Introduction to the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment (July 2019) for Community Organizations

What is the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment?

Senate Bill 11 (85th Texas Legislature, 2017) requires the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) Child Protective Services (CPS) Regional Directors to use data DFPS collects on substitute care needs and availability to develop an annual collaborative, regional substitute care (out-of-home care) capacity needs plan for areas in which Community-Based Care (CBC) has not been implemented.

Substitute care includes all children in DFPS conservatorship who are living in a DFPS out of home placement. While in substitute care a child could be in paid foster care or unverified kinship care. Paid foster care includes foster homes, verified kinship homes, general residential operations (GRO), emergency shelters, residential treatment centers or juvenile facilities.

Contracted providers develop and manage 90 percent of all foster homes across the state, all foster homes for higher needs children, and all group residential care. Building capacity falls largely to community organizations and this responsibility will continue to expand as CBC rolls out across Texas. The CBC model requires local communities to engage in capacity and resource network development along with coordination and delivery of a network of services to children in foster care and their families under the Single Source Continuum Contractor (SSCC). DFPS will no longer be a child placing agency or develop foster homes when CBC is implemented in a catchment area, making community organizations responsible for developing and retaining placement resources.

To help regions make data-informed plans with targeted strategies to increase capacity most needed to serve children and youth in foster care in local communities, DFPS develops and releases the foster care needs assessment with a variety of data. The needs assessment provides a forecast for daily demand for substitute care through Fiscal Year 2021 and an estimated daily current supply, along with some additional insights and information around capacity.

Why do we need the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment?

Texas relies almost entirely on private, community organizations to provide capacity for foster care services. In order for community organizations to know the amount and type of capacity needed, it is important that DFPS provide data so that providers may adapt to the always changing needs of the foster care system. The DFPS needs assessment provides a snapshot of the current needs but historical and forecasted data is necessary to truly understand the changing needs so that community organizations can adjust accordingly.

It is also important that the State provide information about, and continuously assess, the impact of policy and other changes that impact the needs of children and youth in foster care such as new
regulatory requirements, Medicaid service utilization, regional trends for removals, and the impact of implementation of Community Based Care (CBC). This information is not part of the needs assessment.

Senate Bill 11 (85th Texas Legislature, 2017) transformed previous efforts to reform paid foster care in Texas to Community Based Care (CBC). Community Based Care requires children to remain in their home communities and requires providers to build foster care capacity. As CBC rolls out across the state, placements are reserved for children from the local area, impacting capacity in the surrounding areas. Resources traditionally available in the legacy system are no longer available or very limited.

Communities not in CBC catchment areas must strategically increase the supply of foster care placements across the continuum of care to support the array of needs for children and youth with basic needs to those with the most complex therapeutic needs. The needs assessment uses Child Care Licensing licensed capacity data and DFPS data to highlight each region’s strengths and challenges in foster care capacity. Each catchment area’s needs are different, and these data are helpful in ensuring DFPS leadership and community organizations are investing their resources on the right strategies to maximize their capacity building efforts.

These data empower community organizations with useful information to inform their foster home recruitment, retention efforts, and potential funding opportunities to build capacity. The needs assessment also highlights strategies DFPS is employing, such as specifically targeting an increase in kinship care. Working with kinships families requires different levels of resources and approaches than working with non-kinship foster homes. Using the needs assessment can help organizations understand not only local needs, but also DFPS’s strategic priorities. Organizational planning and capacity development around these needs and priorities can help ensure that organizations thrive in the changing child welfare landscape.

What does the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment tell us?

**Forecasted demand**

The demand for out of home care is forecasted to remain similar through fiscal year 2021, and community organizations can expect to continue to serve a comparable volume of children and youth with similar service levels over this time frame. There are many catchment areas with significant existing capacity for basic and moderate level children and youth. There is also a need across catchment areas to build family-like settings for children and youth with specialized or intense levels of care. Highlights from the data include:

The rate of kinship placements is currently forecasted to remain stable through fiscal year 2021, with more than 45% of children in substitute care placed with a kinship caregiver.

- For basic and moderate children in need of foster homes, catchment areas 3a, 3c, 6b, 7a, 8b, 10 and 11b are close to, or have enough, current foster home supply, to meet the forecasted demand from their areas. Catchment areas 9 and 11a have the greatest need to build foster home supply for basic and moderate level children in substitute care (see Appendix C: CBC Catchment Areas).

- Eleven of fourteen catchment areas have limited foster home supply for specialized and intense service levels. Catchment areas 3c, 6b, and 11b are better positioned to meet the demands of the catchment area. Areas 1, 9, and 11a have the greatest need to build capacity.
• There is a need for more supervised independent living placements for youth transitioning out of care in all catchment areas except 6a (Houston) and 7b (Austin).

**Existing resources**

Community organizations may have opportunities to leverage existing capacity. All catchment areas had beds in licensed foster homes across service levels that were empty on August 31, 2018. Active but vacant foster homes and beds in each catchment may possibly be leveraged for additional supply without developing new capacity.

Tables showing cross-catchment placements for each placement type by level of care help inform how capacity needs may be affected with roll out of CBC (Appendix-I Table 17-24). Based on the cross-catchment placement tables it appears that many catchment areas are dependent on the adjacent areas to meet placement needs in the current system.

If a residential treatment center is needed, these data show children and youth are often placed outside of their legal catchment area. There are large concentrations of children and youth in residential treatment settings placed in catchment areas that include Houston, Austin, San Antonio, and the surrounding counties in those metro areas. Region 9, 10, 11A and 11b have virtually no placements to accommodate residential treatment needs. The higher the needs of youth, the less likely they are to be placed in their home catchment area.

Developing capacity to meet the complex needs of children and youth who require group residential care to meet their therapeutic needs is costly and labor intensive. It is a capacity need unlikely to be quickly resolved for communities with a capacity desert without resource investments from the state or the philanthropic community.

**DFPS conclusions**

Based on available data included in the needs assessment, DFPS concludes that these efforts are needed to meet the goal of keeping children in family settings that are close to their:

• An increase in safe placements with relatives
• An increase in foster home capacity across the state for:
  - Youth 14 and older with basic and moderate service levels;
  - Higher needs children and youth; and
  - In rural areas, capacity for all ages and service levels.

The conclusions in the report show a continuation of trends in Texas’s foster care capacity building efforts over recent years.

**How can you use the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment to build capacity to serve children and youth in your community?**

Investing time in becoming familiar with the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment Report and the data that aligns with the continuum of services your organization provides will prepare your organization for:

• Meaningful dialogue with DFPS leadership when your region convenes to create the capacity building strategic plans for fiscal year 2020.
Beyond the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment

Foster care capacity is so much more than a supply vs. demand equation. Meeting the needs of every child in foster care is a long-standing, complex issue that Texas and many other states are actively working to address. And while our focus is on growing capacity – the system is also rightly focusing on quality.

Changing models of care take time and must be done deliberately and with thorough planning. For example, transitioning an emergency shelter to a residential treatment center requires a complete change in model, training, standards of care, contracting, and more. TACFS supports the State's need for a strong, full array of services that can serve as a continuum for children and youth whose needs may change over time.

Children and youth who experience foster care placements provided by contracted community organizations require more than their basic needs: food, clothing, and shelter, to be met. Capacity to serve the children and families of Texas goes beyond physical needs. Community organizations who provide foster care also provide an array of services to meet the complex needs of children, youth, and their families when they have experienced abuse or neglect. Community organizations provide service planning, work to achieve permanency, have clinical models of care, employ social workers and other skilled staff, manage healthcare and therapeutic needs, focus on education and other well-being aspects to help children and families heal.

Other factors that impact capacity merit our continued focus. Placement practices that allow for a child to transition from one placement to another in a planful way can help prevent trauma to the child and a disruption in the placement. Real-time data about the availability of foster home capacity will enable CPS to streamline the process to identify and outreach to a foster care organization – similar to what is currently in place with CBC.

As DFPS and community organizations work together to build capacity to serve children and youth, ample consideration should be given for all the resources and services needed to support and ensure a stable placement. Capacity building must be inclusive of more than placement. Services beyond a foster home or facility to encompass the complexities which ensure the right services exists to meet the individual needs of the children, youth, and families Texas’ serves is critical. To read the full DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment (July 2019) and review all the available data click here.

TACFS is here to support your capacity building efforts. Our team is available to answer specific questions about the information in the DFPS Foster Care Needs Assessment or assist your organization with situating the information within the context of your work.

Name: Katie Elseth
Email: kelseth@tacfs.org
Website: www.tacfs.org