



Social Services

Social Services Board

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Child Welfare: A Five Year Strategic Plan

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Introduction:

Child Welfare is one of the most important and critical services provided by the Department of Social Services. Federally mandated, the Child Welfare program works to assess, protect, and foster the safety of children from child abuse and neglect. It is a complex service involving the community, service-providers, and the legal system. It is critical to build the most effective Child Welfare program possible that both protects children and cultivates staff.

Based on the critical nature of this service and the attention the service is receiving both locally, statewide, and nationally, the Department is setting forth some key critical strategic goals to help build and foster the best Child Welfare program in the state. These strategic goals will help build both workforce capacity and best practice while improving measurable outcomes within the program. Driving factors include:

- **Mandated Caseload Requirements:** The state mandates caseload to worker ratios for all services within Child Welfare to ensure safety of children and manageable workloads for staff.
- **HB 630: Rylan's Law:** The state has passed comprehensive Child Welfare reforms that put additional requirements and performance measures on Child Welfare. Failure to meet performance measures can result in loss of funding and state assumption of services.
- **Child Safety:** Keeping children safe is the primary mission of Child Welfare. This goal is only accomplished through an adequate and well trained workforce.
- **Recruitment and Retention:** Recruiting and maintaining quality staff within Child Welfare is a national epidemic. Creating a work environment that is both productive and balanced with goal oriented outcomes will promote more worker stability.
- **Liability:** Due to the nature of the work, Child Welfare is an area that poses the most risk and liability to the Department and the County. Ensuring capacity, competence, and best practices helps reduce the liability.

Durham County Strategic Plan: This Child Welfare plan supports the following Durham County Strategic Goals:

1. Strategic Goal 1: Community Empowerment and Enrichment: this plan provides a means to help the Department support family success and prosperity through effective Child Welfare services.
2. Strategic Goal 2: Health and Well-being for All: this plan supports and promotes healthy and functional families and children.
3. Strategic Goal 3: Safe Community: this plan helps provide services that keep children safe from abuse and neglect
4. Strategic Goal 5: Accountable, Efficient, and Visionary Government: this plan promotes a talented workforce responsive to customer/client needs and helps meet performance management expectations of state law/mandates.

1. Strategic Goal 1: *To Build Appropriate Staffing Capacity within the Child Welfare Program*

Child Welfare has **required** staffing levels within state policy based on adopted recommendations from the Child Welfare League of America. This policy requires a certain worker/caseload and supervisor/worker ratio to be met in order to be effective within Child Welfare. This requirement is for all services provided within Child Welfare. Objectives include:

- By 2023, meet all caseload requirements and have a plan to adjust staff as required based on caseload demands.
- Consistently assess and utilize reallocation of resources when possible to meet the demands of the program.
- Advocate for new positions as required in a strategic method to ensure adequate resources to provide the services and support staff.

Durham County Strategic Plan:

- Supports Strategic Goal 2, Health/Well-being by ensuring the protection of health of children through effective and efficient Protective Services responses/solutions.
- Supports Strategic Goal 3, Safe Community, by providing the resources needed to effectively operate the requirements of Child Welfare to protect children and keep them safe.
- Supports Strategic Goal 5, Accountable/Efficient/Visionary Government by creating an inviting workforce that will attract and retain talented staff and provide excellent customer service to children and families.

2. Strategic Goal 2: *To Build an Effective Internship Program within Child Welfare to Promote Workforce Development, Training, and Recruitment Opportunities*

Child Welfare relies on professionally trained Social Workers to provide the daily required and mandated services. Durham County and the surrounding area is rich with universities providing potential workforce candidates for the county. Developing a strong and robust internship program could advance recruitment and retention activities and lead to a stronger workforce.

Durham County DSS must develop the capacity within though to effectively offer internships to students. Objectives include:

- Increase one internship slot every two years until at least four is achieved.
- Develop strong relationships with local School Social Work Programs and set up strategic meetings with faculty.
- Attend at least two college job fairs each year (starting in 2018)
- Create a Staff Development position by 2022 that would oversee internship development and supervision as well as in-house staff training and coordination to ensure a strong workforce.

Durham County Strategic Plan:

- Supports Strategic Goal 1, Community Empowerment/Enrichment, by providing and supporting learning and enrichment opportunities that support educational and life success.
- Supports Strategic Goal 5, Accountable/Efficient/Visionary Government by creating engagement and opportunity to external partners and attracting/recruiting talented workforce

3. Strategic Goal 3: To Build a Competent and Trained Workforce Through Staffing Support, Reviews, Coaching, and Create a Path of Growth for Internal Staff.

Building competent and consistent best practice and services requires a great deal on investment on work support strategies and work reviews. One proven system that aids in this goal is to develop senior staff positions that can train, mentor, coach, and review the work of staff conducting critical protective services. Senior positions also can provide an avenue of growth and promotion for current staff while maintaining their Child Welfare core skills. Objectives include:

- Develop a team of Senior Social Worker Positions by 2023 (up and above the required Social Worker positions) that would be trainers and mentors for existing staff. Senior Social Workers would be paid a slightly higher level of pay, carry a very small caseload, but also mentor new staff and review work.
- The objective would be that each unit have 1 senior Social Work position that would carry a caseload of approximately 5 cases and then spend 50% of the time on developing new staff, supporting current staff, and reviewing work.
- This is best done when the agency is at the required staffing standard for state policy.
- Alternative plan could be to develop two to three Senior Social Work positions independent of the units to be assigned to the three primary areas of service (CPS, In-Home, Foster Care).

Durham County Strategic Plan:

- Supports Strategic Goal 5, Accountable/Efficient/Visionary Government by creating a talented workforce through mentoring, training, and work reviews, improving performance management and accountability.

4. Strategic Goal 4: *To Build Effective Community Partnerships to Ensure a Strong Continuum of Services for Families and Children.*

Successful Child Welfare Programs engage the community to help assist in identifying abuse/neglect, reporting abuse/neglect, and partnering with the community to deliver services and help families overcome barriers and issues that may lead them to Child Welfare. Strong partnerships with the community are vital for the success of any Child Welfare Program.

Objectives include:

- Ensure CCPT have all needed resources to function and meet required state mandates.
- Set up a CCPT website for information sharing (2019).
- Develop an online reporting system for community partners to easily make a report of child abuse/neglect (2019).
- Have at least two media events/releases annually regarding Child Welfare to help with outreach and education.
- Develop best practices with community partners to ensure efficient and effective services for children and families.

Durham County Strategic Plan:

- Supports Strategic Goal 4, Environmental Stewardship/Community Prosperity, by providing community based partnerships and services to respond to community challenges and create prosperity and safety for families.
- Supports Strategic Goal 5, Accountable/Efficient/Visionary Government, by bolstering community and customer engagement and developing accountability measures for services.

5. Strategic Goal 5: *Improve Recruitment and Retention within Child Welfare through Best Practices*

Nationally, Child Welfare faces a staffing crisis. The nature of the work creates a turnover rate well exceeding the national averages for most other occupations. The intense stress and nature of the job creates innate challenges not found in many professions. This situation tied with other factors creates a higher turnover rate than in most other areas of Social Work practice. Therefore it is imperative that Durham DSS continue to address this issue in a comprehensive way and to make Durham County DSS the place people want to come and work for Child Welfare.

Objectives include:

- Having the adequate staffing resources in place to help reduce burnout and workload for the Child Welfare worker, giving them the sense they can accomplish the job and not feel overwhelmed with high caseloads.

- Creating opportunities for staff to grow through a comprehensive training and staff development program.
- Creating positions for growth such as Senior Social Workers, QA, and staff development that will not only enhance the program but provide succession planning and growth for staff, having them less likely to leave.
- Ensuring a competency based recruitment tool that is effective in helping the agency make the best selections for vacancies (2018)
- Developing a Realistic Job Preview Video that will promote the realistic aspects of Child Welfare and the work so that candidates will have a clear understanding of the nature of the job, as well as understanding the great opportunities Durham County affords them and the exciting dynamics of living and working in Durham County. (2019)
- Assess flexible scheduling and working from home to both provide motivators for staff as well as help deal with facility space need issues.
- Assess HR practices and strategies with Durham Human Resources to help develop further innovations for recruitment and selection.
- Empower staff to have a voice in the Department and to play critical roles in developing practices and creating a culture of competency.

Durham County Strategic Plan:

- Supports Strategic Goal 5, Accountable/Efficient/Visionary Government by attracting, recruiting, and retaining a talented workforce.

Conclusion:

This five year strategic plan is a blueprint of goals and objectives that could help enhance services and outcomes for Durham County DSS. This plan will be our guide on how we continue to grow and develop the program and frame our budgetary requests over the next few years. We always want to look first within to assess resources and capacity. However, we understand that at times, we may need to advocate for new resources and will do so strategically and in cooperation with county management to ensure efficient use of our resources.