

These 2020 Data Briefs highlight and track long-term trends associated with progress towards the 2020 Strategy goals. Their purpose is to help internal and external stakeholders analyze these key trends with respect to our shared goals.

#### Texas by the numbers:

- Number of children in out-of-home care: 28,462 (FY2007)
- Number of children in population: 6,376,086 (2007)
- Approximate percentage of nation's foster care population in Texas: 5.6%
- Approximate percentage of nation's total population of children living in Texas: 8.5%
- Rate of children in out-of-home care per 1,000 children: 4.5 (compared to 6.9 nationally)
- Number of children entering care: 15,920 (FY2007)
- Rate of children entering care per 1,000 children: 2.5 (compared to 4.2 nationally)

## TEXAS 2020 Data Brief

### What is the impact of screenings and investigations on the number of children in out-of-home care in Texas?

#### What is the issue and how is it relevant to our 2020 Strategy?

Reducing the number of children in foster care by 50 percent is a hallmark of Casey's 2020 Strategy around reduction and reinvestment. Texas is working successfully to this end without compromising the safety and well-being of the children who come into contact with CPS. The increased use of family preservation services has the added benefit of reducing the state's foster care caseload.

#### What do the numbers tell us?

In 2007, Texas started to witness a decline in the number of children in out-of-home care.<sup>1</sup> The 3.5 percent decline that occurred between 2006 and 2007 is expected to continue as a result of several changes made at the front end of Texas' system for screening and investigating reports of child abuse and neglect. Several key data trends help to tell the story.

Understanding the initial reduction in Texas' out-of-home care population requires analysis of both the front-end, pre-placement data as well as the placement data. Since 2000, the number of reports (initial intakes) has been gradually increasing. Similarly, the number of reports assigned for investigation was also increasing until 2006, when it began to stabilize. Despite these initially negative-looking trends, the total number of children removed from their homes and in out-of-home care is starting to decline, with removals trending downward slightly faster than the number in care. See Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Trends in Reports, Investigations and Removals

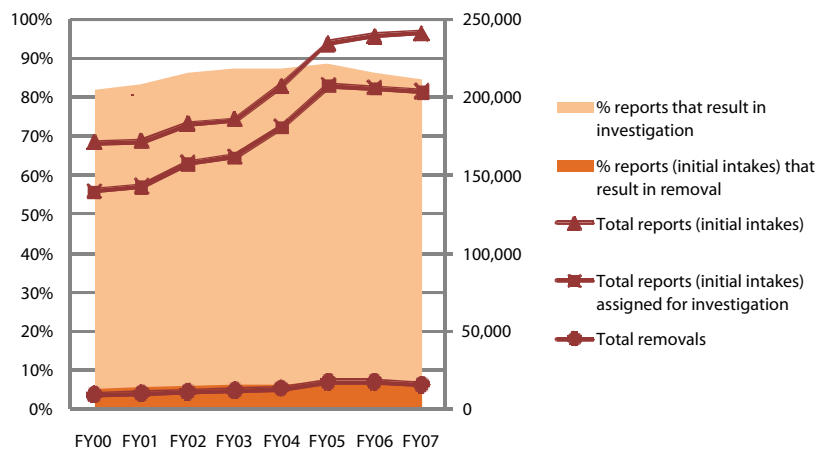
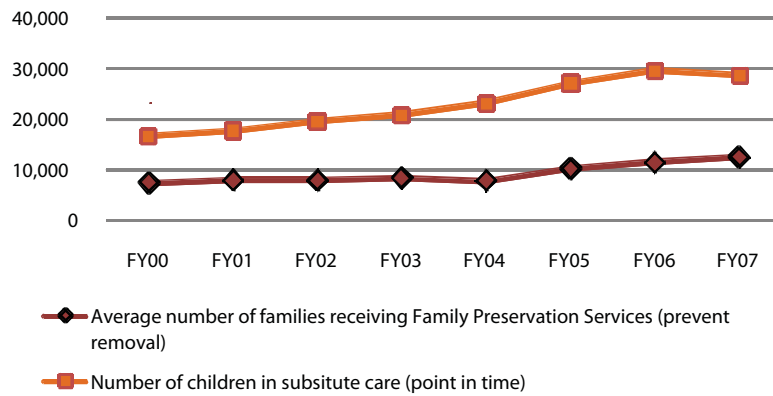


Figure 2: Trends in Family Preservation and Out-of-home Care



At a time when the number of children known to the system through reports and investigations is continuing to increase or remain stable, how is it that the number of children actually entering care is starting to simultaneously decline? What is happening between the reporting and removal stages, and what is causing it to happen? How does Texas ensure that a reduction in the number of children in care doesn't result in negative consequences for children who are reported to Child Protective Services (CPS) but never investigated or removed?

It is important to look beyond the raw numbers and analyze the percentage of reports that result in investigations and the percentage of reports that ultimately result in removal. Although the total number of reports has increased, the percentage of those reports that result in investigation has simultaneously started to decline, as Figure 1 shows. Texas believes this is potentially due to the introduction of screeners in FY2005. These screeners effectively, but safely, reduce the number of intakes that may have progressed to investigation.<sup>2</sup> This change in the front end of the system has had a partial impact on the number of children eventually removed from their home and placed in foster care. Texas has also noted the screeners' ability to successfully handle an increased volume of reports while simultaneously working towards reduction in out-of-home care. The state attributes some of this ability to:

- 1) The allocation of staff in each region to focus on disproportionality and the identification of strategies to reduce the prevalence of children in color at all points throughout the system
- 2) A focus on maintaining children in their own homes by increasing the use of family preservation services (see Figure 2) and by investing in initiatives to fully support families where poverty is a key risk factor
- 3) Leadership development efforts that have focused managers on how to lead differently to achieve reduction and maintain staff
- 4) A reduction in the caseload of investigation workers due to the hiring of additional staff
- 5) The use of Family Team Meetings with families early in the investigation, when there is a risk of child removal

#### What's next

A more targeted program evaluation is necessary in order to reach a comprehensive understanding of how the various programs and policies affect children entering out-of-home care in Texas. The high level trends outlined in this data brief are essential to monitor, however, in pursuit of system-wide improvement for children and families. Texas plans to continue these reduction trends by maintaining a focus on children prior to removal, especially with families where poverty is one of the key risk factors, and sustaining the state's focus on disproportionality at every stage of the system.

<sup>1</sup> Texas Department of Protective and Regulatory Services (TDPRS) Data Book 2007. Accessed 3/10/08 at [http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/Data\\_Books\\_and\\_Annual\\_Reports/2007/databook/default.asp](http://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About/Data_Books_and_Annual_Reports/2007/databook/default.asp). There are a total of 28,462 children in out-of-home care in Texas. This number represents a point in time count of the number of children. It includes all children in licensed, regulated foster care, unlicensed kinship care, unlicensed care by non-relatives, care by pre-consummation adoptive families, and approved independent living arrangements.

<sup>2</sup> Screening applies only to lower priority cases (Priority 2) where there is less risk of serious harm if it involves an alleged victim that is age 6 or older. The purpose of the formal screening is to determine, through additional collateral contacts, if CPS intervention is warranted. Priority 1 cases include all reports concerning children who appear to face an immediate risk of abuse or neglect that could result in death or serious harm. These cases are automatically investigated and are not eligible for screening.