

Annual Report



2013-2014

Circles of Care
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Letter from the President



This annual report covers our fiscal year 2013-2014 and is designed to demonstrate the positive outcomes we experienced and the work we performed to meet our mission of enhancing children, youth, and families' ability for effective living and growth through comprehensive social and mental health services. Our staff and foster parents performed exceptionally well this fiscal year bringing positive results to the communities we serve.

Through our foster care and adoption programs, our main goal is to help children in the Texas foster care system achieve permanency whether that be returning the child to his or her biological parents or to the home of a family member, successful emancipation into the adult world, or adoption into a permanent and loving adoptive family. While working toward that goal, our employees and care providers supply a range of supports and services to stabilize children and ensure all of their basic medical, educational, social, behavioral, and emotional needs are met, helping them in effective living and growth. Our staff and our foster parents are highly qualified professionals trained in managing a wide array of behaviors and challenges, offering the best possible services to the children we serve.

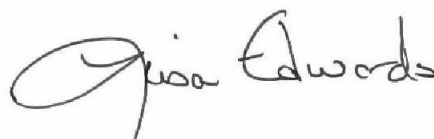
This fiscal year, we began work on obtaining accreditation, and we expect to achieve that goal in 2015. Becoming accredited demonstrates the agency's use of best practices in the delivery of child welfare services and provides an additional layer of oversight for the health and safety of our clients. I am very excited about the process of accreditation and the new opportunities it will present for Circles of Care.

Our preventative family counseling program, Services To At-Risk Youth or STAR, also continues to grow and help many children and families each year who are struggling with crises at home such as family conflict, divorce, and other challenges. The STAR program served 300 more children and almost 100 more families than the previous fiscal year. We added an additional counselor, bringing our total number of counselors to six, to help meet this growing need and enhance thousands of children and families' across Texas ability for effective living and growth through this program.

I am very proud of the Circles of Care workforce, the employees and care providers who deliver services every day and work tirelessly on our mission which is reflected in this report. Circles of Care has a strong, tenured, and knowledgeable staff. This fiscal year, all Case Management and supervisory staff became certified in the CANS assessment, a tool used for child welfare services to support decision making and service planning as well as facilitate quality improvement initiatives and to allow for the monitoring of outcomes of services.

One of our goals for the 2014-2015 fiscal year is to certify each employee in Trauma Informed Care through the University of Buffalo. This certification of our employees will provide Circles of Care an even greater expertise in servicing children and families in the child welfare system.

I am very happy with the agency's performance in fiscal year 2013-2014, and I am excited about the expansion of our prospects and expertise in 2014-2015. Thank you to everyone who was partnered with us this past year!



Foster Care and Adoption

670

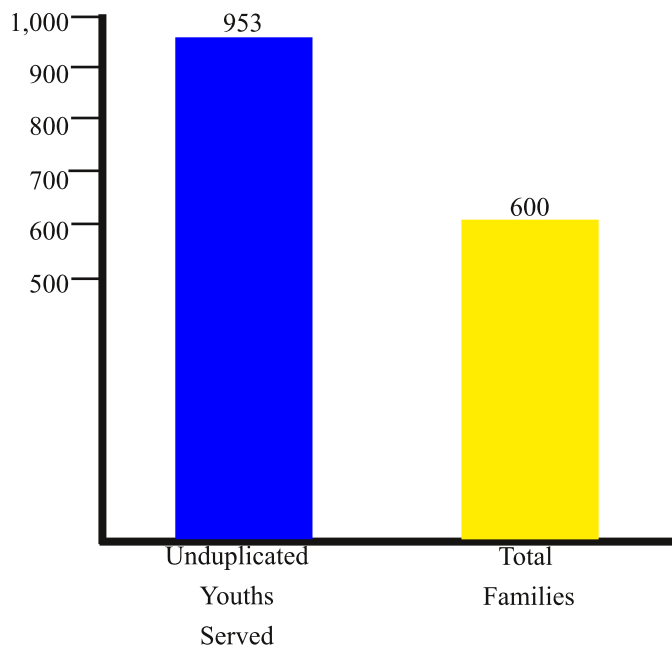
Statewide, Circles of Care provided care for a total of 670 children, 393 of whom were new placements, who had experienced abuse, neglect, or exploitation in fiscal year 2013-2014. The average age of the children we served was 5. The male to female ratio was generally even across the state with female children edging out males by only a few percentage points. The majority of clients originated from a Hispanic background except for Houston where the population was primarily African American and Dallas where it was predominantly Anglo-Saxon. The drop in total children in care over fiscal year 2012-2013 can be explained by a drop in removals conducted by the State.

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We saw an increase in the number of adoptions conducted in fiscal year 2013-2014 over the previous year comprising five percent of our total successful discharges. Our Houston office lead the way with fourteen of the thirty-six adoptions performed this fiscal year. Circles of Care strives each year to give children of all ages safe and loving forever homes with qualified and well-trained new parents. This form of permanency achievement is one of the greatest joys that we can provide to the children and the families we serve.

154

154 of our children were reunited with their own families either with their biological parents or a biological family member who volunteered to take them in. Reunification with the biological family is the first ultimate goal of foster care. After working with the state to rectify the issues that necessitated the original removal, the state can determine that the child may be placed back with his or her family. The Corpus Christi office saw the highest number of reunifications at sixty-nine. Reunification is the first permanency goal for each child who comes into care, and we are proud to assist in the task of keeping families together throughout the foster care system and through our family preservation program, Services To At-Risk Youth.



The Services To At-Risk Youth, STAR, program is our counseling program reaching Nueces, Kleberg, and Jim Wells counties. We reach out to families experiencing a crisis at home such as behavior problems, truancy, divorce or a recent death, or any other family challenge, and our counselors work with them directly to help resolve the issue and get the family back on track.

In fiscal year 2013-2014, we served a total of 953 unduplicated clients in 600 different families, showcasing the program's growth over the previous fiscal year. In order to accomodate this growth, we hired on a new counselor, expanding our total number of qualified, skilled counselors to six.

Referrals come in primarily through the CPS Investigation Units, reflecting this program's preventative nature, and through area schools and juvenile courts. Counselors also reach out in the community, disseminating information to families through churches and town meetings and also host monthly parenting classes to teach struggling parents methods and techniques for surmounting challenging behaviors and crises. All of these services are free of charge to anyone in the community.

We hosted Dr. Hill, PsyD (above bottom) to present the training Crisis Intervention and Management to the community at large (above top). We had thirty-three attendees from all around the Coastal Bend including representatives from local schools, CASA, juvenile courts, women's shelters, and CPS. The class featured instruction on managing a crisis and crisis prevention, both integral parts of our STAR program.

The STAR program is headed by Henry Martinez out of our Corpus Christi location.

Success Stories



A young man came into care in our Houston program in November of 2012. He has done exceptionally well in foster care. He has stayed in one home continuously throughout his tenure in care, has performed well in school and at home, and is a successful member of his high school's basketball and track teams. Additionally, as reflected in his behavior and school performance, he qualifies for our car program, so this fiscal year, Circles of Care purchased for him his very first automobile. He is well on his way to adulthood, and we are all very proud of him!

A young girl came into care in our Corpus Christi office in December of 2013 with severe behavior issues with violent aggression and self harm. The state designated her as requiring an Intense Level of Care, but the family she was placed with chose to work with her and requested that she be lowered to Specialized so that she could remain in their home. She has since made exceptional progress with the help of her supportive foster family and her Case Manager. She has reduced her physical aggression and her self harm, and it is expected that her Level of Care will be reduced again to Moderate. She is also anticipating achieving permanency when she moves in with her grandmother next year.

The Welch family, below, completed their family this fiscal year with the addition of two young boys. They came to us as first time parents hoping to add to their home. Their first placement was reunified with his family, but the Welch's did not give up on adoption. They took in another boy as a foster placement, knowing he might not stay with them forever. Six month's later, that boy was given a baby brother who the Welch's also took in. The boys' biological mother, knowing that her young sons were in a good home, terminated her rights voluntarily on the condition that both boys be adopted, keeping them together. The Welch's were elated and agreed without question and continued on with the adoption process. They consummated and completed their family in October of 2014 and could not be more thrilled to have the family they have always dreamed of.



In Houston, Program Director Cynthia Lee and Case Manager David Jackson oversaw the adoption of a sibling group into one of our families. Two young sisters were placed with Ms. P in November of 2010 with their brother following the next year. In May of 2014, adoption of the young boy and one of his sisters was consummated, but Ms. P was determined to give the other girl a permanent home as well. The following September, her determination paid off, and she completed adoption of the third sibling. The family has been all smiles ever since, each of them thrilled that their journey is complete and their family is whole.



Counselor Jennifer Hernandez began seeing a single mother with two young children, one in elementary school and one in middle school, to provide counseling to help the family with behavior issues, communication, and the children's grades. After several sessions of family counseling, the children's grades began to pick up and, at the end of the school year, the young boy passed all of his classes and was promoted into middle school. The older sister had also passed her classes and reported having higher self esteem. The

behavior of both children has improved dramatically, and the family has much more open communication allowing them to function as a unit. Upon follow-up, the children's mother reported that the family was doing much better, and she expressed her appreciation for the services, for how well the STAR program worked for them, and for the hard work that Jennifer put in helping their family.

Elsewhere in the STAR program, counselor Vanessa Aguirre has been working with two teenage girls who moved in with their aunt and uncle, who had never before had children, after their father was murdered and their mother was unable to care for them. Both girls had behavior problems and had to adjust to living in a home with rules. The eldest sister performed poorly in school and was held back twice from completing her Freshman year, while the younger girl fought with her classmates, skipped school, and smoked marijuana. With counseling, both girls are now performing much better in school. The older sister is on track to graduate with her class or even earlier if she is able, and her younger sibling no longer does drugs or fights and has dramatically reduced incidences of skipping school. Both girls have joined the Junior Varsity soccer team, and the older girl may move up to Varsity before the next season begin. The family reports that they all enjoy much better communication and are very grateful for the services and especially for Vanessa who has guided them every step of their journey.

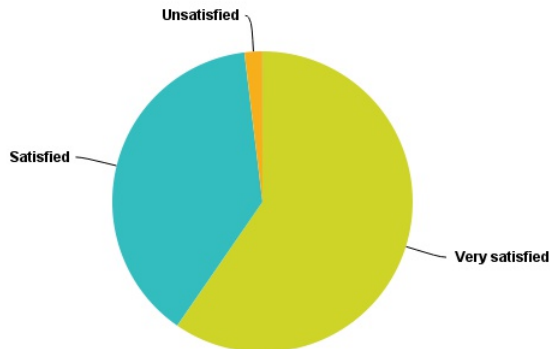
This fiscal year, we saw sixty youths emancipate from care into the adult world. Emancipation can be one of the most intimidating prospects for a foster child, but we do everything we can to prepare them and give them the confidence they need to make it in the world. One young woman from our Salado program area moved out on her own this year. She came into care requiring special supervision and was designated requiring a Specialized Level of Care. Over the next year and a half, she overcame her challenges, and her level was gradually lowered down to Basic Care. This year, she graduated from Ellison High School and has begun classes at Temple College. She is living on her own in an apartment with a car that she earned through our vehicle program. She worked very hard through school, holding down two jobs in anticipation of her future. She is on the road to success, and we have no doubt about the wonderful life that she is building for herself. She is an example to young people everywhere, and we could not be more proud of her and all she has accomplished.

These snapshots are only a small part of the success that we have seen this year. We are very proud of the hard work that our Case Managers and our foster parents do and, most importantly, of all of the effort our children put in to improve their own lives. They are the ones with the most to lose and the most to gain and our reward is seeing them succeed.

Annual Surveys

Q9 Overall, how would you rate your satisfaction with Circles of Care?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 0



When asked about the performance of Circles of Care, members of TDFPS responded very positively, almost unanimously commending our Case Managers, support staff, foster parents, and the agency as a whole. We strive to develop and maintain this kind of relationship with TDFPS and work with them on an individual level to ensure the best results.

In their own words:

Circles of Care is "the best by far."

"Very professional and easy to work with."

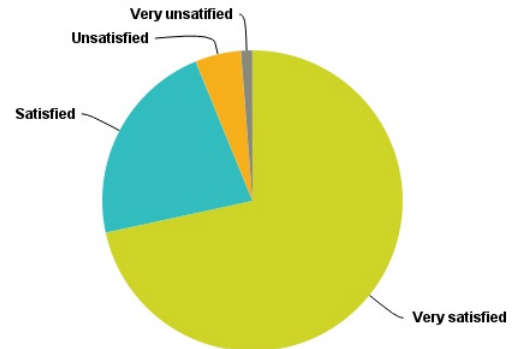
"Circles of Care is great."

While it is rare that a foster care agency works directly with members of CASA, we also sent several of their members surveys requesting feedback. The respondents agreed 100% that our foster parents provide the children in care everything they need to succeed in the system. They provided additional feedback on training options and ways that we can improve our care that we have taken into consideration.

Finally, a special notice to the Salado and McAllen offices for receiving personal commendations and to Norma Rodriguez who got a shoutout for the second year in a row!

Q19 How would you rate your overall experience with Circles of Care?

Answered: 81 Skipped: 0



Our foster parents were also almost unanimous in their positive feedback. We received results from 81 of our foster homes on topics such as frequency of communication with their Case Manager and methods of communication, home visits, common problems they have experienced, support, and other statistics. In addition, we requested the input of our families to hear directly from them what more we can do to help them care for their foster children.

Negative feedback has been taken into account, and we have begun implementing plans to address our parent-identified faults as quickly as possible.

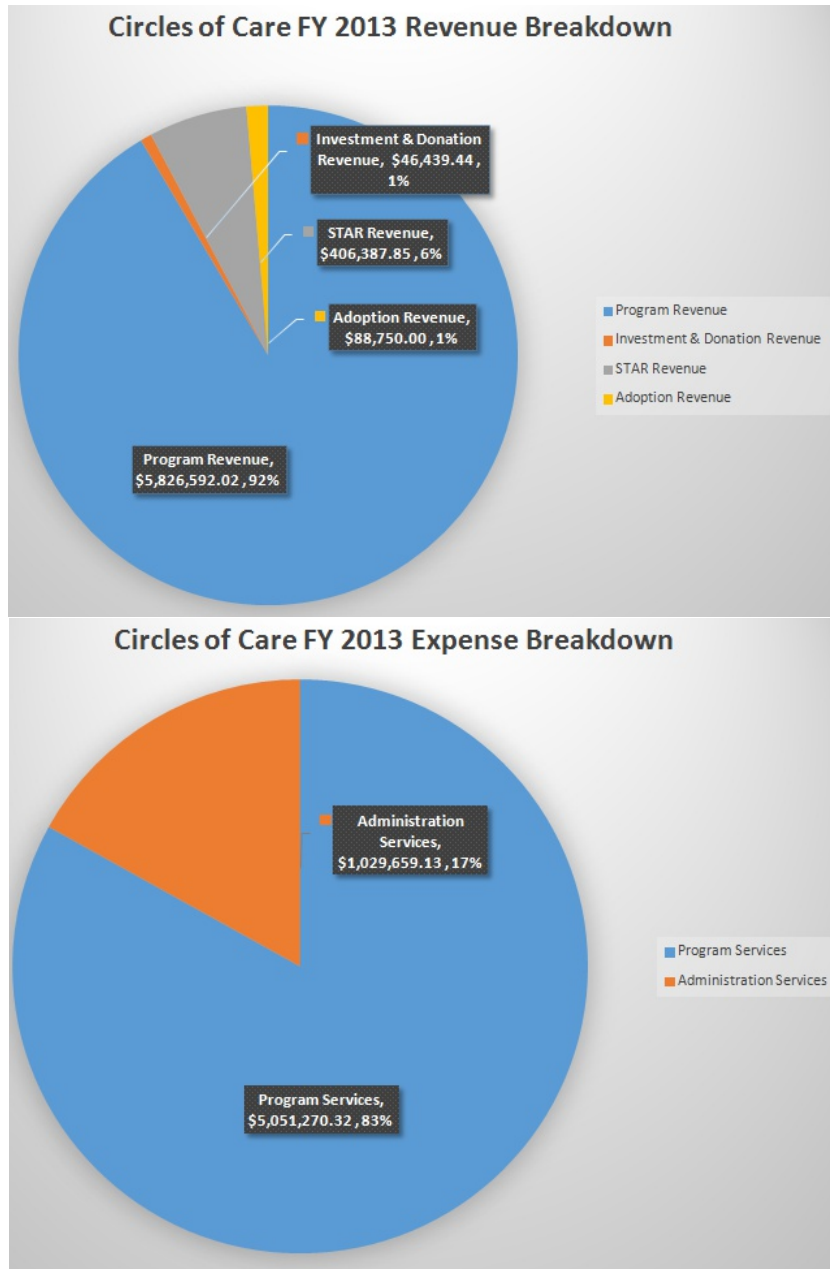
In their own words:

"Blessed to have such a dedicated, hard working group."

"The staff is...extremely personable and helpful."

"Circles of Care has changed my life. I had no clue what I was doing, but [you] have made this whole journey so easy and fun! I can't wait to adopt my boys!"

Financial Data and Outcomes



We had a noticeable increase in the number of family visits conducted this fiscal year. State-wide, 4,679 visits were conducted with biological parents or fictive kin members, an increase of 969 visits over the last year. These visits are important to help children transition into foster care and maintain relationships with their families back home.

We also conducted a total of 839 physical exams and 838 dental exams. Many children come into care without ever having had these types of exams. We provide them routinely to ensure that our children are healthy and safe.

3,518 therapy sessions were conducted this year. These sessions are also important for the transition into foster care and help our children adjust and manage behaviors and mental health.

In fiscal year 2013-2014, Circles of Care received ten office monitorings state-wide, only four of which resulted in citations. The Corpus Christi, Salado, and McAllen offices all received no citations for each of their inspections. This marked the eighth inspection in a row in McAllen from which they received no citations. Salado has also had very few citations, and the previous three inspections in a row have been citation free. Minor citations in other locations included documentation errors. Circles of Care takes each citation seriously, and upper level staff conferenced to determine resolutions. Plans were developed and implemented after each citation to address the issue and develop a solution. We take pride in our record with office monitorings and in our staff's quick and efficient response when an issue does occur. We are working to reduce our citations even further in the coming year.

Events



We once again hosted our annual summer event this year, sending children and families all across the state to a water park, zoo, the movies, or other attraction of their choice. The families receive their tickets shortly after the children begin their summer break from school and may use them at any time throughout the summer. We provide these tickets to give the families a chance to enjoy some summer fun, help them to bond and promote unity as a family, and to give the foster children an experience they may not have ever had before. This year we purchased more than six hundred tickets for families in our Corpus Christi, Houston, Salado, McAllen, San Antonio, Dallas, and Laredo programs.

Our staff in the Valley participated with the employees of Superior Health Plan McAllen, pictured left with our staff members, in a pajama and slipper drive for our foster children in December. Along with the Christmas gifts we provide each year, they supplied new pajamas and slippers for each foster child in our McAllen program for Christmas, making this holiday celebration more special than ever. We extend a big thank you to Superior Health Plan McAllen for all of their hard work helping children in need.



Also in the Valley, our staff, pictured left, was able to participate in a toy drive and movie night hosted by Mel-O-Dee's Productions and the Rising Star. The toy drive was initiated by one of our own foster families, the Chavez family, who had toy donation boxes at their place of business throughout the month of December. The toy drive was a huge success, providing gifts for many of the foster children in McAllen for the holidays.



In our Salado office, Renee Arnett participated in the Hood Howdy event hosted twice per year at Fort Hood. Fort Hood is located between Killeen and Copperas Cove in Texas and is the largest military base in the free world. This event is designed to introduce men and women stationed at Fort Hood, as well as the community at large, to the various organizations and businesses available to soldiers and their families. This is a great method of exposure for Circles of Care, and it introduces our services to hundreds of new people each year. This is essential to the task of locating new, qualified foster parents.

For the first time this year, the Salado staff took part in the Texas A&M health fest with the medical students at the university. While few people expressed an interest in foster care or adoption that day, the fest was valuable in terms of information on health and fitness in addition to the free physical exams and immunizations that the medical students administered to children ages 0-18, an invaluable resource for parents fostering or for their own biological children.

The Future

We have big plans for our upcoming 2014-2015 fiscal year:

- We will be hosting our annual summer event this year once the children are out of school
- The Corpus Christi office will host its annual Halloween festival
- The agency will continue its plans for accreditation and is currently on-target for achieving that goal in April 2015
- Staff members will be attending the annual Winter Growth Conference
- We plan to open a physical location for our Laredo program and are currently scouting office spaces
- We will continue to take part in the future re-

design plans for the foster care system in Texas, participating in meetings and keeping open communication with members of DFPS as those plans develop

- We will begin the rollout of our new training website, offering online options for both our foster parents and the staff to receive virtual instructor led and self training on their own schedules. The site will be available at <http://training.circlesofcareinc.org/>

These are just some of the many exciting things we have planned for the coming year! Stay tuned to our website and our Facebook page to see other events as they develop!

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"Bringing children and families together."

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