



**FRANKLIN COUNTY
CHILDREN SERVICES**

Protecting Children by Strengthening Families

Levy Book 2024

*Safety, Permanency
and Well-being for
Every Child*

Revised 7.3.2024



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Protecting children by strengthening families. Each year, Franklin County Children Services is relied upon to help more than 26,000 children and their families through prevention, protection, placement, and permanency programs, offering services and supports to keep young people safe and families together.

As we enter 2024 - four years into the historic and dramatic impacts on child welfare exposed by the COVID pandemic - Franklin County Children Services is in a unique position to further evolve how we truly protect children and strengthen families in our community... if we are willing to take bold action that breaks away from the unsustainable path of continuing “what we always did”.

Over the past four years, family structures have changed, and the challenges parents face are far different. Add in the mental health crisis gripping so many of our young people, the stressors of violence and guns in our communities, the uncertainties of our economy and workforce, and the stretched-thin child welfare safety net straining to keep young people from slipping deeper through the cracks.

Although FCCS has successfully reduced the number of children in agency custody and the amount of paid placement days over the past five years, the per diem cost of placement has significantly increased. That’s due in large part to the growing complexity of care needed for the children we serve. An estimated one in four youth in agency custody have complex issues including mental illness, developmental disabilities, and multi-system experience - which are often teenage youth involved with the juvenile justice system, some in felony-level crimes. When a child must be placed in agency custody, the child is likely to remain in custody for more than a year-and-a-half (a nearly 60% increase in length of service from a decade ago).

Still, in spite of these growing challenges and the need to evolve, emerging data from this traumatic time also shows that we can make a difference in keeping children safer and making families stronger for longer. More impactful, we know how to prevent more young people and their parents from coming into the child welfare system in the first place.

The framework of this Call to Action is clear, built around six key themes that drive our work:

CALL TO ACTION I: PROTECTING THE WHOLE CHILD

We need an integrated child protection strategy that emphasizes protecting the “whole child” - body, mind, and heart - recognizing the need to better identify and address the mental health and social-emotional challenges confronting so many young people who come into the child welfare system. We also commit to matching every child who comes into care with at least one caring adult - a caseworker, foster parent, relative or kin, mentor or volunteer, or a community partner or service provider.



CALL TO ACTION 2: STRENGTHENING ALL FAMILIES

Strong families are the first foundation to protecting children and youth are better served if they can safely remain with their primary families as they seek support. But if children can no longer stay with their parents, we prioritize placement in family-like settings - such as foster homes or with a relative or family friend (kinship). Even better, we want to prevent the unnecessary entry of families into the child welfare system in the first place by investing in a full-range of community-based prevention programs available to all families in Franklin County.



CALL TO ACTION 3: VALUING OUR TEAM FCCS CULTURE

We are making the necessary investments to recruit a strong workforce, while at the same time capitalizing on infrastructure, training, and staff to keep Team FCCS safer together, organizationally supported, culturally competent, and better reflective of who we serve. The agency is uniquely positioned to turn the tide on a workforce crisis only if we continue our investment in staffing and training.



CALL TO ACTION 4: MANAGING FINANCIAL RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY

We tirelessly pursue financial stewardship marked by transparency, accountability, and mission-driven investments. At the same time, we are focused on re-investing our dollars in businesses that are based in Franklin County and with organizations whose management and staff are more reflective of the children and families we serve.



CALL TO ACTION 5: ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY AUTHENTICALLY

Communities and government share in the responsibility to keep children safe. We are building and strengthening authentic external relationships rooted in trusted partnerships while also actively engaging our internal staff to connect with the communities we serve. Authentic engagement also asks that we increase the depth, quality, and quantity of resources available to serve children and families by promoting and investing in an ecosystem of community partnerships across a diverse field of services.



CALL TO ACTION 6: LEADING IN INNOVATION

As one of the largest public child service agencies in Ohio and a nationally-recognized voice in the child welfare and the child safety, we have an obligation and expectation to be leaders in innovation. With our partners at the national and state levels - and internally with our staff seeking to improve our practice - we will continue to champion the transformation of the child welfare system and in how best serve our families.

To make the necessary investments to provide children with the safety, permanency, and well-being they deserve - and evolve our agency to better serve families in our community to avoid entering the child welfare system - Franklin County Children Services is respectfully asking the Franklin County Board of Commissioners to place a 1.9 mill renewal with a 0.6 mill increase property tax levy for a 10-year period on the November 5, 2024, general election ballot.

FCCS remains one of the most fiscally prudent public agencies in Central Ohio and has not asked voters for a millage increase for more than 20 years. Without increased support, the agency will be forced to cut existing services starting as early as 2026-2027. The new millage will generate approximately \$31 million annually in new revenue and allow the agency to address the challenges of 2025 and beyond, keep children safer, and make families stronger for longer. We have identified three strategic initiatives to accomplish that goal:

KINSHIP SUPPORT PARITY

Data shows the power of kinship placement. Yet, to be successful, kin who take on the responsibility of caring for a child need the levels of supports and access to resources on par with foster families. FCCS will invest in additional necessary kinship supports, including higher monthly stipends; access to new supports such as housing/rental assistance, utilities, childcare, food, and other necessities; amplification of our Kinship Permanency Stipend Program to serve more than 1,100 children in the next ten years; and additional funding in partnership with the Office on Aging to support senior relatives caring for kin.

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT

To keep our current momentum on stabilizing our workforce and providing the necessary training and employee supports in roles that can be demanding and emotionally challenging, we need to continue the investment in staff that was necessary to maintain competitiveness in the child welfare domain, including continued investment in competitive starting salaries and union-supported pay structures - including cost of living and retention adjustments - which will allow us to attract and retain high-quality staff.

COMMUNITY PREVENTION SERVICES

WHOLE CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

To expand capacity and partner with new community-based service providers who offer prevention-based programming available to all families in our community - and better identify and address the growing complexity of youth mental health challenges facing so many of the children we serve - FCCS will invest roughly \$1 million more in new funding on prevention services each year, including youth mental health services and supports. This investment also includes expansion of our community-based Emergency Shelter Care programs.

The Franklin County community has supported our agency's dedication to protecting abused and neglected children since the late 1800s. With typically overwhelming approval numbers, county voters have passed property tax levies for Franklin County Children Services since 1958 (with only one rejection in 1980). The current levy support for the agency includes two overlapping 10-year levies. A 3.1 mill 10-year levy was renewed by voters in November 2019, and a 1.9 mill 10-year levy expires at the end of 2024.

With this proposed 1.9 mill renewal with 0.6 mill increase, the annual cost to a homeowner, per \$100,000 property value after rollback, equals \$49.17. That's an increase from the current property tax of approximately \$1.75 each month - or less than the cost of a cup of coffee each month. We believe our community will find this investment worthy of support to protect children and strengthen families.

SECTION I: Agency Overview

FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES:

Protecting children by strengthening families. Each year, Franklin County Children Services helps more than 26,000 children and their families through prevention, protection, placement, and permanency programs, offering services and supports to keep young people safe and families together.

THE FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES BOARD

The Franklin County Children Services Board provides leadership, experience, commitment, and expertise to assure that the agency is financially responsible and programmatically effective. The Board establishes policy, hires the executive director - who is ultimately responsible for agency operations, and approves contracts and agreements as required by law.

The 11-member volunteer Board governs Franklin County Children Services. Ten members are appointed by the Franklin County Commissioners, and one serves by statute as chair of the agency's Citizens Advisory Committee.

2024 FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES BOARD MEMBERS:

Tammy Wharton, Chairperson
Elon Simms, Vice Chairperson
Maggie Lewis, Secretary
Lolita Augenstein
Rev. Dr. Michael Bean
Napoleon Bell
Wilson Browning
Tiffany Hunt
Elizabeth Martinez
Jamie Shumaker
Necol Russell-Washington

AGENCY LEADERSHIP

Chip Spinning, Executive Director
Tina Rutherford, Deputy Director
Raquel Breckenridge, Family Services Director-Permanency
Katie Congrove, Chief Legal Counsel
Emily Green, Family Services Director-Intake, Ongoing & Placement Services
Lara Laroche, Practice Impact Senior Advisor
Tanya McClanahan, Director of Inclusion & Analysis
Daniel Shook, Chief Financial Officer
Scott Varner, Director of Communications & Community Outreach



AGENCY ORGANIZATION

Division	Departments
Communications & Community Outreach	
Family Services	Assessment & Investigation, Ongoing, Placement & Provider Services, Screening Medical
Finance & Administration	Auditing, Eligibility, Facilities, Fiscal Management, Payroll, Information Technology, Safety
Inclusion & Analysis	Evaluation, Organizational Health, Volunteers & Child Enrichment
Legal/Employee Relations	Contracts & Purchasing, Court Liaison Office, Human Resources, Professional Development, Legal Staff
Permanency	Adoptions, Youth Transition Services, Kinship, Visitation
Policy & Performance Support	Data Management, Performance Review, Managed Care, Policy, Peer Review

Meeting our State & Federal mandates: Public children services agencies are statutorily obligated by federal and state law to assess allegations of abuse and neglect and to secure the safety and well-being of children by partnering with their families to alleviate concerns about care. Children Services is regulated by statutory mandates of the state and federal governments and regulations of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Ohio Department of Children and Youth. Ohio law further requires that Franklin County Children Services take on the responsibility for serving the needs of Franklin County’s children by providing treatment services and alternative placement outside their home when such services and placement are vitally necessary. The agency is also mandated to provide services to families to address any underlying concerns, promote stability and permanency, and safely reunify children with their primary families, whenever possible.

The agency is a member of the Child Welfare League of America and the National Partnership for Childhood Safety.

Our Vision

Safety, Permanency, and Well-being for every child

At Franklin County Children Services, our charge is clear: Protecting Children by Strengthening Families. And we stand firmly committed to our Guiding Principles:

We are child welfare professionals.

- We constantly pursue excellence.
- We recognize the importance of providing effective and timely services.
- We value, respect and support each other.
- We are proud that we improve the quality of life for families in our community.
- We are fiscally responsible.
- We aspire to be culturally competent.

We honor families.

- We respect a family's strengths.
- We understand families are the experts of their own experience.
- We recognize that children are best served within their family and community.
- We separate what parents do from who they are.

We value every child.

- We respect the individuality of each child we serve.
- We advocate for each child's safety, permanency, and well-being.
- We honor each child's family and culture.

We value partnerships.

- Families have the right to be a part of the decision-making team.
- Casework is the most important function of the agency team.
- Families, communities, and government share the responsibility to keep children safe.

Our Mission

Through collaboration with families and their communities, we advocate for the safety, permanency, and well-being of each child we serve in a manner that honors family and culture.

Safety is always the top priority. Franklin County Children Services protects and cares for children in cooperation with parents whenever possible, by providing services to alleviate the problems that led the family to the attention of Children Services. Our child welfare professionals and support staff work to identify and build supportive living settings for young people, minimize the trauma of involvement in the child welfare system, strengthen family life, and assist parents in meeting their responsibilities to their children.

Our team believes in the importance of family and strives to keep the entire family involved in solving the problems that brought them to the agency. Families are the experts regarding their own experiences. We separate what parents do from who they are, empowering them to be a part of the decision-making process. Most importantly, we recognize that children are best served within their family and community.

How the agency responds to families:

Intervention occurs only to ensure the safety of children or to help the family. The goal is to keep children safely in their homes and provide services to families that may prevent the need for opening cases and out-of-home placement.

How FCCS makes decisions with the family:

Families are best served when they are truly engaged in both the identification of the issues that are challenging them and in the development of the service plan to help them. Throughout the life of a case, families are encouraged to provide input and to be a part of the team decision-making process.

How the agency finds stability and permanency for children:

We strive to provide permanency with kinship, foster and adoptive families. Additional services include:

- In-home counseling, community social and mental health services and day treatment.
- Mentor and volunteer services.
- Kinship – support services to those taking in family members.
- Foster Care – placement of children in temporary foster homes.
- Adoption – When parents or relatives are unable to care for the children, permanent and loving adoptive families are found.
- Youth transition services and life skills training for youth who are about to age out of the child welfare system.
- Culturally Responsive Services – a wide-range of services that are family-focused, strengths-based, and lead to positive outcomes for all that come in contact with the agency.

By leading a collaboration of more than 200 partner agencies, businesses, and organizations - and with the dedication of more than 800 employees, 200 volunteers and mentors, and hundreds of families caring for children through kinships, adoptions, and foster care settings - FCCS is committed to strengthening families throughout Franklin County and supporting safe, stable homes and positive, productive futures for every child we serve.

COLLABORATION ACROSS FRANKLIN COUNTY AGENCIES:

Franklin County Children Services is an agency of county government, with an appointed Board and with funding sources outside of the county's general fund. The agency is responsible and responsive to the Franklin County Board of Commissioners, who approve the agency's operating budget each year, have the final authority on labor contracts and lease and building agreements, and set guidelines for county operations that the agency must follow. In addition, Franklin County Children Services authorizes spending and pays bills by following the requirements of the County Auditor's office, and consults with the County Prosecutor's office, when needed, which is the legal representative for the agency.

As part of the social service safety net designed to keep children safe and families together, Franklin County Children Services values its partnership and close working relationships with several agencies and elected offices across Franklin County government. In addition to coordination and collaboration on how best to serve youth and families, these partnerships might also include shared resources and funding.

- ADAMH Board of Franklin County
- Franklin County Board of Developmental Disabilities
- Franklin County Child Support Enforcement Agency
- Franklin County Coroner's Office
- Franklin County Court of Common Pleas Domestic Relations and Juvenile Division
- Franklin County Department of Job and Family Services
- Franklin County Family and Children First Council
- Franklin County Sheriff's Office
- Franklin County Office on Aging
- Franklin County Youth Council
- Columbus City Schools



RISE TOGETHER: A BLUEPRINT FOR REDUCING POVERTY IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

Franklin County Children Services plays a role in advancing solutions to the challenges identified in the historic Rise Together Poverty Blueprint. The challenges faced by many families that come into the agency's care and periphery services - and their aspirations for Franklin County - align with the essential themes identified in the Blueprint: safety, housing, transportation, employment, access to education, personal responsibility, broken trust, and the generational struggle to move out of poverty. Investments by FCCS aimed at helping families avoid separation or build toward reunification often address deficiencies in these poverty-related areas.

FCCS also recognizes the need for and has implemented several proactive measures to combat the historic and contemporary effects of racism and segregation that are persistent in poverty and the child welfare system. As an agency, we continue to integrate racial and ethnic equity and inclusion into all division work. We continue to build upon a Team FCCS culture in which employees feel safe, supported, respected, and valued. In turn, these efforts promote stronger cultural awareness and affirming practices that allow us to better serve our community and all families who face the challenges of poverty.

BUILDING A STRONG SUSTAINABLE WORKFORCE

One of the agency's focus areas has been building a sustainable workforce and improving staff retention. We are turning the tide on our workforce crisis, overcoming the post-pandemic hiring and retention challenges seen in nearly all parts of the private and public sectors (and notably in the child welfare field). **Our intentional commitment to recruit, develop, and retain a strong workforce in all areas of our agency has led to vacancy rates on a path back to pre-pandemic levels**, thanks in large part to pay-equity and retention investments by our Board and an ambitious recruitment effort by our Human Resource team. And caseworkers are staying longer; we hope because of our efforts to make all employees feel safe, supported, and valued.

Child welfare is a labor-intensive field. A strong stable workforce is crucial to the agency's foundation of evidenced-based, sound practice. Research shows that it takes about two years for a child welfare caseworker to develop the skills required to be proficient at this work. The agency recognizes that "safety, permanency, and well-being" is also important to staff. National studies show that almost half of child welfare staff leave their jobs within two years, while schools of Social Work are reporting drops in enrollment, which means the pipeline for future child welfare workers is also shrinking.

To begin addressing this difficult labor market, FCCS implemented an unprecedented \$1,500 hiring and retention bonus offer in 2021, with unanimous approval from the FCCS Board and in collaboration with our partners in labor. It was followed with a one-time \$2,500 state-funded Workforce Recovery Relief bonus in 2022, which FCCS leadership secured through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio. The leadership team then successfully collaborated with our FCCS labor partners to build structured pay increases through the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Nearly all employees will see a 2.25%

annual cost of living adjustment and a 5% step/retention adjustment for each of the next two years. Retention is made even more important to counter the recruitment efforts of other government sector employers (Ohio Dept. of Job and Family Services) and health and human service providers, who often seek to hire away caseworkers who've had initial experiences with FCCS.

On the recruitment side, our Human Resources team hired nearly 200 new employees in 2023, of which 131 were Child Welfare Caseworkers. This ambitious recruitment over the first ten months of the year represents an amazing 38% increase in the total number of CWC's hired compared to the year before. Because of these pay-equity and retention investments and our recruitment efforts, our current caseworker vacancy rate sits below 7%, based on preliminary counts by our administrators. By comparison, our counterparts in Cuyahoga County have seen an increase in their caseworker vacancy rate, which rose from 26% in 2022 to 29% in 2023.

Franklin County Children Services Staffing Levels				
January 2020	January 2021	January 2022	January 2023	January 2024
854 employees	865 employees	816 employees	757 employees	809 employees



SECTION 2: Need and Service Levels

As we enter 2024 - four years into the historic and dramatic impacts on child welfare exposed by the COVID pandemic - Franklin County Children Services is in a unique position to further evolve how we truly protect children and strengthen families in our community.

Over the past four years, family structures have changed, and the challenges parents face are far different. Add in the mental health crisis gripping so many of our young people, the stressors of violence and guns in our communities, the uncertainties of our economy and workforce, and the stretched-thin child welfare safety net straining to keep young people from slipping deeper through the cracks.

Emerging data from this traumatic time also shows that we can make a difference in the lives of the children and families we serve - and prevent more young people and their parents from coming into the child welfare system - **if we are willing to take bold action that breaks away from the unsustainable path of continuing “what we always did” and rally our community to make the necessary investments to provide children with the safety, permanency, and well-being they deserve.**

The framework of this Call to Action is clear, built around six key themes that drive our work:



CALL TO ACTION I: PROTECTING THE WHOLE CHILD

Protecting children and keeping young people safe requires a focus on physical abuse, neglect, dependency, and much more. We will develop an integrated child protection strategy that emphasizes **protecting the “whole child” - body, mind, and heart.**

Physical and sexual abuse continue to dominate the referrals and calls to our Child Abuse Hotline, often coming from neighbors, teachers, police, family members, and anyone who had concerns about a child being abused or neglected. Of the nearly 28,000 referrals, 52% involved claims of physical abuse, 16% referenced alleged sexual abuse, and 30% raised fears of neglect. Drilling down even further, 13% of calls provided additional concerns for children in a house where domestic violence between parents has shattered the sense of safety every child deserves to have at home; in 14% of the calls, an additional concern about substance use and or a parent’s drug addiction also raised fears of drugs or drug paraphernalia sitting around in a household where a very young child or baby may accidentally touch, grab, or ingest a deadly toxin like fentanyl.

Referrals/Calls to Child Abuse Hotline (2023)	
Child Abuse or Neglect Report	89%
Emotional Maltreatment	7%
Medical Neglect	3%
Neglect	30%
Physical Abuse	52%
Sexual Abuse	16%
Dependency Report	4%
Family in Need of Services	4%
Information and/or Referral	2%
Total Referrals in 2023	27,557

To better protect the body, FCCS is continuously improving the process for the reporting, screening, and investigation of cases so that young people are placed in a safe environment as quickly as possible but our impact to the family dynamic is as limited as necessary.

At the same time, Central Ohio is in the midst of a community-wide mental health crisis, and parents and school officials know first-hand that so many of our children are struggling with mental health challenges that seem to be more severe and complex than ever. And for the unique population of young people connected to Children Services, mental health and trauma play some role in nearly every case we investigate.

Our partners at Nationwide Children’s Hospital share that 1 in 5 children nationally has a significantly impairing mental disorder; yet less than half will get the treatment they need. Members of the Governor’s Juvenile Justice Work Group recently reminded us that this crisis expands beyond youth who have major behavioral health diagnoses. The head of the Ohio Department of Medicaid shared that it also includes combinations of conduct disorders, defiant disorders, suicidal ideation, ADHD, and substance use disorders.

Data from the more than 6,000 family assessments conducted by FCCS staff over the past year as part of an investigation - and similar data from the previous three years - also show a steady number of concerns about the social emotional risks - with at least a third of assessments each of the past four years involving emotional/behavioral risk.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Family Assessments with Child Emotional/Behavioral Risk Contributors	31%	29%	33%	33%

To better protect the mind, mental health is now part of our screening process when we look into claims of abuse or neglect: everything from emotional behavior and crisis stabilization to the role and impacts of social media. FCCS is ready to invest in new training, new staff, and new strategies to identify and address some of the trauma and mental health struggles our young people are facing.

And as we put together a comprehensive strategy around protecting the mental health of our children, we’ve enlisted the help of some great partners such as Nationwide Children’s Hospital, ADAMH, the Franklin County Family and Children First Council, and dozens of other local organizations.

Finally, protecting the “Whole Child” must also include our commitment to match every child who comes into our care with at least one caring adult - a caseworker, foster parent, relative or kin, mentor or volunteer, tutor, community partner, or service provider - someone who serves as a reminder to that child that they are not alone, no matter their identity or if they leave our custody. Our young people are resilient but even the most resilient benefit from having that one caring adult standing in their corner with them.

To better protect the heart, the agency has reinvigorated its recruitment of mentors in each of the five established volunteer programs: Friendship, College-Bound, Crisis Center, Simba, and Malaika. As of January 2024, we have 224 approved volunteers working directly with agency-involved youth. Also playing an important role in protecting the heart is maintaining a youth’s connections to their school. To prevent young learners from missing school or sliding in grades during transitions in their home placement, the agency’s EPSEA partnership with the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio provides hundreds of students in FCCS custody with one-on-one educational supports on enrollment, attendance, social-emotional, classroom, and special education needs.

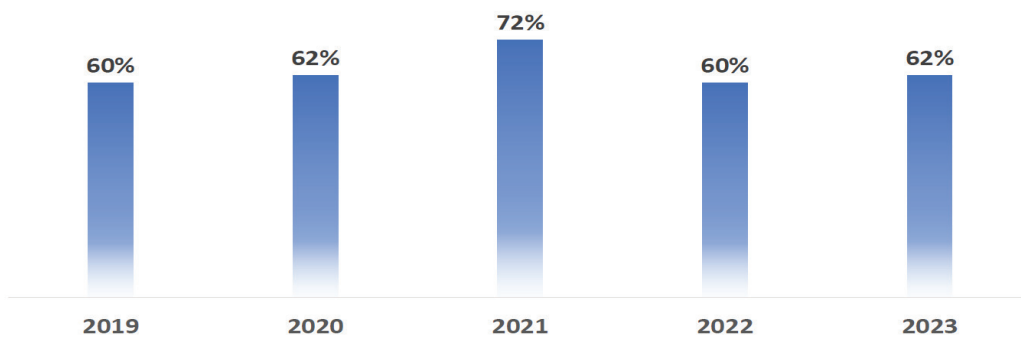


CALL TO ACTION 2: STRENGTHENING ALL FAMILIES

Strong families are the first foundation to protecting children, and family-like settings are the most effective placement for a child who can no longer be in a primary parent's care. While we work to strengthen the safe family settings we identify for youth in our care - and build capacity for primary families to be reunified or permanent placement to be finalized - we recognize a need to engage all Franklin County families - no matter their size, income, neighborhood, background, and diversity - who have the heart to care for children.

Our placement teams are dedicated to finding the most supportive and safe family-like setting possible. Primarily, these placements are in foster homes or kinship. Despite placement challenges, our team has been able to maintain the percentage of teenagers who are initially placed in family-like settings when they come into our care, holding steady at roughly two-thirds (approximately 62.2% in 2023, compared to the six-year average of 62.1%).

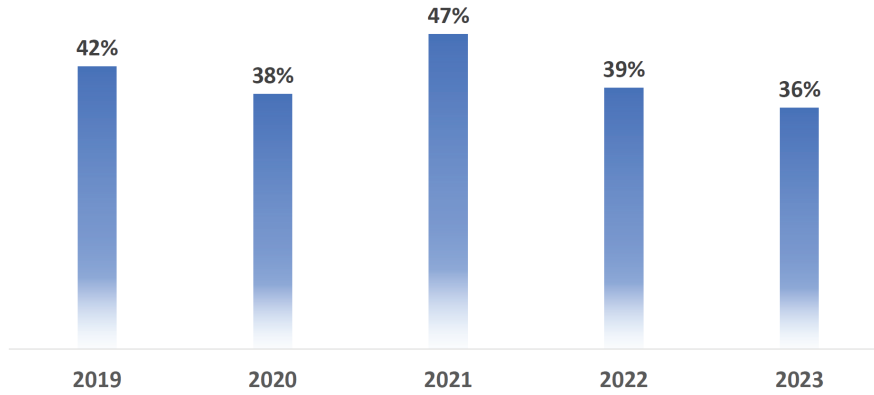
**PERCENT OF TEENS (AGE 11+) INITIALLY PLACED IN FAMILY-LIKE SETTINGS
(KIN OR FOSTER HOMES)**



Data shows a direct need to strengthen the power of kinship care - working to improve our support of family relatives or friends so they will be willing to care for the young person. While the agency has placed a priority on identifying and initially placing youth with kin, the number of relatives who are willing to accept the placement has decreased over the past three years, especially for tween- and teen-aged youth.



PERCENT OF YOUTH INITIALLY WITH KIN



Still, when we are able to boost the number of youth placed in a kinship situation, additional data reveals how much more likely these families will stay together. Children exiting custody from kinship placements are less likely than any other alternative to re-enter agency custody over the subsequent twelve-month period.

Children never outgrow the need for family and a permanent sense of belonging. Our efforts to strengthen all families necessitate we improve how quickly children are placed in a permanent setting and invest where necessary to prevent their return to the system.

Separation should not mean a loss of connection. Safe visits between separated youth and families are how we keep families connected. Through our visitation efforts - with improvements to both the number of successful visits and the ease to families to stay connected closer to home - families can remain on a pathway to reunification.

Better yet, we want to prevent the unnecessary entry of families into the child welfare system in the first place and the trauma for children often associated with removal from a family. We invest in a full-range of community-based prevention programs available to all families in Franklin County - including those who are not connected to our agency - that provide links to the supports and resources parents need so they avoid concerns that might force them into the agency's care. Further significant investment in these trusted, neighborhood-based community partners by as much as a million dollars more each year would allow us to strategically connect with more families and avoid more children requiring placement or support away from their families.

	2020	2021	2022	2023
Supportive Service Contracts	\$1,313,863	\$1,330,378	\$1,286,572	\$2,013,165
Family/Community-Based Contracts	\$6,275,254	\$6,204,033	\$6,257,584	\$8,081,086
Collaborative Government Partnerships	\$593,038	\$641,811	\$467,152	\$754,682
Community Prevention Contracts	\$305,024	\$306,475	\$603,220	\$755,017



CALL TO ACTION 3: VALUING OUR TEAM FCCS CULTURE

Every member and every position in Team FCCS is seen as a child welfare professional who should feel safe, supported, respected, and valued. As previously noted, we are making the necessary investments to recruit a strong workforce, while at the same time capitalizing on infrastructure, training, and staff to keep Team FCCS safer together, organizationally supported, culturally competent, and better reflective of who we serve.

It's important to remember that the child welfare workforce is an essential service, mandated by state and federal law and morally necessary to protect our youngest residents. And it comes at a cost. The services provided by our teams are up-front, in real time, and often emotionally charged when facing the secondary trauma of repeatedly responding to children and families in crisis. We are dedicated to finding strategies that help our team successfully process the toll that is embedded in the nature of the work. Compensation is part of that equation.

Because of pay-equity and retention investments, an ambitious recruitment effort in 2023, and successful collaboration with our union partners, the agency is uniquely positioned to turn the tide on a workforce crisis in the child welfare field. Only continued investment will allow us to retain that momentum and the new staff we've recruited.

Percent of newly hired caseworkers who remain at FCCS for at least 12 months					
Year Hired	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New CWC Hired	94	66	80	80	131
Remain with FCCS	73%	55%	61%	51%	

An organization's culture influences everything and everyone, and this Team FCCS Culture also prioritizes how we dedicate time and resources to moving our agency along a Culture of Safety journey. It is not solely focused on physical and personal safety; it involves eight key components which support positive organizational outcomes and better support for children and families. The eight key components are defined as followed:

- Psychological Safety: a shared belief the team is safe for interpersonal risk taking and team members feel accepted, respected, and part of the team.
- Mindful Organizing: how teams monitor, plan, innovate, learn, and support one another; a measure of teamwork and team resilience.
- Safety Climate: the relationship team members have with their supervisor.
- Stress Recognition: how individuals identify stress and acknowledge its impact on decision-making.
- Emotional Exhaustion: the measure of your team's emotional reserves.
- Perceived Personal Safety: how safe team members feel while they are working in the field and/or alone with children and families.
- Workplace Safety: how safe team members feel in their office environment.
- Workplace Connectedness: the measure and experience of belonging and relatedness among team members.

Race equity and safety culture go hand in hand. Equity and racial justice are critical to any effort to create safety for all, and psychological safety is a prerequisite for honest conversations about race and racism. Honoring the resolution passed by Franklin County Commissioners in 2020 acknowledging racism as a public health crisis in America, Team FCCS remains a leading voice in combating the impacts of discrimination, racism, and historical trauma in child welfare and in championing for every member of Team FCCS to be culturally competent, organizationally supported, and more reflective of who we serve.



CALL TO ACTION 4: MANAGING FINANCIAL RESOURCES RESPONSIBLY

As a public, levy-funded agency, we have a duty to effectively monitor and manage the tax dollars (and donations) we're given, responsibly invest our funds to advance our public mission, and strategically reinvest in the community that supports our work. We tirelessly pursue financial stewardship marked by transparency, accountability, and mission-driven investments.

A key component of transparency is showing how our investments advance our mission. With a mission-driven investment strategy, we remain committed to strategic investments and innovative solutions, all with the singular aim of enhancing our ability to serve children, families, staff, and our community.


At the same time, we are focused on re-investing our dollars in businesses that are based in Franklin County and with organizations whose management and staff are more reflective of the children and families we serve.



CALL TO ACTION 5: ENGAGING OUR COMMUNITY AUTHENTICALLY

Communities and government share in the responsibility to keep children safe. Through our communications and engagement efforts, we are building and strengthening authentic relationships rooted in trusted partnerships. To effectively tell the story of FCCS and the accomplishments of its staff and of the children and families we serve, we are developing a multi-tiered communications strategy that both reaches out to our community AND effectively engages stakeholders to provide two-way communication back to us.

2023 FCCS HOLIDAY WISH COMMUNITY TOY DRIVE

	<p>Marking its 60th anniversary, Holiday Wish brought together more than 700 community members, corporations, and faith organizations to provide nearly 5000 gifts for children in our care.</p>	<p>The Black Girl Magic gift drive provided more than 230 Black and Brown girls with care packages, specifically designed with them in mind.</p>
	<p>Nearly 900 emergency gift requests 77 local toy drives 703 total cash donors 40 donated bicycles 1,731 Amazon Gifts received</p>	<p>First Black Boy Brilliance event collected more than 100 STEM science kits, along with culturally specific books, bikes, and sporting goods for agency-involved Black and Brown boys.</p>

Recognizing that authentic engagement starts at home, we are refining and reengaging in how we activate and excite our staff. FCCS offers several unique opportunities for staff and management to share information, listen to concerns, and celebrate success. A need exists to build further active engagement by staff in both internal and external activities and events, including work committees and volunteering.

To increase the depth, quality, and quantity of resources available to serve children and families in our agency - and support the work of our staff - we will promote and strengthen an ecosystem of community partnerships across a diverse field of services.



CALL TO ACTION 6: LEADING IN INNOVATION

As one of the largest public child service agencies in Ohio and a nationally-recognized voice in the child welfare and the child safety, we have an obligation and expectation to be leaders in innovation. With our partners at the national and state levels - and internally with our staff seeking to improve our practice - we will continue to champion the transformation of the child welfare system and in how best serve our families.

National Partnership on Child Safety

FCCS is a leader in National Partnership on Child Safety, bringing together 33 jurisdictions across the nation to implement a supportive, family-centered, systems-approach to internal child fatality reviews.

Approximately two-thirds of Partnership jurisdictions (including FCCS) implemented a supportive, family-centered, systems approach to internal child fatality reviews.

Fourteen jurisdictions (including FCCS) shared fatality reviews into Partnership's Data Warehouse in 2023.

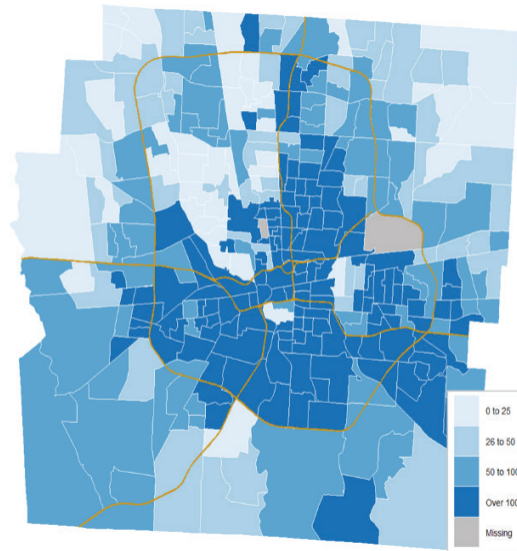
Nearly half of Partnership jurisdictions (including FCCS) participated in at least one administration of the Culture of Safety Survey.

UNDERSTANDING WHO WE SERVE:

Franklin County Children Services serves children, teenagers, and young adults from all cultural and economic backgrounds and from all of the diverse neighborhoods and communities throughout Franklin County. They all have something more in common: children who want and deserve to grow up healthy, happy, and secure. And their parents deserve every opportunity to receive the services and support they need to keep their family together.

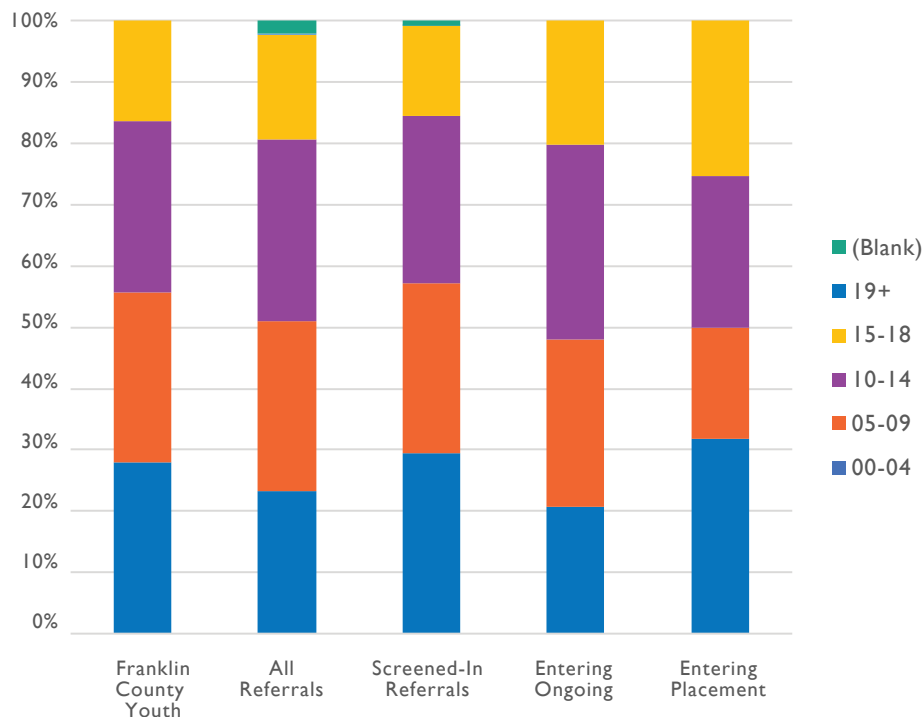
FCCS Serves All of Franklin County

Referrals per 1,000 youth for all Franklin County census tracts, 2022



Data Sources:
 2022 Referrals were pulled from SACWIS on 1/25/2024.
 Franklin County youth population is derived from the ACS 5-Year estimates, table B17020.

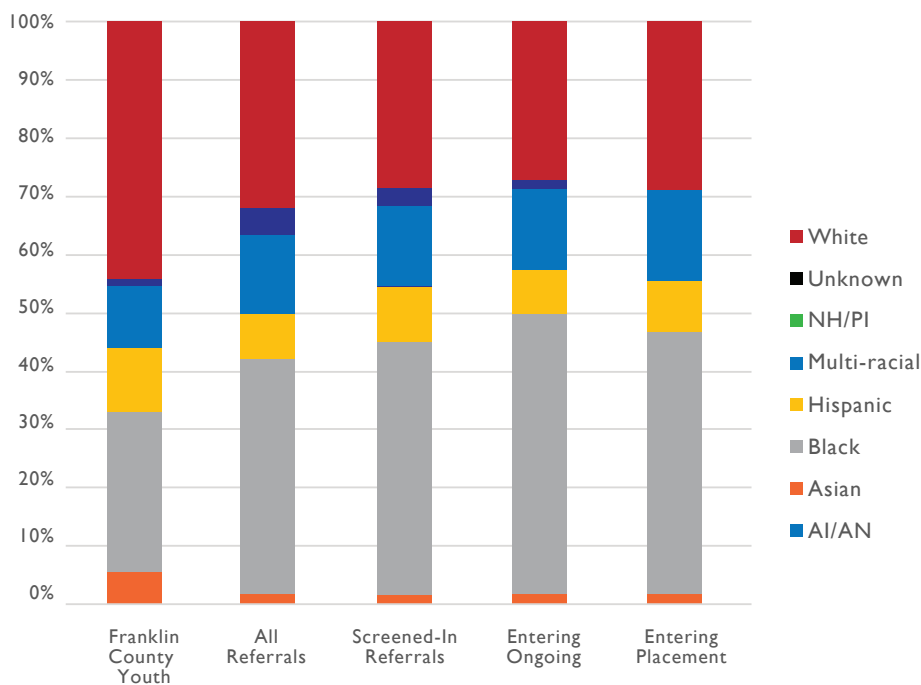
In 2023, Franklin County Children Services helped 26,408 children and their families through our prevention, protection, placement, and permanency programs. Of the children served, approximately 23% were infants and toddlers (up to 4 years old); 28% were children between 5 - 9 years of age; 30% were tween-aged between 10 - 14 years of age; and 17% were teenagers between 15 - 19 years old. For the most part, these percentages mirror the overall Franklin County youth population, with the exception of our county’s youngest residents (under 4 years old) who represent an overall larger percentage of Franklin County youth.



DEALING WITH DISPROPORTIONALITY

Looking at the racial identity of the youth served, however, shows a noticeable disproportionality, with Black and Brown youth (African American, Hispanic, and Biracial) representing the largest share of young people served by the agency. And this disproportionality is repeated at every step in the service model, from the number of calls/referrals to placement and ongoing family services.

And when entering placement, a significant number of black youth will be placed with a caregiver who does not look like them. On average, approximately 70% of black youth are placed with a black caregiver (which means 30% are not), while 78% of white youth are placed with a white caregiver (which means only 22% are not). These numbers reveal the challenges in recruiting foster and kinships families in our county's African American and Latino communities.



As part of our efforts to address disproportionality, Franklin County Children Services continues to work closely through multiple avenues and training alongside our partners in the courts, with the prosecutors, and through law enforcement to identify and address the causes behind these inequalities. We are also engaged in work to improve mandated reporter trainings (often with local school systems) to address disproportionality in the referral system.

HOW ARE CLIENTS REFERRED TO THE AGENCY?

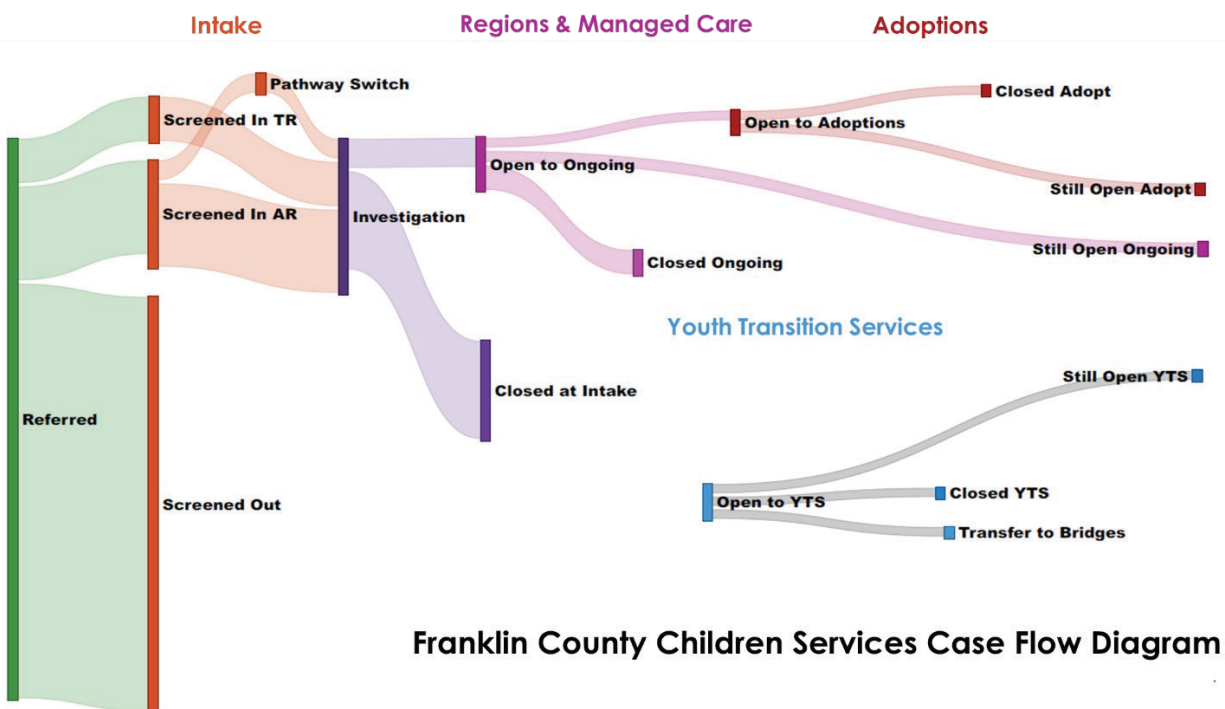
Children Services has a 24-hour, seven-day a week Intake and Investigation operation that screens, assesses, and investigates all reports of abuse and neglect within time frames set by law. Residents are encouraged to report child maltreatment to the agency, and professionals working with children are legally required to make such reports. The Ohio Revised Code provides immunity from civil or criminal liability for those who in good faith make reports of suspected abuse and requires Children Services to protect the confidentiality of those making reports.

Franklin County Children Services is at the forefront of a new partnership to more quickly and efficiently receive reports of child abuse or neglect from teachers, nurses, and childcare providers. The TEAM Ohio portal - short for Taking Early Action Matters - is an advanced online reporting system for mandated reporters who are required by law to report suspected instances of abuse and neglect. Still in the pilot phase, FCCS is partnering with the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and referral sources such as Nationwide Children’s Hospital and Columbus City Schools, who can access the portal anytime in a “self-service” way when they are not able to call the agency’s hotline directly. The TEAM Ohio portal began as a pilot project in June 2023, and nearly 800 reports of suspected abuse in Franklin County were submitted in the first six months.

For the first time, a recent change in state law will permit public children service agencies to reach out to families whose initial referrals were “screened out” (no evidence of abuse or neglect meeting the criteria for investigation) but who would significantly benefit from access to resources and preventive services provided by the agency to strengthen families. This new possibility is at the forefront of practice and guidelines are currently being developed. It’s worth noting that this ability to serve a whole new population of families with needed preventive services will also have a budgetary impact.

In addition to referrals made through our Child Abuse Hotline and reporting portals, concerns about child abuse or neglect - or the need to address the safe custody of youth - might come to the agency through the court system (most typically through the Juvenile Branch of the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas) or through our partners in law enforcement. In recent years, it has also become more common for parents or youth to call or walk into our Intake offices to request assistance or attempt to relinquish custody. The agency might also receive referrals or requests through public child service agencies in other jurisdictions.

LEVELS OF SERVICE:



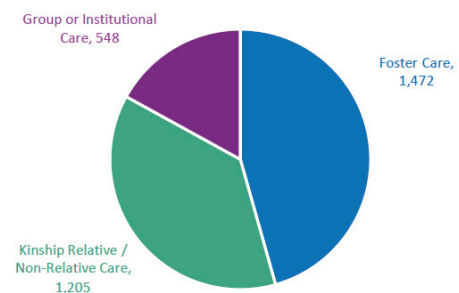
Franklin County Children Services Case Flow Diagram

The process of taking a referral is the beginning step in FCCS's involvement with a family. At the Intake level, information is taken, and if the referral rises to the level requiring action an assessment begins. The agency evaluates every referral to determine if it meets the criteria for further investigation by utilizing state screening guidelines. If the referral is screened in, state required assessment tools are utilized to determine the extent of risk and the safety concern for the children involved. The agency also assesses risk and safety concerns for children who may need protection because of unruliness or delinquent behaviors. At the conclusion of the investigation a decision is made on whether or not there is a need to open a case, refer the family for community-based support services, or close out the investigation without further action.

Every effort is made to work with families to resolve their issues while the children remain in the home. If this cannot be done, due to child safety issues, Children Services places children in out-of-home care, following a decision made by the Juvenile Court. When a child must be placed away from home, the agency seeks the least restrictive placement possible: with family members or other kin or in foster homes within a reasonable distance for the parents to visit.

When specialized placement services in treatment foster care or residential treatment facilities are necessary, FCCS finds the appropriate placement to meet the child's individual needs. The goal for children in placement is for them to return home whenever safely possible. When the child cannot return to family, Children Services seeks an adoptive home or makes other permanent plans, such as the emancipation of older youth.

How many children were placed in 2023?



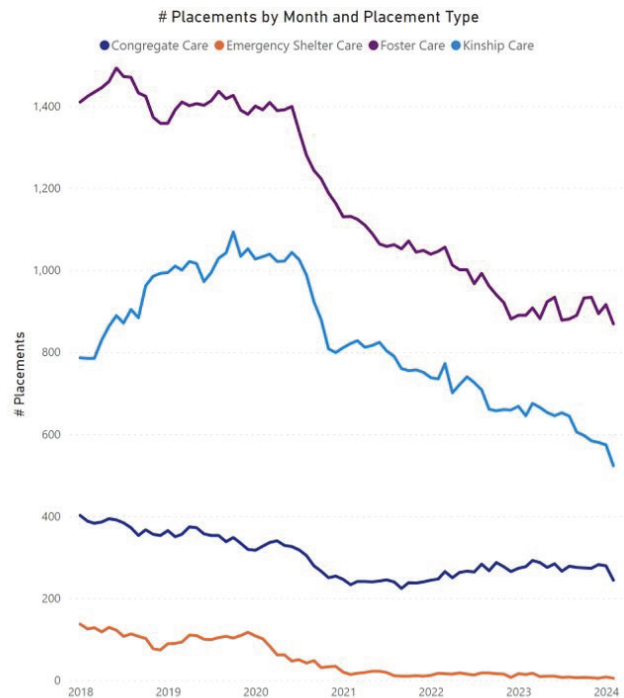
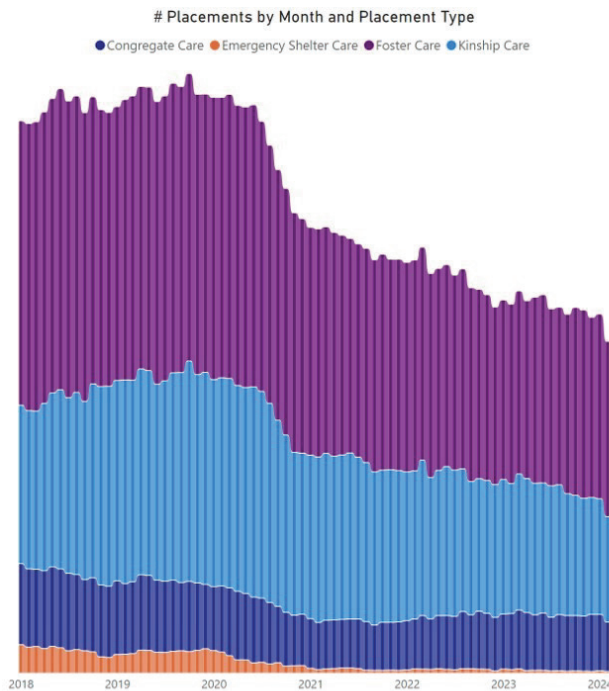
Number of children in care by placement type in 2023

REDUCTION IN CUSTODY x GROWTH IN COMPLEXITY

Children Services uses a comprehensive assessment and planning model (CAPMIS) for structured decision-making from the time a child or family is referred and throughout the life of the case. The model provides tools for assessing a child's risk, developing safety plans and conducting family assessments. CAPMIS guides Children Services workers in how to protect and care for children who are unsafe and avoid interventions into the lives of families where parents are able to protect their children. And with CAPMIS, the agency has moved from broad-based community protection and prevention programs to evidence-based/evidence-informed programs that can provide services proven by research to effectively meet the needs of children and families.

Much of this assistance comes through direct services by the agency's professional staff and by purchasing services from more than 200 provider agencies and partner organizations. In 2023, the agency received nearly 28,000 referrals from all over the county, with approximately 11,600 screened in and requiring additional investigation and attention from our staff.

For youth who come into the agency's custody, the priority is to quickly identify placement in a family-like setting, including placement in foster care or kinship care. In some situations with limited options, youth might be placed in a congregate care situation or require emergency shelter care. Mirroring national child maltreatment rates which have declined over the past 30 years, **Franklin County Children Services has seen a decrease in the annual number of placements for youth who come into the agency's custody.**



Even though the total number of days that youth are kept in FCCS custody has decreased since mid-2020, the complexity of needed care has grown. At a statewide level, it's estimated that at least a fourth of youth who are in the custody of a public child service agency have complex issues including mental illness, developmental disabilities, and multi-system experience - which are often teenage youth involved with the juvenile justice system, some in felony-level crimes.

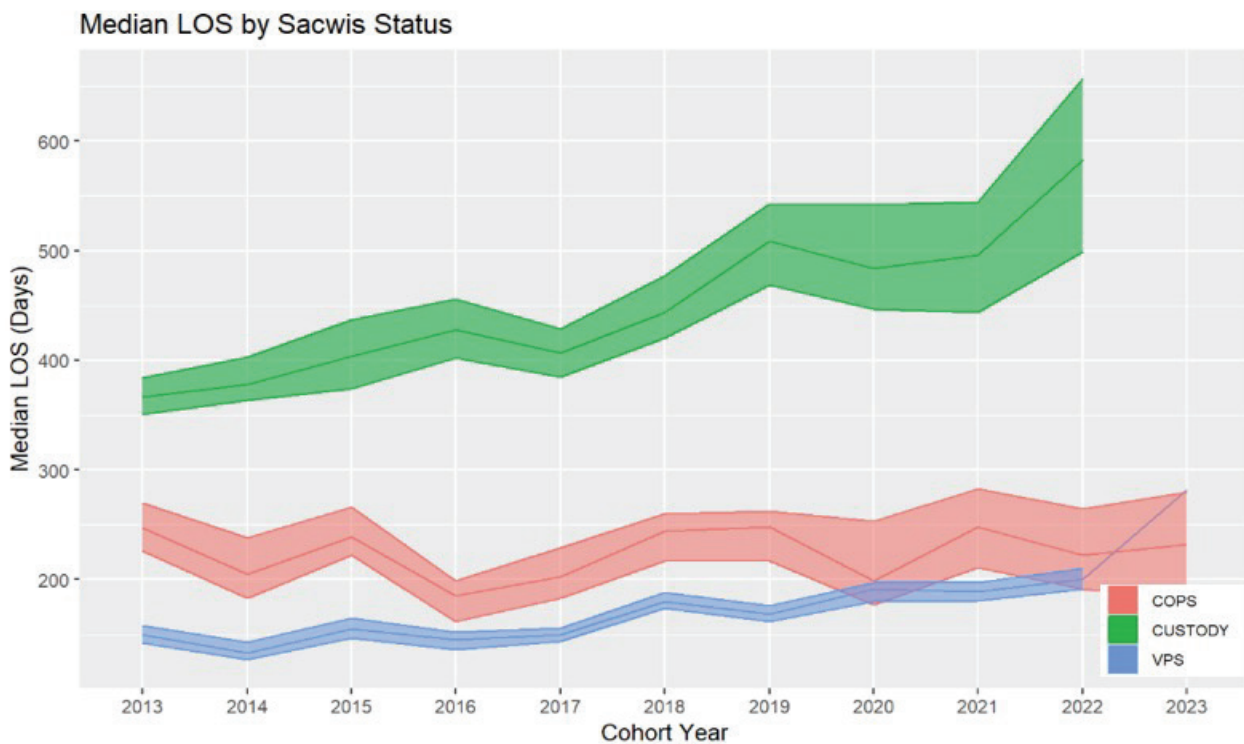
The complexity of needed care is also evident in the increased cost of placement through contracted service providers. FCCS's average placement day per diems have skyrocketed by 24% over the last three years (comparing January 2021 to December 2023).

While there are a number of different factors that would have contributed to the three-year reduction in the number of youth in FCCS custody and the number of paid placement days - including the additional family supports made available through the federal pandemic relief packages - **a return to a normal/pre-pandemic number of placements along with the current placement per diem costs would have a devastating impact on the financial stability of FCCS based on current levy funding.**

GROWING AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME IN THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

The complexity and acuity of needs confronting both the children and families we serve are one of the leading causes for the growing length of time youth remain in the child welfare system. At the same time, many of these families are navigating an interwoven pathway through other social service, health, and/or criminal justice systems.

When a child is no longer able to safely stay with their parents and must be placed in the custody of Franklin County Children Services, the child is likely to remain in custody for an average of roughly 580 days - that's more than a year-and-a-half in custody on average. It also represents a nearly 60% increase in length of service from a decade ago.



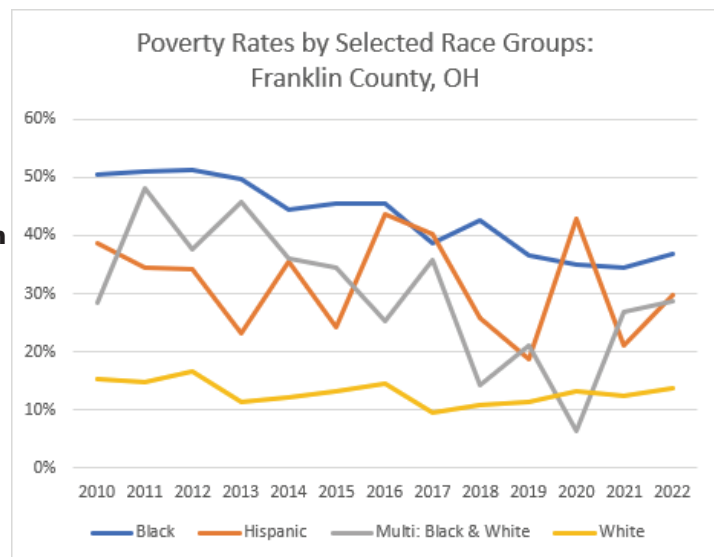
The growth in length of service is also seen at a lesser rate for temporary- and court-ordered protective services in which children remain with their primary family but are ordered to receive services from FCCS or its contracted service providers.

READY TO RESPOND TO PROJECTED POPULATION GROWTH

Franklin County's population is anticipated to grow by 8% over the next decade, based on models from the Mid-Ohio Regional Planning Commission. A 2024 study released by the Bank of America Institute shows Columbus as the fastest growing city in the U.S. with population growth at 1.1% in the second half of 2023. Continued growth like we see in our region can often lead to challenges in affordable housing, unemployment, lack of transportation, and strained public and social services - all of which can be triggers to entry into the child welfare system.

Poverty rates can also have an impact. Poverty produces material hardships for families. Such hardships often result in families experiencing toxic stress, which can impede children's cognitive development and parents' capacity to meet the needs of their children. **While poverty does not cause or equate to neglect, far too many studies show that poverty and child neglect are highly correlated and often impact families simultaneously.**

Because of the correlation between poverty and entry into either the social service system or child welfare system, it is helpful to look at youth poverty rates, which were on a steady downward trend up until 2019. Despite the additional financial supports made available to families at the federal and local levels as part of the nation's response to the pandemic, youth poverty rates are headed back up. And youth of color are more likely to be living in poverty - almost 3 times as likely based on the numbers in 2022 and looking ahead.



FCCS has conservatively projected an increase in screened-in referrals, paid placement days, and case services to average closer to 7%.

Our current levy model will allow FCCS to provide additional up-front services, reunite children with their family sooner, achieve permanency for children quicker, and enhance the probability that children leaving FCCS custody rarely return. At the same time, expanded prevention services, continued investment in staff, and amplification of financial supports to kin would also assist in keeping the number of new children entering the agency lower (projected at less than 7%).

In fact, our projection for paid placement days is based on an increase of only 5% over each year of the ten-year levy period. This projection is anticipated to cover any increase in children entering agency custody as well as allow for increases in per diem over the levy cycle.

SECTION 3: Current Levy Cycle

From shifts in behaviors and needs to deep losses and higher expectations, the global health crisis created by COVID-19 four years ago altered nearly every aspect of the work of Franklin County Children Services during this current levy cycle.

The pandemic changed the way most of the children and families served by the agency lived and thrived. Our staff was forced to learn how to work remotely and gained new appreciation for human connection. The child welfare system was caught short-staffed by the unprecedented churn in the entire labor market and the so-called “Great Resignation.” And for the loved ones of those who died from the virus here in Franklin County, life will forever feel incomplete. While the worst of the pandemic may be behind us, its effects linger.

TRIGGER WARNING: END OF PANDEMIC RELIEF

In 2020 and 2021, the federal government passed six relief bills in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that provided additional funding for state and local governments, Medicaid, and particularly hard-hit public sectors such as public education, childcare, and transit. The expanded Child Tax Credit gave more money to low-income families with children. Families were also protected from losing their homes through eviction, rising costs at the grocery store, or missing out on much-needed health resources.

More money for kids, extra food benefits, and Medicaid protections were all part of a stronger safety net made available in response to the public health emergency that was COVID. Four years later, most of those programs have either ended or are slated to do so by the end of 2024, sending many families back on a pathway into poverty and creating the potential return of challenges in affordable safe housing, higher costs of living (especially at the grocery store), reduced food security, excessive monthly expenses for childcare, and strained access to affordable health care - all of which can be triggers to entry into the child welfare system.

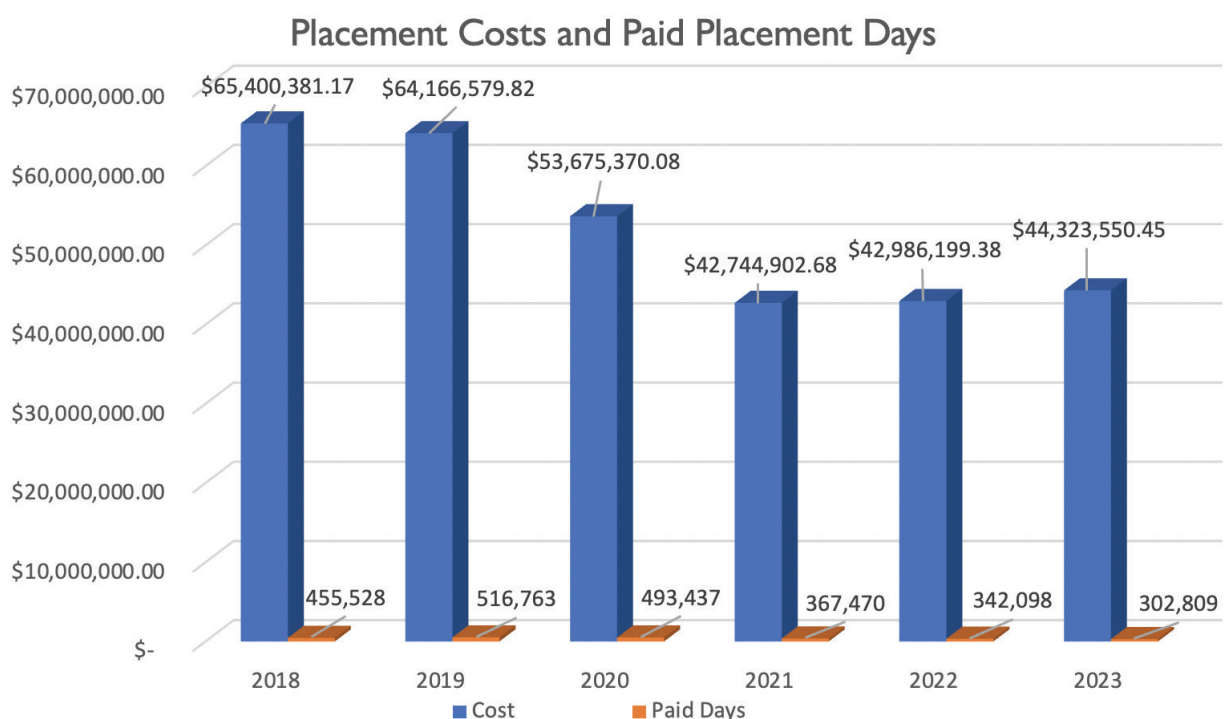
Take for example the support for childcare. The federal funding that helped prop up childcare providers during the pandemic expired last fall. In 2023, the Franklin County Commissioners needed to invest an additional \$11.5 million to make high-quality childcare more affordable for working Franklin County families, bringing the commissioners’ total commitment to this multi-year initiative to more than \$23 million. Affordability scholarships are being offered to working families who are facing the “benefits cliff” in which they make too much to qualify for Publicly Funded Child Care (PFCC) but too little to afford the full cost of childcare out-of-pocket. Even with recent moves to modestly expand eligibility for childcare subsidies at the state level, Ohio remains among the bottom-five states when it comes to access to childcare subsidies and supports for working families.

ADDRESSING RECOMMENDATIONS FROM PREVIOUS LEVY REVIEW:

Leading up to the community’s overwhelming support of the agency’s last levy request - a renewal of the 3.1 mill/10-year levy approved in 2019 - the Franklin County Human Services Levy Review Committee made five recommendations for FCCS to consider and take action upon prior to returning.

Recommendation 1: Identify and implement cost savings or efficiencies that could be put into place over the next five years.

As one means by which the agency identified and implemented cost savings, FCCS significantly reduced congregate care placements over the past five years. Comparing December 2019 to December 2023, the number of congregate care paid placement days has decreased by 25.79%. Further, total paid placement days for the same period shows a 41.4% reduction.



It is important to note that, although we achieved and continue to achieve a lower number of paid placement days, we did not anticipate the significant increase in inflation being encountered across our nation in 2022 and 2023. The increase in inflation has resulted in many of our placement providers requesting higher per diem rates through contract re-negotiations to maintain placement of our children or to accept new placements. While FCCS has traditionally been able to keep our placement per diems low, we are unable to escape the overall increase in costs being encountered.

Recommendation 2: Maximize existing and available revenue opportunities to strengthen cash reserves.

Over the past five years, FCCS maximized the federal and state funds made available to our agency, allowing us to further stretch our local levy funds. FCCS successfully identified and drew down one-time federal, state and local funds over the past five years through COVID relief funding, Workforce Grants, and Federal Funding Certainty Grants, all while continuing to maximize ongoing federal and state revenues. Further details of this maximization of one-time funding are shared later in this report.

Recommendation 3: Conduct an analysis of Contracted Managed Board and Care and present findings to the Committee at the mid-levy review in 2021.

FCCS presented an analysis of our Contracted Managed Board and Care findings during our mid-levy review committee meeting.

Recommendation 4: Continue to engage in responsive community engagement that allows the agency to adapt outreach and services to the changing needs of the community.

We continue to build upon a culture in which employees feel safe, supported, respected, and valued. This internal culture provides the basis for how we engage and respond to the families we serve. Adapting those services to the changing needs of the community begins with better understanding the community we serve. That's why hundreds of staff over the last five years have participated in a wide range of equity-based training, open conversations on racial justice, and tireless work to drive multi-cultural competency.

FCCS leadership has long prioritized mandated cultural training for all staff. In 2022, the agency designated a new series of trainings, enlisting nationally-respected child welfare practitioners and researchers to deliver a comprehensive examination of racial disproportionality and disparities. Through our Training and Professional Development team, staff members have also attended a required onboarding training on "Unveiling Racism." Culture classes have also been offered and well-attended on topics such as microaggressions, LGBTQ young people in casework, culture of poverty, immigration and child welfare issues, strategies for working with families living in poverty, and unconventional and mischaracterized trauma expressions in Black males.



SECTION 4: Performance Measures

Shortly before COVID-19 dramatically gripped the world and our work, Franklin County Children Services launched its 2019-2023 Five-Year Strategic Plan with four strategic areas of focus and a quantifiable set of objectives to help advance our mission and live up to our guiding principles and values. While all of the priority areas in the Strategic Plan were impacted by the pandemic, the agency is continuing to track the measurements and objectives for an additional year (2024) as we develop a new Five-Year Strategic Plan with input from staff and stakeholders and with support from our national partner at Casey Family Program. The data collected as part of the Strategic Plan continues to provide for a measurement of our success over the five years.

ADVANCING OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Children Services Board and FCCS leadership have monitored data on three strategic areas of focus, with figures showing the work of the agency to build a sustainable workforce, place youth in family-like settings, and empower families to meet their children’s needs. The agency leadership has also routinely looked at the intentional efforts to integrate racial and ethnic equity and inclusion across our agency. Below is the data behind these strategic priorities and some of the intentional actions that have advanced our efforts and led to improved outcomes.

I. Building a strong and sustainable workforce:

Goal	Historical Data
A. Decrease vacancy rate for Intake and Regional caseworkers.	2020 – 4% 2021 – 11% 2022 – 19% 2023 – 7%*
B. Increase the percent of newly hired caseworkers who remain with the agency for at least 12 months.	Year Starting with Agency 2019 – 73% 2020 – 55% 2021 – 61% 2022 – 51%

Summary:

We are turning the tide on our workforce crisis, overcoming the post-pandemic hiring and retention challenges seen in nearly all parts of the private and public sectors. Our intentional commitment to recruit, develop, and retain a strong workforce in all areas of our agency has led to vacancy rates on a path back to pre-pandemic levels, thanks in large part to pay-equity and retention investments by our Board and an ambitious recruitment effort by our Human Resources team. And caseworkers are staying longer, we hope because of our efforts to make all employees feel safe, supported, and valued.

*Preliminary data as of November 2023

- In what economists called the Great Resignation, the pandemic set off an unprecedented churn in the entire labor market, with peaks in late 2021 and 2022 of workers quitting their jobs because of perceived low pay, no opportunities for advancement, and feeling disrespected. National studies show that almost half of child welfare staff leave their jobs within two years, while schools of Social Work are reporting drops in enrollment, which means the pipeline for future child welfare workers is also shrinking.
- To begin addressing this difficult labor market, FCCS implemented an unprecedented \$1,500 hiring and retention bonus offer in 2021, with unanimous approval from the FCCS Board and in collaboration with our partners in labor. It was followed with a one-time \$2,500 state-funded Workforce Recovery Relief bonus in 2022, which FCCS leadership secured through the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services and the Public Children Services Association of Ohio.
- The leadership team then successfully collaborated with our FCCS labor partners to build structured pay increases through the Collective Bargaining Agreement. Nearly all employees will see an annual 2.25% cost of living adjustment and a 5% step/retention adjustment in their paychecks for each of the next two years.
- On the recruitment side, our Human Resources team hired nearly 165 new employees, of which 131 were Child Welfare Caseworkers (1 & 2). This ambitious recruitment represents an amazing 38% increase in the total number of CWC's hired compared to the year before.
- To meet this recruitment challenge, the HR team hosted 12 on-site hiring events; 8 college campus visits; 20 job fairs and requests for appearances on college campuses; and 30 community evening events to meet people in their community.
- Because of these pay-equity and retention investments and our recruitment efforts, **our current case-carrying caseworker vacancy rate sits below 7%**, based on preliminary counts by our administrators. By comparison, our counterparts in Cuyahoga County have seen an increase in their caseworker vacancy rate, which rose from 26% in 2022 to 29% in 2023.
- Supporting these new caseworkers - and contributing to our efforts to increase the percent of newly hired caseworkers who remain with the agency for at least 12 months- our Direct Service teams now have a heightened focus on onboarding and training, with the launch of Casework "Mentors" in each of our direct service areas.

2. Serve youth by placing them in the least restrictive family-like setting.

Goal	Historical Data
C. Increase the percent of youth initially placed with kin.	2020 – 37.7% 2021 – 47.0% 2022 – 39.2% 2023 – 36.5%**
D. Increase the percent of teens initially placed in family-like settings.	2020 – 62.1% 2021 – 71.6% 2022 – 60.3% 2023 – 62.2%**
<p>Summary:</p> <p>Despite a well-documented and worsening national placement crisis in 2022-2023 in which it has become more difficult to enlist potential home-based providers (foster parents) and address the treatment of teenage youth with multi-system and high-acuity needs, FCCS has been still able to initially place roughly 40% of all youth who come into our care with kin. Attention at the state and local levels to the placement crisis, more collaboration on mental health supports, and additional investment to financially support kinship providers have prevented those numbers from significantly worsening. Instead, it's helping to prevent our direct service teams from losing ground on our ability to place teenagers in family-like settings, which has held steady at our six-year average of roughly two-thirds of teens in our care.</p>	

** Data as of November 20, 2023

- Across Ohio, a shortage of foster families, group homes, residential treatment facilities, and other placements has overwhelmed child welfare agencies, according to research by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio (PCSAO). Frequently, it means youth in custody are housed in offices, hospital emergency rooms, and other ill-suited places for days, weeks and sometimes longer. In the year ending June 2022, 503 children in foster care spent at least one night in county government offices across Ohio.
- Compounding this challenge, of the nearly 15,000 youth who are in the custody of PCSA's across the state, about a fourth of them have complex issues including mental illness, developmental disabilities, and multi-system experience - which are often teenage youth involved with the juvenile justice system, some in felony-level crimes.

- Over the past year, FCCS has worked closely with the Franklin County Juvenile Courts and local law enforcement to better manage the number of youth brought into the child welfare system. This includes a rethinking of the Reception Center for teens whose families are still able to maintain custody after a youth is arrested and for youth who are not facing criminal charges but may need a limited time (less than 24 hours) away from home to de-escalate.
- Continuing our efforts to address the youth mental health crisis that is impacting our community, our direct services teams have enhanced our partnerships with other providers and other systems in the community who have expertise on youth mental health, collaborated closely with OhioRISE, and provided additional youth mental health training to our front-line staff. Our agency also hosted multiple community mental health summits (including one specifically with teenagers).
- Caseworkers on our Placements team received training in the “Family Finding” model to improve our efforts to locate supportive kin and kinship placements for children in FCCS custody. As Family Finders, our Caseworkers are now able to search, identify and/or engage 60 of a youth’s relatives, build a genogram for a family to the fourth generation, and create a road map that further identifies a youth’s family and community supports.
- To provide additional financial support for kinship providers, our Kinships team collaborated with Franklin County Job and Family Services to provide more than 1,200 kinship caregivers with Caregiver Grant reimbursements of up to \$1,500 each to help with the expenses of caring for additional family members.
- In a unique state-county-city-community collaboration, FCCS enlisted the help of the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, the Franklin County Commissioners, and Columbus City Council - along with more than two dozen foster agencies, local service providers, and community partners including Action for Children - to recruit as many as 100 additional foster parents specifically to support tween- and teen-aged children.
- Despite the placement challenges, our team has been able to maintain the percentage of teenagers who are initially placed in family-like settings when they come into our care, holding steady at roughly two-thirds (approximately 62.2% in 2023, compared to the six-year average of 62.1%).
- While we would prefer youth to be placed in kinship situations, the percentage of kin who are willing to take on the responsibility continues to wane - in part because of the same factors driving the overall placement crisis. In 2023, the percent of youth initially placed with kin dipped slightly to 36.5% but remains near our six-year average of 40.6%. For comparative purposes on the depth of this challenge, our PCSA colleagues in Cuyahoga County have seen their rates drop to 30% in 2023, down from 31% the year before.



3. Empower families to meet their children’s needs after agency involvement.

Goal	Historical Data
Increase the percent of youth for whom permanency is maintained for at least one year.	2020 – 86.9% 2021 – 89.3% 2022 – 88.2% 2023 – 89.1%**
Summary: From our agency’s first interactions with children and parents, our team and our supportive community partners are intentional in their efforts to empower families to meet their children’s needs after agency involvement. We continue to be a statewide leader on helping families from re-entering the child welfare system. In 2023, 89.1% of the youth we served remained in stable, permanent homes for at least twelve months - which outdoes our six-year average of 86%.	

** Data as of November 20, 2023

*** Ohio Results Oriented Measurement System, 2022

- For comparison purposes, the percent of re-screened-in reports within 12 months of a screen-in is approximately 23%***. That means roughly 77% of the families we investigate or assess do not come back into the system over the course of the year. In Cuyahoga County, this number is above 27%; in Hamilton County, it’s 26%.
- Another helpful comparison, the recurrence rate of maltreatment within twelve months is roughly 7%***. That means once cases of abuse and neglect are resolved, accusations of repeated maltreatment are not seen again in roughly 93% of our cases. In Cuyahoga County, this number is above 10%; in Hamilton County, it’s 15%; the statewide average is 10%.
- Of the nearly 6,000 family assessments completed by our Intake team during the first ten months of the year, approximately 22% resulted in the need for provided ongoing services to youth and families.
- Because of our intentional efforts to empower families to meet their children’s needs after agency involvement, we will have increased the percent of youth for whom permanency is maintained for at least one year to a high of 89.1%.

4. Integrate racial and ethnic equity and inclusion into all division work.

Summary:

We continue to build upon a Team FCCS culture in which employees feel safe, supported, respected, and valued. Growing our numbers once again in 2023, hundreds of staff participated in equity-based training, open conversations on racial justice, and committee work to drive multi-cultural competency.

- Significant efforts to engage with staff and ultimately enhance the agency's culture and climate resulted in nearly half of the entire agency attending at least one or more of our Building A Community of Hope speaker series sessions. The three highest attended sessions were Kim Brazwell's virtual session on Identity, Trauma, & Restoration; Jen Agosti's virtual session on racial justice and the need for anti-racist approaches; and Trabian Shorters' in-person session on asset-framing as a model to support equity.
- In 2022, FCCS leadership designated mandated cultural training, enlisting child welfare practitioner and researcher Dr. Rekió Boyd to deliver a comprehensive examination of racial disproportionality and disparities. The initial training on Agency-Systemic Factors has been completed by 113 staff, with remaining staff scheduled within the first six months of 2024.
- Dozens of staff are actively involved in the agency's Multi-Cultural Development Committee and SOGIE Committee (Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression), both of which have hosted staff presentations and activities.
- Our Organizational Health team hosted a new series of Listening Lounges - an employee engagement space focused on understanding the employee experience, exploring critical agency issues, and strengthening connection in the workplace through an interactive facilitated discussion process - which attracted 220 total attendees.

LEADING IN INNOVATION

In addition to strategic plan alignment with the agency's guiding principles and mission, Franklin County Children Services continues to be a leading voice and active member in National Partnership on Child Safety. With our Executive Director serving as co-chair, the Partnership has brought together 33 jurisdictions and collaborators across the nation. And over the past year:

- Approximately two-thirds of Partnership jurisdictions have fully implemented a supportive, family-centered, systems approach to internal child fatality reviews.
- Fourteen jurisdictions (including FCCS) shared fatality reviews into Partnership's Data Warehouse in 2023. Preliminary analysis alongside a draft codebook was developed.
- Nearly half of all Partnership (including FCCS) jurisdictions have participated in at least one or more administrations of the Safety Culture Survey.
- Op-eds and federal testimony have continued to advance Safety Science as a crucial pathway to creating a 21st Century public health/multi-systems approach to safe, equitable family preservation and reducing the use of foster care.

- Enhanced internal and external partnership communication through the launch of the NPCS website, annual resource guide, quarterly newsletters, and monthly e-blasts.

FCCS has also been an active participant in the development of the “Practice in Action Together” shared practice model developed by our partners at PSCAO throughout 2023. The PACT model takes a behavior-driven approach to practice which is designed to lead to equity for families, workers, and communities. The model has been developed by caseworkers, supervisors, and agency leaders working alongside families, former foster youth, academics, and other experts. With input from FCCS, the model is now being evaluated to determine which of the caseworker behaviors identified by this diverse stakeholder group achieve stronger relationships between workers and families.



SECTION 5:

Business Environment

INVESTING FOR THE CHALLENGES AHEAD:

Looking to address the challenges of 2025 and beyond, Franklin County Children Services recognizes that sustainability for the agency - and the necessary evolution of service to keep children safer and make families stronger for longer - will require new investment. We have identified three strategic initiatives to accomplish that goal.

KINSHIP SUPPORT PARITY

As part of our Call to Action to Strengthen All Families, we recognize a need to better support family relatives or friends who are willing to care for a child. As shared previously, however, the number of relatives who are willing to accept this type of placement has decreased over the past three years, especially for tween- and teen-aged youth.

Still, data shows the power of a kinship setting. Children who exit the custody of FCCS into a kinship setting - as compared to youth who go into a foster home, group home, or institution - are less likely than any other alternative placement to return to FCCS. It's less than 4%, dramatically more successful than placement in a group home where the odds are 50:50 that a child will re-enter the child welfare system within a year. As noted previously, the re-entry into the system is likely to last more than a year-and-a-half.

Percentage of Youth who Remain in Permanency One Year After Agency Custody					
Observation Year	Discharge Year	Kinship Home	Foster Home	Group Home	Institution
2023	2022	96.1%	86.7%	57.1%	71.0%
2022	2021	93.8%	87.2%	64.7%	63.0%

To be successful, kin caregivers who take on this responsibility need levels of supports and access to resources on par with foster families. FCCS will further invest in kinship supports over the ten-year levy period by:

1. Supporting agency youth who are placed with kinship families through higher monthly stipends, growing the per-month investment to \$500.
2. Investing new levy dollars to provide supports to kinship families such as housing/rental assistance, utilities, childcare, food, and other necessities to provide for a safe and healthy living environment.
3. Amplifying our Kinship Permanency Stipend Program (previously Board approved) to continue

providing support when children exit our custody into the permanent custody/guardianship of kin, moving from support of approximately 285 children to more than 1,100 children in the next ten years.

4. Doubling our partnership with the Office on Aging to provide additional supports to senior relatives - grandparents, older aunts and uncles caring for kin who are also receiving services from Aging.



STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT

As part of our Call to Action to Value our Team FCCS Culture, we recognize the continued challenge of staff recruitment and retention. As repeatedly noted in this report, our agency faces extreme competition for workers in the child welfare system - especially our valued caseworkers. At the same time, the work of this staff can be demanding and emotionally challenging, so the agency must also invest in training, mentoring, and staff support.

More than just an investment in salaries and benefits, retention also has a direct impact on the youth we serve. Data shows when families are served by a stable case manager, we lessen the time a child spends in agency custody, reduce trauma, and improve long term outcomes. To put this point in clearer terms, **national data confirms that when a child's caseworker leaves and is replaced by a new caseworker, the child will likely stay in custody an additional six months or more on average.** That means more trauma to the child and family and more cost to the agency.

The agency has made significant gains in hiring. To keep our current momentum on stabilizing our workforce, we need to continue the current investment in staff. This includes committing to continued investment in competitive starting salaries and union-supported structured pay increases which will allow us to attract and retain high-quality staff.



COMMUNITY PREVENTION SERVICES



WHOLE CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

As part of our Call to Actions to Protect the Whole Child and Strengthen All Families, we recognize the opportunity to better identify and address the growing complexity of youth mental health challenges facing so many of the children we serve. At the same time, we can also take advantage of the opportunity to invest in community-based programs that can prevent families from coming into the child welfare system (or, at least, reducing a family's penetration into the child welfare safety net).

FCCS currently partners with 16 local and neighborhood-based organizations to strengthen and provide vital front-door services to any Franklin County family who seeks assistance. These community partners provide a variety of support services to families and children - no matter a family's size, income, neighborhood, background, and diversity - and the prevention services cover a wide net, including supporting young mothers, preventing sex trafficking, tackling food insecurity, addressing domestic violence or youth violence, providing life skills, and offering family counseling.

FCCS will invest \$1 million more each year in new funding on prevention services by:

1. Expanding capacity and partnering with new community-based service providers who offer prevention-based programming available to all families in our community.
2. Setting aside specific funding to enhancing youth mental health services and supports.
3. Expanding community-based Emergency Shelter Care programs.

ABATING IMPACTS OF POLICY AND FUNDING DECISIONS:

At both the state and federal level, new investments and new attentions to the child welfare system have provided a mix of more funding and more bureaucracy to the work of Franklin County Children Services.

FAMILY FIRST PREVENTION SERVICES ACT

In 2018, Congress passed the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) which moved Title IV-E Funding upstream to allowed for reimbursement of certain prevention services adopted by states and restricted reimbursement for children placed in congregate care. Ohio implemented FFPSA effective October 1, 2021.

Since implementation, Ohio's available prevention services adopted by the state is minimal and does not offer a lot of options for our children and families. However, FFPSA has had a significant impact on our placement costs while also negatively impacting our federal reimbursement for placement costs.

Since the implementation of FFPSA, per diem costs for children placed in congregate care has increased by 38.76%. Reimbursement for these higher costs have decreased from approximately 30% to a low of 8%. **From October 2021 through December 2023, FCCS has lost \$2.5 million in revenue for children placed in congregate care settings related to FFPSA requirements.** Federal revenue related to FFPSA in our levy requests maintains this lost revenue over the 2025 – 2029 levy period.

TIERED FOSTER CARE

The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services has undertaken a collaborative effort to launch Tiered Foster Care with the specific goal of enhancing training and supports beyond traditional and treatment foster care, with the hope of better meeting the variety of challenging needs of children entering the custody of PCSA and Title IV-E agencies as well as those who may be stepping down from congregate care or entering foster care with higher levels of need.

It aims to better align children's characteristics and unique needs with caregivers' skills and abilities with consistent training, supports, and payment for caregivers and placement agencies.

There are multiple components to this initiative, along with a detailed history of the initiative, prospective timeline, and ways to get involved and contribute to the effort.

Five key topics are addressed:

1. Defining clear Levels of Need (LON) Tiers through specific child characteristics and caregiver skills.
2. Updating rules and resources for caregiver certification and training.
3. Expanding and enhancing the resources and supports available to caregivers.
4. Standardizing tools used to help determine the appropriate LON Tier for each child.
5. Setting consistent payment rates with an Actuarial vendor through the Ohio Department of Medicaid (ODM).

FCCS has been involved in a Pilot of Tiered Foster Care as well as served on the Rate Setting committee for the past few years. What we have concluded is that, although the concept is good, this will add a lot of intensive effort and time to practice regarding assessments, potentially negatively impact placement acceptance and will increase placement cost at various levels. The full impact will be better evaluated upon the state's policy and program requirements being finalized and after full implementation.

KINSHIP GUARDIANSHIP ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

In accordance with the Federal Administration on Children, Youth, and Families and the "Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008," a new title IV-E plan option was created for states to provide kinship guardianship assistance payments to relatives who assume legal custody/guardianship of kinship children for whom they have cared for as foster parents for a minimum of six consecutive months. This option led to Ohio's Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP), which became effective in January 2023.

Ohio's KGAP model is a hybrid in which county agencies who have placed children in their custody with kin can assist the kin in obtaining licensure, pay the kin a monthly payment equal to the foster care payment for the child, provide case management services for a minimum of six months, work with the court system to grant legal custody/guardianship to the relative, and ultimately assist the kin family in applying for KGAP. The state will pay 80% of the foster care rate the kin was receiving at the time of legal custody.

While KGAP is one option for kinship financial support, our concern is that eligibility for the program requires, among other criteria, a child be placed into agency custody, the child be placed with kin for at least six months after the relative becomes licensed, and the kin relative must receive legal custody from the court to receive long term financial support. Having a program that requires custody and potentially lengthening the time a child is in agency custody to receive this benefit has negative impacts to the number of cases a caseworker will be required to carry, costs of paying the kin the licensed foster care rate, and most devastating is the trauma a child will suffer from being in the child welfare system.

With the state paying 80% of the foster care rate for KGAP eligible children, this has a potential impact on adoption assistance negotiations as well, where adoptions could be delayed pending our ability to also pay 80% of the foster care rate for finalized adoptions.

SECTION 6:

Operational Needs

In addition to investing in strategic initiatives aimed at keeping children safer and making families stronger for longer, there are several operation needs that also factor into the agency's financial stability and sustainability over the next ten years.

STAFFING NEEDS

Staff at FCCS are our greatest asset. To recruit and retain well qualified staff who make a difference every day in the lives of those we serve, our continued investment in staff is critical. As previously mentioned, achieving and maintaining a competitive edge in the market by ensuring starting wages are attractive and annual increases are equitable across the market will allow us to maintain tenured and well-seasoned staff. Nationally and at FCCS, maintaining tenure has proven to provide better outcomes for children and families and has financial benefits in paid placements.

TECHNOLOGY INITIATIVES

FCCS is upgrading the Fiscal ERP (enterprise resource planning) software. ERP software is a one-stop shop for combining various business activities, such as purchasing, accounts payable, accounts receivable and general ledger. The new ERP will allow FCCS to automate the requisition to payment request process, improve visibility of that process flow to caseworkers and other staff, and allow for more accurate and timely data for reporting and data warehouse uses. The goal is for a staff member to use the software link from their mobile device to not only order all goods and services needed, but to review a report that lists all goods, services and costs incurred by the case. This data will then flow to the data warehouse where the Evaluation department can run reports comparing costs and outcomes, so that service teams and management can use the information to improve outcomes and best practices for families and youth in Franklin County. The new ERP will also streamline fiscal operations which is currently bogged down in duplicate systems and manual processes. Integrations with the county ERP will be implemented to reduce double entry. Enhanced reporting functionality should result in elimination of many manual spreadsheets currently in use in the purchasing, audit and fiscal departments. Report analysis should be increased as staff will no longer spend so much time creating the reports instead of analyzing them.

The data warehouse (DW or DWH) - also known as an enterprise data warehouse (EDW) - for reporting and analysis is considered a core component of business intelligence and is currently under construction. DWs are central repositories of integrated data from one or more disparate sources. They store current and historical data in one single place that are used for creating analytical reports for workers throughout the enterprise. This tool is used for decision support and allow leaders to leverage data within the various enterprise systems to make decisions. When completed this project will expand technology utilizing existing oracle tables from several enterprise systems, including our Fiscal ERP, as well SACWIS state data for analysis down to the service level. This

service level analysis will show what service interventions are providing the best outcomes for future financial investment in those areas.

PROVIDERS

FCCS has 18 supportive service contracts in place for added support for families and children associated with FCCS. Further, FCCS has partnerships with 21 providers throughout Franklin County providing 26 different types of services for FCCS involved youth and families. These community-based services provide various levels of mental health treatment components, AOD, life skills development, parenting, and supports for the youth and families FCCS serves. FCCS also works directly with 13 various county agencies for different purposes through an MOU. FCCS has a total of 16 community prevention contracts that were awarded from an RFP issued in 2021. FCCS doubled the number of community prevention contracts awarded from the previous RFP. FCCS contributes funding to existing programs in the community which benefit not only FCCS families but families throughout Franklin County. Lastly, FCCS has contracts with 59 foster care, group home and residential providers for the placement of children in our custody.

CAPITAL

1. FCCS will have multiple capital projects over the ten-year levy. Of note are:
2. Replacement of the roof at our 855 W. Mound location estimated to cost \$450,000 in 2025
3. Parking lot replacement at our 855 W. Mound location estimated to cost \$400,000 in 2026
4. Exterior and window caulking at our 855 W. Mound location estimated to cost \$350,000 in 2027
5. Water tower update at our 1919 Frank Rd location estimated at \$45,000 in 2027
6. Asphalt replacement at our 1919 Frank Rd location estimated at \$250,000 in 2027



SECTION 7:

Revenue and Expenditures

FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES FIVE YEAR REVENUE AND EXPENSE HISTORY

FCCS Historical Revenue and Expenditures and 2024 Projections						
	2019 Actuals	2020 Actuals	2021 Actuals	2022 Actuals	2023 Actuals	2024 FCCS Projection
Beginning Cash:	132,731,685	127,509,079	131,034,970	155,667,175	157,072,100	145,678,410
Revenue:						
Levy Funds						
1.9 Mill Levy - Expiring in 2024	49,242,151	49,995,206	50,485,614	51,793,437	52,606,019	53,148,711
3.1 Mill Levy - Expiring in 2029	84,568,042	85,861,333	86,703,554	88,949,599	90,345,120	91,277,134
Federal Funds	53,337,215	47,676,607	61,135,733	42,358,955	42,263,199	45,875,000
State Funds	8,829,073	13,445,962	12,173,058	12,522,015	12,523,415	12,384,884
Local Funds	2,118,462	2,927,699	2,410,308	1,614,991	1,611,223	1,890,000
Miscellaneous Funds	624,955	744,675	721,041	1,067,617	883,182	915,000
Total Revenue	198,719,898	200,651,482	213,629,308	198,306,614	200,232,158	205,490,729
Expenditures:						
Personal Services	43,517,971	46,592,631	45,451,549	51,858,792	51,744,479	55,369,208
Fringe Benefits	25,900,605	26,444,336	26,871,026	23,590,351	24,911,868	27,791,080
Materials & Services	17,595,854	18,048,411	15,943,910	16,986,677	17,123,577	18,763,040
Capital Outlays	550,963	143,042	108,583	133,397	31,325	638,161
Social Services	116,377,110	105,897,172	100,622,035	104,332,471	117,814,599	122,178,733
Total Expenditures	203,942,504	197,125,591	188,997,103	196,901,688	211,625,848	224,740,222
Ending Cash Balance:	127,509,079	131,034,970	155,667,175	157,072,100	145,678,410	126,428,917
Recommended Cash Balance:	50,985,626	49,281,398	47,249,276	49,225,422	52,906,462	56,185,056

As a public, levy-funded agency, we have a duty to effectively monitor and manage the tax dollars (and donations) we're given, responsibly invest our funds to advance our public mission, and strategically reinvest in the community that supports our work. We tirelessly pursue financial stewardship marked by transparency, accountability, and mission-driven investments.

The approval of a property tax levy brings a great responsibility, and FCCS has honored this trust given by the community for more than 50 years. The knowledge of this responsibility serves as a foundation to the financial management of the organization. Decisions are made with a focus on child protection, family stability, and promoting positive outcomes for kids all while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.

Over the past five years, FCCS has proven to be excellent stewards of taxpayer dollars by reducing expenditures in placement costs, maximizing federal reimbursement and state allocated dollars, and drawing down one-time funding opportunities from both the federal and state government.

FCCS has increased prevention supports which has then reduced the number of children coming into agency custody, reduced the number of paid placement days, and allowed a shift on placements in congregate care settings... all while increasing kinship placements and supports.

The prevention supports and placement practice change have reduced our annual number of paid placement days and costs from 516 thousand placement days at a cost of \$64.166 million in 2019 as compared to 303 thousand placement days at a cost of \$44.323 million in 2023.

The maximization of Federal and State funds to the agency is of the upmost priority to FCCS as increases here allows us to stretch our local levy funds. Further FCCS has successfully drawn down one-time Federal, State and Local funds over the past five years through COVID relief funds, Workforce Grants and Federal Funding Certainty Grants. Maximizing federal and state funds as well as drawing down one-time funds has allowed FCCS to avoid the drastic reduction of cash reserve as projected in the 2019 levy projections. Specifically, FCCS has seen more than a \$24 million positive impact to cash related to one-time funding such as:

1. The Federal Medical Assistance Percentage increased by 6% over the COVID emergency period netting FCCS an additional \$236 thousand.
2. Board of Commissioners Corona Relief Funds received equaled approximately \$1.4 million.
3. Federal Chaffee Stimulus received equaled slightly over \$2 million.
4. Federal Funding Certainty Grants received exceeded \$19 million.
5. ODJFS Workforce Ready Grants received were more than \$1.5 million.

Given the significant reduction in placement costs as well as maximizing federal and state funds and drawing down significant one-time dollars, FCCS projects to beat the 2019 levy projections by approximately \$51.4 million at the end of CY 2024.

Although FCCS's cash balance is significantly higher than expected, it is important to remember that approximately half of the increase is due to one-time funding and much of the remaining increase in cash is due to a significant reduction in paid placement days over the past five years where we are beginning to see an increasing trend in placement costs starting in 2023.

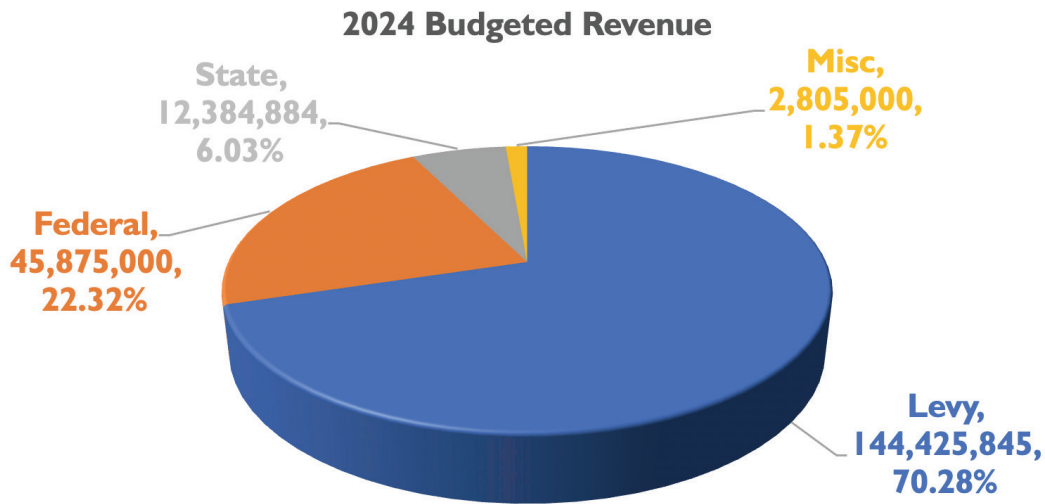
PROJECTED REVENUE AND EXPENDITURES

The 2024 projected budget shows revenues at \$205.5 million and expenses at \$224.7 million causing a budget deficit of approximately \$19.2 million.

Projected revenue is slightly higher than the prior year mainly due to increased levy proceeds, an increase in federal funds offset by a loss in state funding.

In projecting federal funding, the anticipated revenue increase is based on increased operational and administrative costs. FCCS receives approximately 24% federal administrative reimbursement, thus, as the projected costs increase, so do the projected federal revenue.

State funds are projected to be less than 2023 actuals as the state provided a one-time Workforce Grant to county agencies in 2023 where FCCS was able to draw down additional one-time funds slightly more than \$1.5 million.



Projected revenue over the levy lifecycle (2025 – 2034) are as follows:

Year	Levy	Federal Funds	State Funds	Miscellaneous	Totals
2025	\$177,064,237	\$50,359,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$242,663,121
2026	\$178,833,359	\$52,485,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$246,558,243
2027	\$180,620,173	\$54,745,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$250,605,057
2028	\$182,424,855	\$57,136,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$254,800,739
2029	\$184,247,583	\$59,675,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$259,162,467
2030	\$186,088,539	\$62,368,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$263,696,423
2031	\$187,947,904	\$65,222,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$268,409,788
2032	\$189,825,863	\$70,006,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$275,071,747
2033	\$191,722,602	\$71,465,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$278,427,486
2034	\$193,638,308	\$74,871,000	\$12,434,884	\$2,805,000	\$283,749,192

Expenses are projected to increase in staff costs as well as placement and managed care costs. Staff costs will increase based on the approved Collective Bargaining Agreement. Further, with increased starting wages and increases through annual raises, FCCS anticipates filling many vacancies which will impact overall staff costs.

Although FCCS has significantly reduced paid placement days and costs over the past five years, we are projecting and increase in this area. With the inception of FFPSA and Qualified Residential Treatment Program requirements as well as the spike in inflation, **FCCS's average placement day per diems have skyrocketed by 25.56 % when comparing January 2023 average per diem cost to the January 2024 per diem cost.** FCCS continues to keep the number of paid placements down, however, paying extreme per diem amounts for placements will negatively impact our cash balance moving forward.

Projected expenditures over the levy lifecycle (2025 – 2034) are as follows:

Year	Personal Services	Fringe Benefits	Materials & Services	Capital Outlays	Social Services	Totals
2024	\$55,369,208	\$27,791,080	\$18,763,040	\$638,161	\$122,178,733	\$224,740,222
2025	\$59,383,476	\$28,723,560	\$19,186,576	\$653,208	\$130,149,481	\$238,096,299
2026	\$63,688,778	\$29,672,169	\$18,797,501	\$667,806	\$135,876,297	\$248,702,550
2027	\$68,306,214	\$30,649,571	\$19,204,572	\$682,268	\$141,862,228	\$260,704,853
2028	\$73,258,414	\$31,664,083	\$19,612,753	\$696,769	\$148,385,400	\$273,617,420
2029	\$78,569,649	\$32,722,065	\$20,025,213	\$711,422	\$154,892,560	\$286,920,910
2030	\$84,265,949	\$33,828,871	\$20,444,114	\$726,304	\$161,378,074	\$300,643,313
2031	\$90,375,230	\$34,989,333	\$20,871,011	\$741,471	\$168,122,900	\$315,099,945
2032	\$105,004,721	\$39,205,194	\$21,307,075	\$756,962	\$175,165,726	\$341,439,678
2033	\$103,954,674	\$37,489,522	\$21,753,223	\$772,812	\$182,502,641	\$346,472,871
2034	\$111,491,387	\$38,838,350	\$22,210,207	\$789,047	\$190,142,369	\$363,471,361

MAKING THE NECESSARY INVESTMENTS:

To make the necessary investments to provide children with the safety, permanency, and well-being they deserve and evolve how we truly strengthen families in our community, FCCS proposes investments in three targeted areas:

1. Kinship Support Parity
2. Staff Recruitment and Retainment
3. Community Prevention Services - including dedicated funding on youth mental health

KINSHIP SUPPORT PARITY

To provide kin who take on the responsibility of raising a child with levels of supports and access to resources on par with foster families, FCCS will invest in additional necessary kinship supports over the ten-year levy period, including higher monthly stipends; access to new supports such as housing/rental assistance, utilities, childcare, food, and other necessities; amplification of our Kinship Permanency Stipend Program to serve more than 1,100 children in the next ten years with continued support when children exit our custody into the

permanent custody/guardianship of kin; and additional funding in partnership with the Office on Aging to support senior relatives caring for kin.

STAFF RECRUITMENT AND RETAINMENT

To keep our current momentum on stabilizing our workforce, we need to continue the investment in staff that was necessary to maintain competitiveness in the child welfare domain, including continued investment in competitive starting salaries and union-supported structured pay increases which will allow us to attract and retain high-quality staff.

COMMUNITY PREVENTION SERVICES AND WHOLE CHILD MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORTS

To expand capacity and partner with new community-based service providers who offer prevention-based programming available to all families in our community, FCCS will invest \$1 million more in new funding each year on prevention services with specific enhancement of youth mental health services and supports. This investment also includes expansion of our community-based Emergency Shelter Care programs.

OTHER PROJECTED EXPENSES

- Placement costs are projected to increase by a minimum of 5%. This minimal increase in placement costs is only possible with increased investments in prevention services, staff stabilization, and kinship support, as these areas have a significant impact on the number of children entering agency custody, the length of time children remain in agency custody, and the unlikelihood that children placed with kin will return to agency custody.
- Costs for our contracted Managed Care partners is a steady 3% increase for each year of the levy.
- All other costs are at the Federal inflation rate.

HISTORICAL GROWTH RATES FOR INCOME AND EXPENSES

Historical growth rates are beneficial in creating context in evaluating growth patterns when comparing the past to the future. The following chart illustrates the annual growth pattern of income and expenses from 1983 to 2034. Of greater importance are the last two columns which shows how much growth was experienced (or projected) in a five-year period. For example, comparing income and expenses in 1983 to 1988 shows a revenue increase of 70.64% and an expense increase of 84.58%. Each line in the last two columns compares the current year to that point five year prior.

Franklin County Children Services Income & Expense Growth Rates, 1983 - 2034

Year	Income	Annual Income Growth Rate	Expense	Annual Expense Growth Rate	5 Year Income Growth Rate	5 Year Expense Growth Rate
1983	23,735,106		23,233,823			
1984	23,971,733	1.00%	25,676,428	10.51%		
1985	25,309,226	5.58%	28,195,538	9.81%		
1986	35,963,145	42.10%	33,527,690	18.91%		
1987	39,401,821	9.56%	39,575,075	18.04%		
1988	40,501,533	2.79%	42,885,306	8.36%	70.64%	84.58%
1989	41,243,917	1.83%	44,521,337	3.81%	72.05%	73.39%
1990	55,502,179	34.57%	48,218,111	8.30%	119.30%	71.01%
1991	59,774,571	7.70%	53,803,950	11.58%	66.21%	60.48%
1992	64,792,128	8.39%	61,907,872	15.06%	64.44%	56.43%
1993	66,616,371	2.82%	68,206,239	10.17%	64.48%	59.04%
1994	73,248,741	9.96%	72,066,346	5.66%	77.60%	61.87%
1995	76,855,022	4.92%	79,590,410	10.44%	38.47%	65.06%
1996	79,221,884	3.08%	80,188,345	0.75%	32.53%	49.04%
1997	100,919,804	27.39%	88,711,417	10.63%	55.76%	43.30%
1998	109,870,347	8.87%	95,470,290	7.62%	64.93%	39.97%
1999	112,644,916	2.53%	112,385,363	17.72%	53.78%	55.95%
2000	132,801,928	17.89%	120,565,402	7.28%	72.80%	51.48%
2001	135,445,989	1.99%	132,191,131	9.64%	70.97%	64.85%
2002	140,426,075	3.68%	148,614,070	12.42%	39.15%	67.53%
2003	146,224,027	4.13%	162,028,499	9.03%	33.09%	69.72%
2004	145,641,809	-0.40%	157,764,160	-2.63%	29.29%	40.38%
2005	173,985,600	19.46%	158,229,100	0.29%	31.01%	31.24%
2006	174,595,163	0.35%	163,589,159	3.39%	28.90%	23.75%
2007	178,152,319	2.04%	167,780,258	2.56%	26.87%	12.90%
2008	173,392,942	-2.67%	167,236,437	-0.32%	18.58%	3.21%
2009	174,855,683	0.84%	167,947,341	0.43%	20.06%	6.45%
2010	203,833,310	16.57%	165,732,352	-1.32%	17.16%	4.74%
2011	188,598,469	-7.47%	167,675,584	1.17%	8.02%	2.50%
2012	177,069,650	-6.11%	168,766,118	0.65%	-0.61%	0.59%
2013	173,616,645	-1.95%	185,840,708	10.12%	0.13%	11.12%
2014	180,543,145	3.99%	173,289,387	-6.75%	3.25%	3.18%
2015	181,521,953	0.54%	180,825,145	4.35%	-10.95%	9.11%
2016	187,753,206	3.43%	187,404,012	3.64%	-0.45%	11.77%
2017	196,724,458	4.78%	193,189,406	3.09%	11.10%	14.47%

Year	Income	Annual Income Growth Rate	Expense	Annual Expense Growth Rate	5 Year Income Growth Rate	5 Year Expense Growth Rate
2018	194,699,933	-1.03%	197,528,781	2.25%	12.14%	6.29%
2019	198,719,898	2.06%	203,942,504	3.25%	10.07%	17.69%
2020	200,651,482	0.97%	197,125,591	-3.34%	10.54%	9.01%
2021	213,629,308	6.47%	188,997,103	-4.12%	13.78%	0.85%
2022	198,306,614	-7.17%	196,901,688	4.18%	0.80%	1.92%
2023	200,232,158	0.97%	211,630,122	7.48%	2.84%	7.14%
2024	205,490,729	2.63%	224,740,222	6.19%	3.41%	10.20%
2025	242,663,121	18.09%	238,096,299	5.94%	20.94%	20.78%
2026	246,558,243	1.61%	248,702,550	4.45%	15.41%	31.59%
2027	250,605,057	1.64%	260,704,853	4.83%	26.37%	32.40%
2028	254,800,739	1.67%	273,617,420	4.95%	27.25%	29.29%
2029	259,162,467	1.71%	286,920,910	4.86%	26.12%	27.67%
2030	263,696,423	1.75%	300,643,313	4.78%	8.67%	26.27%
2031	268,409,788	1.79%	315,099,945	4.81%	8.86%	26.70%
2032	275,071,747	2.48%	341,439,678	8.36%	9.76%	30.97%
2033	278,427,486	1.22%	346,472,871	1.47%	9.27%	26.63%
2034	283,749,192	1.91%	363,471,361	4.91%	9.49%	26.68%
Average	1983 - 1987	14.56%		14.32%		
Average	1988 - 1992	11.06%		9.43%	78.53%	69.18%
Average	1993 - 1997	9.63%		7.53%	53.77%	55.66%
Average	1998 - 2002	6.99%		10.94%	60.33%	55.96%
Average	2003 - 2007	5.12%		2.53%	29.83%	35.60%
Average	2008 - 2012	0.23%		0.12%	12.64%	3.50%
Average	2013 - 2017	2.16%		2.89%	0.62%	9.93%
Average	2018 - 2022	0.26%		0.44%	9.47%	7.15%
Average	2023 - 2027	4.99%		5.78%	13.79%	20.42%
Average	2028 - 2032	1.88%		5.55%	16.13%	28.18%
Average	2032 - 2034	1.57%		3.19%	9.38%	26.65%

BEGINNING AND ENDING CASH BALANCES FOR EACH YEAR OF LEVY CYCLE

The levy request, if approved, would result in the following FCCS Operating Days Cash on Hand:

Year	Beginning Cash	Income	Expenses	Ending Cash	Operating Days Cash on Hand
2017	132,025,481	196,724,458	193,189,406	135,560,532	256
2018	135,560,532	194,699,933	197,528,781	132,731,685	245
2019	132,731,685	198,719,898	203,942,504	127,509,079	228
2020	127,509,079	200,651,482	197,125,591	131,034,970	243
2021	131,034,970	213,629,308	188,997,103	155,667,175	301
2022	155,667,175	198,306,614	196,901,688	157,072,100	291
2023	157,072,100	200,232,158	211,630,122	145,674,136	251
2024	145,674,136	205,490,729	224,740,222	126,424,643	205
2025	126,424,643	242,740,222	238,096,299	130,991,465	201
2026	130,991,465	246,558,243	248,702,550	128,847,157	189
2027	128,847,157	250,605,057	260,704,853	118,747,157	166
2028	118,747,362	254,800,739	273,617,420	99,930,680	133
2029	99,930,680	259,162,467	286,920,910	72,172,237	92
2030	72,172,237	263,696,423	300,643,313	35,225,348	43
2031	35,225,348	268,409,788	315,099,945	-11,464,809	-13
2032	-11,464,809	275,071,747	341,439,678	-77,832,740	-83
2033	-77,832,740	278,427,486	346,472,871	-145,878,125	-154
2034	-145,878,125	283,749,192	363,471,361	-225,600,294	-227



SECTION 8: 2024 Levy Request

HISTORY OF COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Franklin County community has supported abused and neglected children since the late 1800s. With typically overwhelming approval numbers, county voters have passed property tax levies for Franklin County Children Services since 1958 (with only one rejection in 1980).

The current levy support for the agency includes two overlapping 10-year levies. The 3.1 mill 10-year levy was renewed by voters in November 2019, and a 1.9 mill 10-year levy expires at the end of 2024.

For more than 20 years, FCCS has not had to request an increase in millage.

CHRONOLOGY OF FRANKLIN COUNTY CHILDREN SERVICES LEVIES

Year	Millage	Comments	Expiration	% of Yes Vote
1958	0.5	Passed new child welfare levy in November after combined welfare levy failed in primary	1963	58.60%
1963	1.5	Passed new levy in November	1968	62.70%
1970	1.5	Renewal of 1963 levy in November	1973	50.90%
State law changed in 1973 to allow 10-year levies, millage limit removed				
1973	1.5	Renewal of 1968 Levy in November	1983	67.50%
Reduction factor applied in 1976 (1.1 and .4 mills effective levy rate)				
Levy considered in 1978, but not placed on ballot				
1975	0.5	Renewal of 1970 Levy in November	1985	66.40%
1980	0.85	New levy defeated in November		46.10%
1981	1.6	Passed new levy in November	1991	59.00%
1983	1.1	Renewal of 1973 in November	1993	79.00%
1985	1	New levy passed (instead of 1975 renewal) in November	1991	66.50%
1989	3.15	New levy passed (two levies to expire in 1991 discontinued) in November	1999	61.30%
1993	0.8	Replacement with reduction passed in November	1996	53.00%
1996	1.1	Replacement with increase passed in November	2004	60.80%
1999	3.15	Replacement passed in November	2019	61.67%
2004	1.9	Replacement of 1.1 mill = .8 mill new passed in March	2014	51.00%
2009	3.1	Replacement with a reduction passed in November	2019	61.67%
2014	1.9	Renewal Passed in November	2024	70.09%
2019	3.1	Renewal Passed in November	2029	79.58%

LEVY REQUEST

The agency has two 10-year levies that account for approximately 71 percent of the agency's annual income. The first is a 3.1 mill levy last renewed in 2019, expires at the end of 2029. The second is a 1.9 mill levy last renewed in 2014, set to expire in 2024.

The agency considered the expense projections under several levy scenarios: renewal levy only and renewal with various increases of millage. All revenue and expense assumptions remained the same in each scenario; only the amount of levy receipts changed. The objective was to determine the level of support required to ensure a cash reserve adequate to cover 90 days of operating expenses through the next five years (2025 – 2029).

The following chart shows the financial stability under the Board Approved levy scenario of a 1.9 mill renewal and a 0.6 mill increase. Levy funds collected under this proposal will allow FCCS to provide kinship support parity, recruit and retain staff, and provide needed community prevention services and supports.

The annual cost to the taxpayer, per \$100,000 property value after rollback, for the renewal and increase equals \$49.17. The 2024 approved budget is the basis for the levy scenario.

