needed in program or practice approaches. A second annual organizational assessment indicated stronger agreement than disagreement on all items. Finally, we added new members to our Racial Equity Team, which developed its first work plan that includes broadening our focus beyond race and ethnicity to learn more about how best to serve other populations. The work plan includes goals as recommended by our 2022 Racial Equity Systems Analysis.
- While our workforce began to stabilize this year, we continued our retention focus. Supervisors conducted Stay Interviews designed to build trust between supervisor and supervisee and provide needed support, connection, and opportunity for growth. While we have conducted employee satisfaction surveys for many years, this year we moved to Gallup's research based Q12[®] Employee Engagement Survey and supervisors used those results to develop unit action plans to increase opportunities for connection to the work, colleagues, and the organization.
- We maintained COA accreditation through an annual process of providing specific evidence of our Risk Management, Financial, Performance and Quality Improvement, and safety processes.
- Wellness at Work returned to TCDSS and launched its first kick-off event in July 2022. The year included the introduction of a wellness scorecard designed to encourage staff participation in wellness activities within the workplace and community with opportunities to win incentives. A wide range of activities were offered to staff all year long including educational presentations, interactive physical activities, personal challenges, and virtual resources. The team focused on prioritizing in-person activities with a minimum of monthly offerings. Excellent feedback was provided by staff, including structured feedback in a survey to help guide the next year's planning.

- We wrapped up our FY 2022-2023 strategic plan, which included the following key outcomes:
 - Assessed and adjusted work processes, supervision, new employee orientation, meeting structure, and organizational culture initiatives to adapt to a newly virtual workforce.
 - Updated and initiated new recruitment and retention activities in response to the changing workforce and hiring landscape.
 - Expanded our equity work to add recruitment, hiring, and on-boarding components; add equity-related questions to our annual customer and community partner surveys; and make training opportunities available both within the agency and those offered in the community.
 - Conducted outreach to and met with new leadership in many of our community partner agencies.
 - Worked collaboratively with Talbot County Public Schools and law enforcement agencies to refine Child Protective Services reporting processes.
 - Prioritized our local government relationship by providing an orientation to new and continuing County Council members and members of County staff, offering a tour of the Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center, and providing regular updates to the County Council.
 - Regularly met program performance targets.
- We drafted our FY 2024-26 strategic plan with the support of consultant Rob Levit. Executive, management, PQI, and equity teams, as well as members of the Social Services Board participated in several planning sessions to develop the following goals, which will guide our work for the next three years:
 - Cultivating a diverse and compassionate organization that provides equitable access, services, and opportunities to staff and the community.
 - Attracting, developing, and retaining staff with the skills, knowledge, and ability to work collaboratively to serve the community.
 - Supporting and promoting the health and well-being of staff, customers, and the community.
 - Continuing to be a high performing organization.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

- The Family Investment Program began a partnership with Brookletts Place Senior Center by providing quarterly presentations on income support programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program.
- TCDSS coordinated several initiatives to support individuals and their families throughout the 2022 Holiday season. Through our annual Holiday Project, we served 165 individuals in 69 families by working with 12 community contributors - a combination of individuals and organizations. The Services unit worked with 15 organizations and private donors to provide holiday gifts to 60 seniors, 180 children, and 16 families. We again partnered with The Star Democrat on the Brighter Christmas initiative to serve 152 households. We also received donations of food and hand crocheted blankets that were distributed to individuals and families served by the Child Welfare, Adult Services, and Family Investment programs.
- Empower Me is a child abuse prevention program adopted in Talbot County in 2014 as a community initiative. TCDSS has remained the lead agency and has been diligent about carrying the message of personal safety. This year, every elementary school classroom at Saints Peter and Paul Elementary and Middle School received an Empower Me presentation and every first grade classroom within Talbot County Public Schools was provided with a presentation and materials to take home. Also this year, a pilot program at Polaris Village Academy was launched using a five-session model that was very well received. The Empower Me Steering Committee continues to provide education, resources and presentations throughout the county, as well as technical assistance to other organizations interested in implementing the program.
- TCDSS's Public Education and Advocacy Team (PEAT) participated in a wide variety of community events. These opportunities ranged from client-focused events, community education, recreational support, and community partnerships. An exciting new partnership was formed with the Maryland Food Bank, targeting outreach in identified food deserts in the county. There was an intentional focus this year to increase outreach in diverse communities and operate through a lens of equity, spanning beyond race and ethnicity and supporting other marginalized groups. In addition to community events, PEAT has remained committed to outreach in a variety of forms and has supported open houses for our Children's Advocacy Center, interviews with media, press releases, presentations at the County Council, and program related presentations to individual community partners. PEAT completed

62 outreach events and presentations this fiscal year. The increased use of social media remains a strategy to reach the community virtually and share resources, opportunities, education and event information.

- Our annual Customer Satisfaction Survey received 112 responses with more than 90% of respondents reporting satisfaction in areas such as service provision in preferred language, respect, equity, and communication. Once data from the survey was aggregated, the results were reviewed at all levels of the agency beginning with Executive leadership and finishing with the PQI Central Council and each program's Performance Improvement Team. All feedback from each level of review was documented on a Process Summary Report, which was used to track actions taken based on survey feedback.
- Our annual Community Partner Survey was distributed to 141 individuals in private/non-profit, government, education, legal, health care, law enforcement, business, and advocacy sectors, as well as to resource parents. The survey received 68 responses - a response rate of 48%, which exceeded the prior survey's rate by 9%. The majority of respondents agreed that they were treated politely and professionally; that services were delivered promptly and equitably; that there was no discrimination in the provision of services; and that the agency demonstrated its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion through community engagement and service delivery. The survey results were reviewed in the same manner as described above for the customer survey. The PQI process resulted in documented activities that included procedural refinement work with Talbot County Public Schools, Talbot County Sheriff's Office, and Easton Police Department; increased partnership with the Hunger Coalition and area food banks; clarifying the expectations around the availability of after-hours workers to resource parents; and a review of the script used for incoming phone calls.
- TCDSS chaired and staffed the Talbot County Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP) Board, which awarded \$15,925.00 (after the deduction of \$275.00 in administrative costs) to Easton Church of God Harvest of Hope Food Pantry, St. Michaels Community Center, Talbot Interfaith Shelter, and Tilghman United Methodist Church. EFSP is a federal program that supports the expansion of existing food and shelter programs. Board membership is guided by EFSP guidelines and includes representatives from American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Mid Shore Behavioral Health, the faith community, and County government.

CHILD WELFARE AND ADULT SERVICES

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

Child Protective Services and Consolidated In-Home Services

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

From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Held 18 Family Team Decision Making meetings with family members receiving In Home and Out of Home Services and their support networks at key child welfare decision points.
- Provided In Home Services to 30 families.
- Conducted 21 Risk of Harm assessments, which are assessments to determine if a child is safe and identify risk factors. Coordination and referral to community resources is an important aspect of this service.
- Conducted 15 Substance Exposed Newborn assessments, which involve determining the safety and risk of harm to a substance exposed newborn and the interventions or services that may be needed. Services are developed to address the risks and needs of the entire family.

Child maltreatment allegations meeting investigative criteria can be addressed through two different pathways - investigative response or alternative response. The investigative response is the traditional forensic approach to the investigation of child maltreatment allegations in which a finding, or investigative determination, is made and a maltreater is identified. The alternative response is a collaborative approach, utilized for low risk allegations, in which the family's needs and circumstances are assessed and services are implemented to reduce the risk of future maltreatment. In fiscal year 2023, we

- Responded to 54 reports of child abuse or neglect using an investigative response.
- Responded to 43 reports of child abuse or neglect using an alternative response.
- Received 469 reports of child abuse or neglect and 24 requests for information and/or community resources.



Talbot County Children's Advocacy Center

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

From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Conducted 27 medical examinations for the children in the five Mid Shore counties (Talbot, Caroline, Kent, Queen Anne's, Dorchester) and provided a full review of 11 children's medical history.
- Conducted 71 forensic interviews for the Mid Shore counties.
- Provided Victim Advocacy services:
 - 180 children and non-offending caregivers served.
 - 728 victim advocacy sessions provided.
- Provided emergency financial assistance to 16 children and 44 caregivers to support stabilization after disclosure of abuse.
- Provided Mental Health services
 - 67 children were referred to mental health providers.
 - 49 sessions of Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy were provided to victims of child abuse.
- 20 cases were accepted for prosecution, 14 of which resulted in a conviction or plea deal.

- Because individualized options allow for individualized recovery, TCCAC also offers access to a variety of alternative therapies and services:
 - 14 sessions of equine therapy with an instructor accredited by the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship.
 - 56 sessions of art therapy.
 - Two therapeutic art groups serving 14 children between the ages of 12 and 17 years were provided, focusing on building connections between the mind and body and including spiritual components of healing, which helps participants understand their feelings and create a path towards healing.
 - One caregiver retreat and two victim retreats.
 - Six sessions of music therapy.
- 18 members of the Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) were sent to 80 training sessions and 6 conferences throughout the year and held 28 case staffings with the goal of continuously improving the team's response to child abuse cases.
- In order to ensure the wellbeing of the MDT, a TCCAC mental health therapist provided 36 therapeutic sessions to 14 members of the MDT.
- One team building event was held for 13 members of the MDT.
- The TCCAC Advisory Board met twice this year to obtain and disseminate information to community partners and ensure continuity and availability of services. Coordinated efforts with board members ensured that community agencies are aware of resources for victims and allow for the development of programs that address gaps in services.



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

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

From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Provided foster care services to 19 youth
- Held 15 Enhanced Youth Transition Planning meetings using the Achieve My Plan (AMP) youth engagement model with transition aged youth in foster care. This enhanced planning process is designed to help youth aged 14 to 21 years of age prepare for a successful transition out of foster care.
- Collaborated with the Child Welfare Academy to help plan the Annual Resource Parent conference which was held virtually in April 2023. Additional virtual training events that were planned through other agencies and organizations were shared with resource families throughout the year.
- Held 6 Resource Parent Appreciation events.
- Offered a virtual monthly support group facilitated by Families Connected.

TCDSS Option Respite Program

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

- Served 21 children and 24 parents from 17 families.
- Provided 388 overnight episodes and 30 full-day episodes of respite care for a total of 418 episodes of respite.

TCDSS Nurturing Parenting Program

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

- One 8-week session of parenting education was held at the Talbot Interfaith Shelter from January through May 2023 serving 6 parents and 19 children.
- Three 10-week virtual parenting education sessions were held.
- Served a total of 28 parents and 60 children from 19 families with a total of 268 units of service/personal contact.



Adult Services

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

From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Conducted 168 Adult Protective Services (APS) investigations and assessments.
- Provided 385 units of personal contact in APS continuing care.
- Provided 280 units of personal contact in In-Home Aide services continuing care.
- Provided 190 units of personal contact in the Social Services To Adults (SSTA) program, a case management service that provides assessment, service planning and connection to community resources.
- Provided services that supported the ability of 98% of the adults served to remain safely in the community.
- Maintained one provider of Project Home, a supportive housing program for persons with mental illness or other disabilities, by offering an adult foster care family model of care that provides a stable, family-like living arrangement in the community.

FAMILY INVESTMENT SERVICES

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

From July 2022 to June 2023 we:

- Returned to pre-pandemic application processing rules for some programs (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program or SNAP and Medical Assistance) with the end of the Public Health Emergency.
- Awarded 11 individuals with job retention bonuses for retaining employment for 30, 60 and 90 days after receiving benefits.
- Served 40 households by paying a total of \$10,689.00 in past due water and wastewater bills through the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program (LIHWAP), which began in February 2022.
- Completed 2,778 applications for income support.
- Issued a combined annual total of \$11,577,790.94 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits to a monthly average of 4,267 individuals.
- Issued a combined annual total of \$328,540.18 in Temporary Disability Assistance (TDAP) benefits to a monthly average of 63 Talbot County residents.
- Served a monthly average of
 - 746 individuals receiving Community Care Medical Assistance
 - 592 individuals receiving SSI Medical Assistance
 - 85 individuals receiving Long Term Care Medical Assistance
- Issued a combined annual total of \$632,677.97 to a monthly average of 43 adults and 144 children receiving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA)
- Issued a combined annual amount of \$11,298.00 for a total of 9 recipients receiving Public Assistance to Adults (PAA)
- Issued a total of \$1,889.78 in Emergency Assistance for Families with Children (EAFC) for 4 households.
- Answered a monthly average of 562 calls on our customer service phone line
- Provided interpreter services 929 times during the year

CHILD SUPPORT SERVICES

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

From October 2022 through September 2023 (Federal Fiscal Year 2023), we:

- Collected and distributed \$2,667,759.00 in child support payments (current and arrears) to families and children
- Collected 68.77% of current child support due
- Collected payments in 73.67% of the cases where individuals fell behind in their obligations

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

The Child Support Program is supported by the Talbot County Young Fathers/Non-custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP), which provides one-on-one case management services to non-custodial parents by identifying, assessing, and addressing barriers to economic stability and employment. NPEP provides referrals to community partners for services in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, job readiness, and employment resources. Although the NPEP Coordinator position was vacant for 6 months, the following was accomplished between July 2022 and June 2023:

- Enrolled 16 parents.
- Served a total of 16 parents.
- Assisted in 7 full-time job placements.
- Collected \$13,817.00 in child support from parents participating in the program.
- Celebrated family and connection by hosting a trip to Jolly Rogers Splash Mountain and Amusement Park in Ocean City, MD for five families consisting of 9 adults and 17 children.





Responsible Fathers Program

The Responsible Fathers Program provides peer support and education sessions for fathers incarcerated at the Talbot County Detention Center. Utilizing the evidence-based curriculum *Inside Out Dad*, the goal of this program is to reduce recidivism.

From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Held 73 classes for 10 men.
- Held 2 in-person graduations for the men's group.
- Conducted 4 community presentations.
- Launched the evidence-based *Understanding DAD* women's group as a small pilot in April 2021 and received funding for full implementation from the Maryland Child Support Administration this year.
- Held 25 classes for 7 women.
- Held 2 in-person graduations for the women's group.

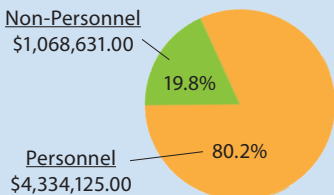
ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

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

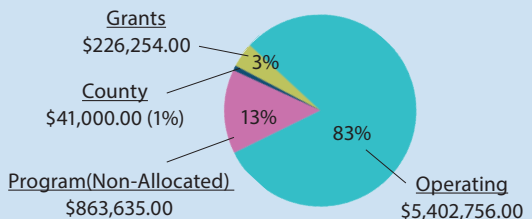
From July 2022 through June 2023, we:

- Continued to provide IT equipment, training and support for employees both in the office and on telework status.
- Provided support to 68 individuals, including TCDSS employees and
 - 1 Talbot County Health Department employee who provides substance abuse screening and peer support onsite
 - 1 Eastern Shore Area Health Education Center employee who assists customers enrolling in health insurance programs
 - 1 Maryland State Department of Education, Office of Child Care employee by providing office space.
- Supported employees in continued professional development
 - 1 Employee obtained a Masters in Social Work license.
 - 1 Employee obtained the Maryland Procurement Associate Certification.
 - 1 Employee obtained the Certified Public Manager certificate from University of Baltimore.
- Added and filled 1 state contractual position in the Family Investment unit.
- Added and filled 1 state merit position for a supervisor for the Children’s Advocacy Center.
- Recruited for 18 positions that were vacated.
- Filled 22 positions.
- Promoted 9 individuals to advance their careers
 - 8 individuals were promoted to fill internal vacancies
 - 1 individual was promoted to fill a vacancy in another state agency

**FY2023 Operating Budget
Personnel vs. Non-Personnel**



FY2023 Overall Budget





PERFORMANCE AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT (PQI)



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

From July 2022 through June 2023, our PQI Central Council and Performance Improvement Teams (PIT) accomplished the following:

PQI-CENTRAL COUNCIL (PQI-CC)

- PQI-CC hosted its fourth annual PQI-CC training. This year the training was a part of the annual All Staff Development Day. A subcommittee was created and there was record breaking in-person attendance since pre-pandemic.

- PQI-CC delivered the new member orientation process in June 2023. The process included shadowing and individual meetings. New staff began participating in PQI-CC meeting observation as a part of new hire orientation, and the PQI Orientation Handout provided in new employee orientation was updated.
- PQI-CC bylaws were updated to create the Secretary position and add membership from the Finance Unit. Both positions were filled.
- Surveys and survey distribution processes were reviewed and adapted by the PQI-CC team. Following the aggregation of survey response data, results were shared throughout the agency and process summary reports were used consistently to document actions taken. This year's surveys included the community partner survey, resource parent survey, customer survey, racial equity survey, and employee engagement survey.
- PQI-CC also recommended the addition of the Wellness program overview as a part of new hire orientation.
- PQI-CC reviewed the current employee recognition opportunities and gathered feedback from staff about possible enhancements. This resulted in updating the Employee Recognition administrative procedure A-87 to include feedback from all staff, not just supervisors.
- PQI-CC added Wellness to the team's monthly agenda for review and ensured that there are members from PQI-CC on the Wellness committee at all times to support information sharing.
- Equity remains a standing item on this team's monthly agenda. This year, PQI-CC provided support to the PIT teams to incorporate equity into their monthly meetings. Representation from PQI-CC members remains consistent on the Equity Committee.
- PQI-CC developed new schedules for bulletin board development, management team presentations, and quarterly presentations to staff from community partners to align with the new PIT Team structure.
- There were five Care to Shares from the period of July 1, 2022 through June 30, 2023. All have been reviewed, four have been closed and one remains in process.
- Quarterly presentations on community resources are conducted by PIT teams to all agency staff, and feedback is reviewed by PQI-CC. This year, three quarterly presentations were delivered to all agency employees.
- PQI-CC has continued to review possible outreach opportunities and forward ideas or resources to the Public Education and Advocacy Team (PEAT). All staff participation in the events has increased, Social Services Board members have been engaged, and community outreach has increased.



PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT TEAMS

Family Investment Improvement Team (FIIT):

- Staff continued to maintain the Super Users list, ensured all needed technology was secured, and developed a Google group chat to improve communication, as well as inform and share experiences in real time.
- Team building and self care remained priorities to promote retention and a high performing workforce in FIA. There was one FIA retreat in October, one mini retreat in January, and an FIA appreciation event in June. New employees and supervisors were engaged in these activities.
- Staff developed a coverage schedule for the hybrid work environment to ensure adequate in office coverage in all areas.
- Monthly review of compliance outcomes is conducted to facilitate continued application and redetermination processing timeliness. Regular review of data uncovered a reporting issue in the Work Participation Rate and internal tracking was developed to more accurately report performance in this area.

Services Excellence Team (SET):

- Hybrid orientation recommendations were revised and submitted for adaptation by leadership and human resources for new hires. Services staff began individual outreach to new staff to orient them to the SET team and PQI structure.
- The Kinship Navigator presented “Building Connections” to Services staff as an overview of the Kinship Navigation and Family Finding services available.
- SET arranged a presentation to all staff by ARC on their services.
- Services staff committed to representation on IT, PEAT, Wellness, Risk and the Equity committee in an effort to remain involved, committed and contributing to cross-agency work.
- Monthly review of training was maintained, and an email group was created for new staff in need of training resources and newsletter subscriptions. HUB training was promoted and Services usage of training available on the HUB was increased.
- Public awareness of vulnerable adults was increased by identifying and participating in a series of presentations at Brookletts Place and reinstating the quarterly meetings with community partners in the aging community. Additional ideas for outreach specific to the aging community were shared with PEAT.
- Annual self-care retreat and celebration of Social Work month were organized and completed.

Child Support Improvement Team (CSIT):

- The team assigned staff on a monthly basis to provide the group with critical updates and practical tips on operating in the Child Support Management System (CSMS) environment.
- The use of the Non-Custodial Parent Employment Program (NPEP) continued, and the team reviewed the program’s outreach and engagement on a monthly basis.
- CSIT developed four small group training sessions and exercises to enhance their knowledge of equity-related topics.
- Wellness was a key focus area for CSIT and included regular sharing of self-care plans, wellness walks, and participation in self-care training. The team tracked a total of 783 walks!

2022 Resource Parent Appreciation Dinner



Multicultural Festival Outreach: PEAT Volunteer, Lee Newcomb and TCDSS Board member, Reverend Sue Browning



July 2022 Resource Parent Appreciation

Event Shorebirds Game!



Baynard Family at the December 2022

Resource Parent Holiday Party



**November 2022 "Thanks for Giving" Annual
Adoption Appreciation Fall event**



Talbot County Young Fathers/NPEP Program



Empower Me Community Presentation, Talbot County

Free Library, Easton Branch, March 2023



Holiday Program Gift Distribution, December 2022





**TALBOT COUNTY
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

301 Bay St. Unit #5
Easton, MD 21601

Phone: (410)770-4848 Fax: (410)820-7117
www.dhs.maryland.gov



Wes Moore, Governor
Aruna Miller, Lt. Governor
Rafael López, Secretary