

Executive Summary

This report is a summary review of the Department of Family Services public welfare and aging programs that are under the purview of the Advisory Social Services Board (ASSB). This report summarizes significant program trends, events and initiatives for 2007.

Introduction

In accordance with its responsibility to provide citizen oversight of the county's public welfare programs administered by the Department of Family Services (DFS), the Fairfax County Advisory Social Services Board (ASSB) presents this report summarizing significant program trends, events and initiatives in 2007 for three DFS divisions: Adult and Aging; Children, Youth and Families; and Self-Sufficiency.

This Executive Summary highlights key issues for which the continued attention and support of the Board of Supervisors are critical:

- Planning for and meeting the needs of a growing population of older adults.
- Managing the increasing workload of public assistance and social work staff.
- Nurturing community partnerships to enhance services and advance outreach.
- Implementing the plan to prevent and end homelessness in 10 years.
- Reaching out in various and innovative ways to serve a diverse population.
- Improving the county's ability to respond to the needs of its most vulnerable residents in the event of an emergency.

Meeting the Needs of a Growing Senior Population

The Advisory Social Services Board commends the Board of Supervisors for its excellent and detailed action plan to ensure a more "aging friendly" Fairfax County and meet the needs of the county's growing population of older adults. By 2010, persons age 65 and older will be 9.2 percent of the county's total population, 104,400 persons. By 2020, it is projected that there will be 138,600 persons age 65 and older living in Fairfax County, and they will be 11.6 percent of the total population.

As noted in the *Fairfax 50+ Action Plan*, it is crucial for the well-being of older residents that we work on developing opportunities in many areas, including housing, transportation, engagement, and specialized services.

The ASSB urges the Board to continue its leadership in this area and to press for progress in carrying out the initiatives described in its *Fairfax 50+ Action Plan*.

Managing Increased Demand for Social Services

Throughout the department, staff is experiencing increased demand for services. In Fiscal Year 2007, the DFS Self-Sufficiency Division managed an average monthly public assistance caseload of 49,681 cases, a 71 percent increase from FY 2001.

The increase in cases without corresponding state support for staff increases taxes the division's capacity to deliver services in accordance with federal and state requirements. Federal entitlement programs such as Food Stamps and Medicaid do not permit local agencies to create waiting lists if demand for services exceeds capacity.

Regulatory changes have increased the workload for social work staff as well. Federal and State policies in 2006 increased the minimum frequency of face-to-face, in-home visits between social workers and children in foster care. Proposed regulations at the state level will, if approved, also increase the frequency of required in-home reviews of foster and adoptive homes from once every two years to once every six months.

Adult Protective Services investigations have increased from 632 investigations in FY 2006 to 818 in FY2007. Child Protective Services hotline calls have increased from 27,790 calls in FY 2006 to 29,684 in FY 2007. Expenditures for emergency assistance to eligible families and individuals to help with rent or mortgage, security deposits, utility payments, and storage or moving expenses, increased 39 percent from FY 2006 to FY 2007.

The state is undertaking a broad workload study to help determine staffing needs in all social service areas. Results of the study are expected later this spring and will be reported to you, though additional state support for needed positions is not anticipated before the FY 2011 – FY 2012 biennium.

The ASSB asks the Board of Supervisors to monitor this situation closely to make sure that once the study is done, the state provides appropriate resources to enable localities to meet staffing needs.

Nurturing Community Partnerships

Community partnerships are vital for many aspects of the department's work. Such partnerships – for example, with neighborhood associations, faith communities, businesses, community-based organizations, and individual volunteers – greatly enhance the services that the department can provide in the community and are essential in prevention and education efforts.

The Adult and Aging division staff, working with other county agencies and community organizations, will hold a symposium in April to explore the prospect of forming neighborhood-based cooperatives to help older residents. A June forum for faith-based organizations will share information about local resources for older adults.

Community partnerships have enabled the Children, Youth and Families Division to expand programming at the Culmore Family Resource Center. New programs include Spanish literacy classes with George Mason University and Tenant and Workers United; computer classes for adults with St. Anthony's Catholic Church and the county's Office of Partnerships; a Girl Scouts Leadership Program with the organization "HACAN" - Hispanics Against Child Abuse and Neglect; and an exciting new program with the World Children's Choir.

The Self-Sufficiency Division is working with the county's Office of Partnerships and volunteers throughout the community to provide a free service to help clients file their federal income tax forms, enabling them to receive the earned income tax credit.

The county's extensive hypothermia program, overseen by the Department of Family Services, depends on a network of partnerships with nonprofit and faith-based organizations and thousands of community volunteers.

The Board of Supervisors' continued support of these and the department's many other partnership initiatives is greatly appreciated.

Preventing and Ending Homelessness

The Advisory Social Services Board supports the Board of Supervisors' efforts to meet the housing needs of its most indigent residents. Continued development of housing for persons with very low incomes is essential if we are to end homelessness in Fairfax County. The ASSB encourages the Board of Supervisors to press ahead with implementation of the plan to prevent and end homelessness in 10 years.

While the county works to develop permanent housing resources for low-income residents, the need for temporary homeless shelter continues. Recognizing that need, the Board of Supervisors supported the development of the Katherine K. Hanley Family Shelter, which opened in August 2007 and now operates at full capacity serving 20 families. Shelter House, Inc., operates the shelter under contract with DFS.

Shelter staff works closely with county service providers to prepare families for moving out of the shelter to permanent housing. Volunteers supplement these services with recreation, tutoring and other activities. The shelter and county staff have created a model of service delivery that supports the "housing first" concept articulated in the county's "Ten Year Plan to End Homelessness."

In addition to overseeing the county's six homeless shelters, the department manages the Partnership for Permanent Housing in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development. During 2007, 25 families entered the program and are currently working with their case managers in preparation to purchase their first homes.

Serving a Diverse Population

The Department of Family Services continues to reach out in various and innovative ways to the county's diverse population. A new information and referral phone line for Vietnamese-speaking seniors is now in operation, staffed by volunteers. A similar service, also volunteer-operated, is available for Korean-speaking seniors. A Meals on Wheels route with Middle Eastern food was initiated for residents of Tysons Towers. A second Vietnamese Meals on Wheels route was begun, and Korean Meals on Wheels continue to be offered.

The Nurturing Parenting Program conducted 17 groups in FY2007, including three groups using a Spanish curriculum and two groups using a curriculum designed to be culturally appropriate for parents of African-American children. The Healthy Families Fairfax program serves a large

population of Hispanic families. A special team is also focusing on reaching out specifically to African-American families.

The department has 104 bilingual employees who provide services to non-English speaking clients in their own languages. Staff language capacity is supplemented with language interpretation services (including sign language) at no cost to clients.

The department also produces a wealth of public information available in multiple languages. The Adult and Aging Division program description, for example, is available in English, Arabic, Farsi, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese. The department-wide program overview is available in nine languages, including Urdu, Somali, and Chinese. Child supervision guidelines and other popular information for parents and caregivers has been translated into multiple languages as well. All DFS public information materials, including translations, can be downloaded from the county Web site at www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs.

Nationwide, there is an issue of a disproportionate number of African-American children in the foster care system, and Fairfax County is no exception. While about 10 percent of the children in Fairfax County are African-American, 41 percent of the children in foster care are African-American. Additionally, in recent years a disproportionate number of Hispanic children have entered foster care. While about 17 percent of Fairfax County's children are Hispanic, 24 percent of the children who entered foster care in FY2007 were Hispanic.

The department is a key participant in a collaborative effort, launched by Deputy County Executive Verdia Haywood, to bring together community resources to address this and related issues. The effort focuses on preventing and reducing the disproportionate presence of African American children in the county's foster care and juvenile justice systems and increasing school readiness and academic achievement.

Emergency Planning

During the past year, the Department of Family Services has conducted and participated in a number of planning efforts with the goal of improving the county's ability to respond to the needs of its most vulnerable residents in the event of an emergency.

A plan has been developed to determine how and where to open a shelter for residents with medical needs. An exercise with other county agencies was held to review the plan and to formalize roles and responsibilities. An exercise to practice opening a medical shelter will be held later in 2008.

A table-top exercise was conducted with multiple agencies to test out the assumptions of newly developed Family Assistance Center plan, which would be activated should the county experience a major disaster involving mass casualties. In addition, DFS has worked with the county's interfaith liaison, public safety chaplains and the Office of Emergency Management to develop criteria and training needs for a corps of chaplains that could be called upon to provide spiritual care in a Family Assistance Center.

The department continues its work with other agencies to ensure that the essential needs component of the county's Pandemic Flu Plan will be viable.

As part of a countywide planning process, DFS drafted a continuity of operations plan to ensure that mission critical services, such as foster care, child protective services, adult protective services, and homeless shelter services would continue in the event of an emergency. Training and exercising of this plan will be rolled out in 2008.

DFS recruited and trained a pool of 100 employees who are designated as agency emergency personnel. These employees support shelter operations in collaboration with the Red Cross to provide basic immediate needs, including shelter and food, to disaster victims in Fairfax County.