



# KENT COUNTY

Department of Social Services

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**2022 ANNUAL REPORT**

Maryland Department of Human Services

**Kent County Department of Social Services  
Annual Report FY 2022**

**Vision**

We envision Kent County as a safe community where individuals and families strive for, achieve, and maintain independence.

**Mission**

Kent County Department of Social Services advocates for and protects vulnerable children, adults and families through partnerships and collaboration with our community.

**Values**

**Self-Sufficiency:** Every adult, child and family should be given the opportunity and means to establish stability and economic independence so that they become and remain self-sufficient.

**Customer Service:** We maintain a supportive environment that encourages collaborative customer service, high quality delivery of service, and respect for ourselves, our colleagues, and our customers.

**Supportive Environment:** We support individuals, families and the community by providing accessible services in a dignified and compassionate manner in partnership with our stakeholders.

**FY 2022 Kent County Social Services Advisory Board Members**

Caitlan Gartland, Co Chair

Beverly Birkmire, Co Chair

Robert Jacobs, County Commissioner Representative

Dr. Vienna Walker - Kent County Board of Education Representative

Sara England - Cunningham

Portia Turner

Catherine Boyer- Sterling

Mary Adda Moore

## Director's Message

It is once again my humble honor to present this year's annual report from the Kent County Department of Social Services. Every year, our local DSS reaffirms and follows through on its commitments, strengthens its community and non-profit partnerships, and faces transitions with our characteristic, collective resilience.

Our achievements were expansive, both within and outside of our welcoming neighborhood. The diversity of our accomplishments reflects our ongoing refinement and attainment of goals that we've set.

Within our agency, we had several retirements, and because we are blessed to have such a wealth of in-house professionals, several staff were promoted to lead workers and supervisors. It is satisfying as Director to know that the chain of reliability is continuous here among all of our staff.

Our community outreach blossomed further this year, as we offered more services to the community by partnering with community agencies to refer families and adults to Kinship Navigation, Functional Family Therapy and Parent-Child Interaction Therapy. As you well know, more offerings strengthen the fabric of our community safety net.

And from a technological standpoint – for our agency and especially those whom we serve – all systems have been 'go' with FIA, Services, CSA and LGA on the MD THINK platform. We proudly started off helping to pilot the MD THINK platform, with other agencies, and we take additional pride with the part we played in the successful roll-out.

It is also incumbent upon me to give kudos to the Social Services Advisory Board, with whom we've worked closely to educate the community on the services we provide. We are grateful for the counsel each member contributes, in addition to their continued support. Their collective wisdom provides a light at all times and is invaluable.

Last but not least, I am pleased to note that our agency achieved accreditation from the Council on Accreditation, "an international, independent, nonprofit organization that accredits human and social service providers." Their accreditation process is justifiably rigorous as it helps maintain high standards of service and trust in agencies such as ours. Such accreditation represents a mark of distinction that enables others to instantly recognize us as the reliable resource that we know ourselves to be.

Thank you to all DHS staff, community partners, stakeholders, legislators, government agencies, non-profit agencies that have invariably played a role in serving the vulnerable citizens of Kent County. This annual report reflects the intersection of where compassion and professionalism meet, here on High Street in Chestertown, Maryland.

*Shelly Neal-Edwards, LCSW-C, Director*

## **Child and Adult Services Division**

The Services Division works collaboratively with our county citizens and community partners. Through our family-centered approach we strive to engage and support individuals and families in order to achieve safety, permanency, and wellbeing. While recognizing culture and tradition in our community, we utilize a strengths-based approach, tailoring services to the individual's needs. We have continued to promote and strengthen our community partnerships, recognizing a shared responsibility in protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

### ***From July 2021 through June 2022 (FY22):***

- 82 Investigations of child abuse and neglect were conducted.
- 31 were Investigative Response
- 51 were Alternative Response.
- 22 Family Involvement meetings were held, resulting in children being diverted from Out-of-Home Placement.
- Mandated Reporter training was provided for multiple community partners in the fiscal year.

**Family Preservation Services** now encompasses all In-Home programs. These services vary in the intensity and frequency of home visits as determined by the safety and risk factors present in the home environment.

- 33 families were served during FY2022.
- 11 families with substance exposed newborns were served. During the assessment process the focus is on assessing the safety of, and risk of harm to, the newborn (and other children in the home) to determine whether any further intervention is necessary.
- 8 assessments were conducted, this is a voluntary assessment and service provision program for families requesting assistance by preventing further breakdown in family functioning which, if not addressed, might require either Child Protective Services intervention, out-of-home placement, or dissolving of the family unit.
- 4 requests from other agencies were completed. These requests come from other jurisdictions both in and out of state, law enforcement agencies and the courts.
- 10 families received ongoing, In-Home Services from the Department.
- The Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) served 4 of those families in FY2022. START is a program which serves families with parental substance use disorder who have children from 0-5 including substance-exposed newborns. The program involves collaboration with the Kent County Health Department.
- Kinship Navigator Program assisted 10 families in FY22 with diverting out of home placement, preserving family ties, and assisting with the coordination of community resources.

### **Out-of-Home Placement**

- 15 children were served in Out-of-Home Services and 4 of the 15 were in a Voluntary Placement during FY 2022.
- Hosted PRIDE training for the recruitment of new Resource Parents which resulted in one new applicant.
- Annual Christmas Gift delivery from community partners.
- An Appreciation event for Resource Parents was held in Rock Hall, MD in recognition of Foster Care Month. We had 5 families participate in this event.
- 1 child achieved permanency through Guardianship.

### **Social Service to Adults**

- 38 adults were served with Social Services to Adults, a decrease of 2 from FY2021.
- Provided training and educational resources to the community on Adult Services programs.
- Statewide system CJAMS has been implemented for adult services programs.
- Provided Personal Care Services to 4 In-Home Aide Recipients.

### **Adult Protective Services**

- 24 Adult Protective Service Investigations were completed.
- 4 Adult Protective Services Continuing customers.
- 4 Persons are in Adult Public Guardianship.
- Provided community outreach and education for Financial Exploitation on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

## **Family Investment Division**

The Family Investment Division helps families achieve independence through work, personal responsibility and community involvement. In addition, a variety of family-centered supportive services and assistance are provided. These include Temporary Cash Assistance, Temporary Disability Assistance, and Emergency Assistance to Families with Children, Local Emergency Assistance, Food Supplement Assistance, Medical Assistance, Work Readiness and Job Placement programs. Home heating needs are supplemented through our Office of Home Energy Programs.

*From July 2021 through June 2022:*

- Served 24 families through the Adopt-A-Family Holiday Program, which matches families referred by employees with community sponsors. 28 community members and/or organizations served as sponsors who purchased gifts for the families. 95 Families from Kent County were referred to the Star Democrat's Brighter Christmas Fund, and 80 individuals and families were referred to the Lions Club of Kent County for the Christmas Basket Program. Kent County Elks supplied 24 Christmas Dinner boxes to our needy families.
- Provided assistance totaling \$1,407,713 to 905 Kent County households through the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) and the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP).
- Issued Food Supplement Program Benefits averaging a total of \$779,143 per month (\$9,349,712 Total) to an average of 1,881 households per month.
- Served an average of 934 families receiving Community Medical Assistance and 88 individuals receiving Long Term Care Medical Assistance each month.
- In January 2022, seven families were displaced from an apartment fire in Worton. We worked diligently with the Red Cross and other local partners to provide food, clothing and temporary shelter to the victims.
- Our Work Opportunities Program funding provided 4 TCA youth ages 14-17 the opportunity to participate in the Regional Summer Youth Employment Program. The 4 week program began July 5th. Participants were provided wages and a stipend for their hours of service.

## **Child Support Administration**

The Kent County Office of Child Support Administration is committed to the philosophy that all children in the State of Maryland deserve emotional and financial support from both parents to enable them to mature into healthy and productive citizens.

The Child Support Administration Office provides assistance to custodial and non-custodial parents in the pursuit of child support services. The office can assist with the establishment of paternity via an affidavit of parentage or court order and by providing genetic testing services, establishing an order for support and health insurance, collection of arrears and modification of an existing order(s) and by assisting non-custodial parents to secure employment.

The level of success that the staff have achieved during a year that has proven quite challenging speaks volumes to the dedication and commitment to our customers, partners and agency.

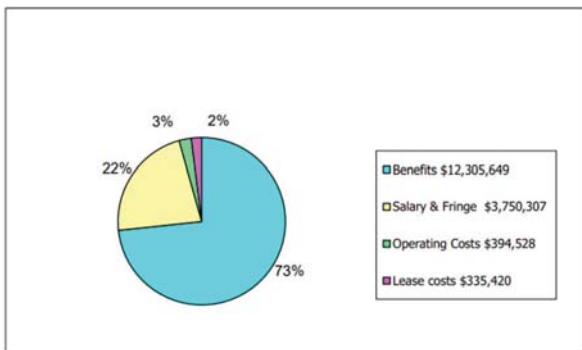
Federal Fiscal Year 2022 Accomplishments Include:

- Collected over \$1.8 million in current support and payments towards arrears.
- Successfully reached and exceeded all of our Federal Performance Goals in the areas of Paternity Establishment, Support Order Establishment, Collection of Current Support and Collection of Arrears.
- Staff continue to develop and embrace innovative practices to communicate with our customers and community partners to ensure they continue to receive excellent customer service.

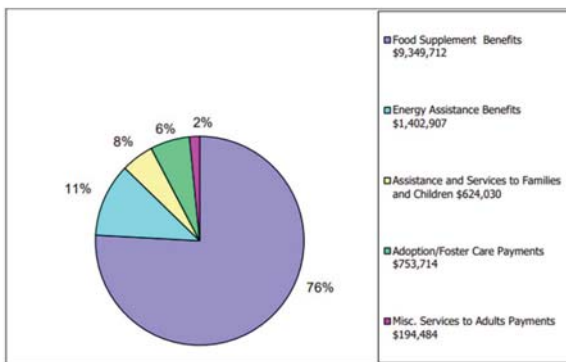
### Administration Division:

The Administrative Division provides a wide variety of support to the employees of Kent County Department of Social Services which enables them to provide quality services to customers. Support functions provided by this division include human resources, budget management, accounting operations, procurement/contract management, information technology and communications, fleet operations, inventory and supply management, mail services, facilities and lease management and security services.

#### Total Actual Spending from July 2021 to June 2022, \$16,785,903



#### Total Benefits to Customers from July 2021 to June 2022, \$12,324,848





## KCDSS' 2022 Customer Service Excellence Award



*Vastina Fisher - Human Resource Officer and Supervisor*

Vastina (Tina) is KCDSS' 2022 Customer Services Excellence Award recipient. Tina has been a State employee for 16 years. We would like to recognize Tina not only for her willingness to step up in the past 2 years during a critical time in the LGA Division but also for the many qualities that she continuously displays as a State employee.

In 2020, during the pandemic and hiring freeze, the finance officer of 15 years retired and it left a huge gap in our small LGA division. In a matter of no time, Tina expressed interest in serving dual roles as Human Resource Officer and Finance Officer. This was something that we had not considered but as it turned out, it was a creative solution to the problem. Tina served in the dual roles until the hiring freeze ended nearly two years later. She continues to assist the division by providing additional supervision to the division. Rather than view these additional responsibilities as a burden, she viewed them as an opportunity for growth. She is eager to learn in all matters related to the LGA Division. During this time, she has displayed her excellent skills as a team player, problem solver, creative thinker and someone who is willing to adapt during a critical time.

In addition to the LGA Division, Tina is quick to offer her assistance to other divisions whenever possible. As the Human Resource Officer, she sets the highest of standards to serve staff of all levels. She works hard with the union stewards to mitigate issues and has earned the trust and respect of the management team and staff. In this role, among her many qualities, she brings a sense of calm and empathy as well as her excellent communication and conflict resolution skills.

Vastina Fisher is an invaluable employee of Kent County DSS and we think she is a role model for customer service excellence.

## 2022 All Staff Retreat



Kent County DSS Staff have not attended an in person All Staff meeting since March 2020 due to the pandemic. We were able to celebrate with a 2022 Quality Improvement and 2022 Strategic Plan Kick Off followed by a long overdue get together. Staff enjoyed reconnecting with each other and the opportunity to meet new staff members

## Kent County START Team



The 2022 Sobriety Treatment And Recovery Team Retreat at Chesapeake College

## Child Abuse Awareness Prevention Month



The Commissioners of Kent County Maryland signed a proclamation on April 5th to proclaim April 2022 as “Child Abuse Awareness and Prevention Month” to recognize and acknowledge the importance of bringing awareness to our community. We hoped you enjoyed the resources we shared during the month of April. Pictured left to right, back Chief Dixon, Advisory Board Member Portia Turner, Director Shelly Neal-Edwards, Commissioner Jacob, Commissioner Mason, Commissioner Fithian. Front DSS Mattie Meehan, Advisory Board Member Beverly Birkmire, DSS Margaret Allen.

## Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association (EAGALA)



The Services Division participated in the EGALA program at Bridges at Worthmore in 2022. There was focus on experiential, ground-based activities with the team participating in creative horse-centered activities designed to address specific goals, producing team results. This experience initiated many “Aha” moments within the team. The knowledge gained from this experience will not only impact the way the staff work as a team but it will also guide families being served to this resource.



FIA Workers, Brandi Lane and Regina Reed visited Millington Food pantry to share outreach materials. They returned with prepackaged food boxes for customers in need.



Child Support organized the 2022 Agency Trunk or Treat event, costumes and cars looked great, a good time was had by all!