
EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

INFORMATION

Department Name: Department of Family Services

Equity Lead(s): Department Equity Lead: Melanie Fenwick; Division Equity Leads: Keesha Coke, Linda Hernandez-Giblin, Daniel Mekibib, Stephanie Pegues, Jeanetta Vinson

Date: November 18, 2024

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN REPORT

DEPARTMENTAL GOALS

Review your department's Equity Impact Plan for CY 2024 at [Equity Impact Plans | Topics \(fairfaxcounty.gov\)](#). Add each departmental goal below and describe: 1) what was done to make progress toward the goal, 2) with whom (partners), and 3) how work toward this goal was measured/evaluated and the results. If you have data for the performance measures listed in your CY 2024 Equity Impact Plan, report them. Add more goals as needed.

Goal 1: Implement a comprehensive communication and engagement strategy that supports belonging and increases knowledge and application of an equity lens throughout DFS

Goal 1 Progress:

In alignment with the One Fairfax framework, DFS made significant progress in advancing its equity goals. A key accomplishment was the successful rollout of the ADDRESSING Framework eLearning module. Launched in January 2024, all 1,052 DFS employees completed the training. All employees hired into the department starting on July 1, 2024, are required to complete the learning module as part of their onboarding, establishing a solid foundation for equity, inclusion, and belonging across the department.

Additionally, DFS introduced Debi's Corner, a blog dedicated to enhancing staff understanding of cultural humility, intersectionality, and belonging. The blog, which incorporates self-reflection and equity principles into everyday operations, helps improve service delivery, especially for diverse communities.

DFS also achieved a major milestone with the SAGE certification by the Area Agency on Aging (AAA), which earned the Platinum Standard for supporting LGBTQ+ older adults. Over 85% of staff participated in the required educational modules, deepening their understanding of cultural contexts and trust-building with marginalized groups.

By embedding continuous learning and fostering an inclusive environment, DFS strengthened its capacity to offer accessible and culturally appropriate services.

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

Goal 2: Build internal capacity to consider equity in decision making and planning.

Goal 2 Progress:

DFS has made significant strides toward building internal capacity to consider equity in decision-making and planning. The department's ongoing efforts aim to create a health and human services system that offers accessible and culturally appropriate services for all individuals and families in Fairfax County. A core part of this work is fostering a culture of equity and fairness within the department, which includes intentional recruitment efforts, inclusive hiring practices, and creating avenues for employee feedback. The department's GROW (Gaining Rewarding Opportunities in the Workforce) Intern Program for Social Work students and DFS Social Work Field Instructors, recently established an affiliation agreement with Howard University. This talent pipeline builds and retains our diverse workforce through a highly structured clinical learning environment.

These efforts are designed to strengthen the foundation for an organizational culture where equity is prioritized in every decision, from recruitment to program delivery.

DFS also assessed employee engagement through an internal survey. This will inform future efforts to ensure that all employees, regardless of gender or race, feel supported and included.

In 2024, DFS saw increased usage of the Equity Analysis Tool. Leaders across the department shared their experiences with the tool. Managers and Supervisors formally acknowledged their understanding of using the tool and its importance in planning and decision-making processes. As a result, the insights gained from the tool guided policy and business practice changes that prioritized equity and increased stakeholder engagement. For example, the SHAPE the Future of Aging implementation committees facilitated more transparent and inclusive decision-making processes. Community stakeholders were engaged in discussions about equity issues, and their feedback was incorporated into planning. This collaborative approach built stronger relationships and trust between the Area Agency on Aging, the department, the Commission on Aging and the communities served.

Senior Management, Program Managers, Equity Teams, and some DFS staff members attended the Courageous Conversation (CC) two-day Beyond Diversity training. This transformational learning experience equipped us with practical tools and insights to deepen our own personal understanding of race and racial consciousness. The CC model enabled us to break the silence and have authentic dialogue about addressing race and social inequities to challenge policies and practices and to champion equitable outcomes for our clients and the broader community across systems and institutions. Building upon this foundational experience, participants have begun to integrate the Courageous Conversation framework into their daily work. This has manifested in more intentional discussions about racial equity in program development and review as well as an increased capacity among leadership and equity teams to facilitate difficult dialogues and advocate for systemic change.

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

Child welfare programs continued implementation of the Safe and Connected Practice Model, designed to promote resilience and inclusion, prevention childhood adversity and trauma. This approach is key to ensuring the safety and well-being of every child and family served by the department. The Safe and Connected Practice Model provides a framework that encourages a more critical, inclusive, and partnership-oriented approach to working with families. This inherently challenges potential biases and promotes practices that are more likely to lead to equitable outcomes for all individuals and communities involved.

Goal 3: Engage with interdepartmental stakeholders to identify and improve intersections of practices and services.

Goal 3 Progress:

DFS continued to collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to enhance service delivery and foster a more inclusive environment. In partnership with Virginia Department of Social Services and local nonprofits, DFS held the first Kin First Now Convening. The event emphasized the importance of placing children with relatives and supporting kinship care. This shift aims to dismantle stereotypes and improve family outcomes, particularly within marginalized communities.

The Disability Rights and Resources Program also engaged in important collaborations to further its equity goals. Notably, developing a training titled "Disability Equity Through the Lens of the Social Model," focusing on the historical context of disability discrimination, its impact on people with disabilities within various community systems, and the intersectionality of people with disabilities and other protected classes. This training reached 70 participants from 25 County agencies, promoting awareness and understanding of disability equity. Additionally, a screening of *Being Michelle* brought 24 attendees together to explore the concept of equity through the social model of disability.

Other efforts, such as our partnership with the Community Provider Strategy Team (CPST), helped to identify key intersections between various community organizations, including nonprofits and county agencies focusing on increasing access to basic needs and information-sharing to improve the provision of services such as VITA tax preparation and Energy Assistance. The department proactively engaged with health and human service agencies and community partners, during the reevaluation of eligibility for everyone enrolled in Medicaid after the special provisions linked to the COVID-19 public health emergency came to an end. These efforts mitigated the disproportionate impact on marginalized communities facing potential loss of medical coverage. The department's collaborative approach recognized that achieving health equity requires more than just disseminating information. It necessitated leveraging the expertise of community partners to ensure that marginalized communities were not disproportionately affected by the Medicaid Unwinding process and had fair opportunities to maintain essential healthcare coverage.

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

The Adult and Aging Services and Area Agency on Aging programs focused on fostering a cultural shift to promote inclusivity. This included specifically targeting stakeholder organizations that support vulnerable populations. By collaborating with these organizations, the programs sought to enhance outreach in spaces where LGBTQ+ adults congregate, aiming to eliminate invisible barriers and ensure equitable access to services.

Goal 4: Implement Economic Mobility Project to Support Low Income Families with Pathways to Economic Opportunity

Goal 4 Progress:

Launched in October 2023, The Fairfax County Economic Mobility Pilot is led by Department of Family Services, and Neighborhood and Community Services and Office of the County Executive – One Fairfax Central Team. FCEMP provides 180 randomly selected participants with a monthly cash payment for use as they deem necessary as well as access to wrap-around supports and resources. The FCEMP continued to make significant strides in 2024, promoting economic mobility for ALICE (Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) households. Beyond the pilot’s launch phase, throughout 2024, DFS continued to manage the monthly cash payment process as well as payments to the participants who engage in the pilot’s research and evaluation activities led by George Mason University. As part of the pilot’s Executive Committee, DFS leadership continues to provide guidance and direction on the pilot’s implementation, including participant communication and engagement as well as help inform the County’s broader vision and approach to encourage and support economic opportunity and upward mobility for all residents.

Goal 5: Implement the SHAPE the Future of Aging Plan to provide equitable access and opportunities for older adults.

Goal 5 Progress:

In 2024, both the Commission on Aging and DFS, actively engaged in activities aligning with the SHAPE the Future of Aging Plan to promote equitable access and opportunities for older adults. The Commission on Aging took a leading role in developing and guiding the implementation of the SHAPE plan, which focuses on five key areas: Services for Older Adults and Family Caregivers, Housing and Neighborhood Supports, Access to Mobility Options, Personal Well-Being, and Economic Stability and Planning. Throughout 2024, the Commission convened Initiative Development Committees for each of these areas, comprising experts, community-based organizations, 50+ Community

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

Ambassadors, and various stakeholders. These committees worked to identify specific needs, develop strategies, and recommend actions to ensure equitable access to resources and opportunities for all older adults in the county, with a strong emphasis on addressing disparities and promoting inclusivity.

Goal 6: Eliminate digital discrimination in the provision of DFS services

Goal 6 Progress:

DFS remains committed to improving digital equity outcomes by increasing access to digital literacy and technology and recognizing that digital tools are essential for many tasks in modern life including applying for services, achieving economic mobility, supporting personal safety and wellbeing, and staying informed and connected with government and community services. DFS has supported the county's strategic priorities related to Digital Access and Opportunity by:

- Leveraging ARPA funding to acquire 100 tablets designed specifically for older adults that were distributed by volunteers to help homebound and socially isolated older adults remain connected and engaged with their community. This supports the use of technology to help combat the epidemic of loneliness identified by the U.S. Surgeon General.
- Providing clients engaged with Domestic and Sexual Violence Services who lack safe access to a mobile device with cell phones and data plans to promote the ability to stay connect with community resources and to be used as an important tool in safety plans for individuals and families impacted by interpersonal violence.
- In partnership with the Virginia Department of Social Services (VDSS), distributed 90 Chromebooks and laptops to clients participating in the Virginia Initiative for Education and Work (VIEW) program who lacked a device to conduct job searches or complete online skills training. Access to this equipment allowed VIEW participants greater engagement with educational, training, and employment opportunities. Introductory digital literacy training workshops are also offered to interested job seekers via the county's one-stop job centers.

To increase access and opportunity, the Employment Services program has leveraged the following partnerships:

- Under a contract with non-profit, Computer CORE provides digital skills training to job seekers aged 55 and over.
- A partnership with AT&T and the Minority Tech Foundation has distributed 75 of 150 donated laptops to county residents to eliminate barriers to digital access.

COUNTYWIDE GOALS

Report progress on Countywide goals related to the Regional Fair Housing Plan, if relevant to your department. As above, copy in each Countywide goal from your CY 2024 Equity Impact Plan, and describe progress made in CY 2024. If none, write "Not applicable."

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

Not applicable

OTHER EQUITY-RELATED WORK

Was other equity-related work completed in addition to the goals above? If so, please describe.

In addition to the outlined goals, DFS has made important strides in addressing disparities and improving equity across the department. Key initiatives include:

- **Demographics Data:** Adult and Aging Services continues to explore data to identify and address disproportionality within programs and services, using this information to drive policy changes and improve service outcomes.
- **Employment Services:** The department focused on digital equity by providing resources to clients, including tablets for older adults, mobile phones for those experiencing domestic violence, and laptops for those participating in job readiness programs. These efforts aim to bridge the digital divide and increase access to services and opportunities.
- **Climb Program:** DFS launched a program to support youth aged 18-24 who were disengaged from education or work, providing career readiness, mentorship, and paid work experience to help participants transition into higher education, vocational training, or the workforce.
- **Partnerships:** DFS has continued to build partnerships with organizations such as Northern Virginia Family Service and The Women's Center, celebrating these collaborations at the "This Is Us" Wellness and Recognition Event. These partnerships are vital in supporting economic mobility, positive health outcomes, and access to services for underserved populations.
- **Gains, Gaps, & Goals Event:** In partnership with the Commission for Women, DFS hosted a presentation on the status of women and girls in Fairfax County. This event provided valuable insights into the challenges women and girls face in terms of economics, health, and work-life balance.
- **Digital Equity:** DFS is a member of the Countywide Digital Equity Coordination (DEC) Team, a team of various county agencies that works together to collectively to address the digital divide in Fairfax County by ensuring all Fairfax County residents have access to affordable and reliable high speed (broadband) internet services, devices, software, training, and tools. DFS attends monthly DEC meetings to establish connections with and coordinate efforts of existing digital services, leverage best practices and identify gaps to enhance existing digital services, provide cross-department collaboration and support to operationalize the Digital Equity Action Plan, and partner on engagement opportunities to inform, connect and educate internal/external stakeholders and the community. Also in 2024, as part of the 2nd

EQUITY IMPACT PLAN ANNUAL REPORT

CALENDAR YEAR 2024

Annual Digital Equity Summit on October 10, 2024, Assistant Division Director for Workforce Development within the Division of Public Assistance and Employment Services represented DFS on a panel on titled “The Work of Local Government in Closing the Digital Divide in Fairfax County”, which highlighted ways in which the agency is working to ensuring that all Fairfax County residents have the resources and skills to participate and thrive in digitally connected communities.

DFS continues to strengthen its commitment to equity by addressing both historical and emerging barriers, ensuring that every community member has the opportunity to thrive.