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*for* Children

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## **History of Community-Based Care: The State of the System (Issue 15)**

### ***Our Past***

This article is the first of a three-part series on the *History of Community-Based Care: The State of the System*. It will examine the past, present, and frame a future vision for Florida's child welfare system of care.

Community-Based Care (CBC) is a comprehensive redesign of Florida's child welfare system. It was initiated and piloted as a bipartisan effort in 1996, when the Florida Legislature, in response to growing concerns and public dissatisfaction with the state-operated child protection system, mandated the outsourcing of child welfare services.

By December 2005, all regions across Florida's 67 counties had implemented the CBC model, which assigned "lead agencies" to provide foster care and related services in areas across the state. Today, 17 lead agencies deliver those services in 20 judicial circuits. The Florida Department of Children and Families (DCF) supervises and selects these agencies by awarding contracts for service. Lead agencies, in turn, select local service providers to deliver care in their own communities.

The intent is clear: enhance child welfare services by getting communities deeply involved and engaged in the protection and care of their own children.

In addition, DCF operates a hotline that receives calls alleging child abuse and refers them for follow-up action. The department also coordinates legal services in the child welfare system.

The Florida Legislature gave DCF the authority to conduct child abuse investigations or contract with another governmental or law enforcement agency to perform those investigations. For example, DCF contracts with seven local law enforcement agencies to do child abuse investigations, and those partnerships offer communities more local control of child welfare services.

That philosophy highlighting the importance of local ownership of child protective efforts is also illustrated in legal services for children in foster care. In three Florida communities, those services are provided by local attorney general offices; another community deploys its local state attorney's office.

Community-Based Care has proven to be more efficient and effective compared to Florida's former state-run child welfare system. The data shows CBCs have made great

strides in outcomes for children and families, system improvements and performance.

One clear example of greater efficiency is seen in administrative costs.

Lead agencies have reduced administrative overhead costs to an average of below 3.5%<sup>[ii]</sup> when the national standard for nonprofit organizations falls between 10-15%. In 2012, the *Right for Kids Ranking*<sup>[iii]</sup> was published validating the post-privatization improvements made by Florida's CBCs.

The new system made great advances during its early implementation. DCF and CBC leaders forged a strong partnership, which helped Florida receive the nation's first statewide Child Welfare Title IV-E Waiver. The waiver was groundbreaking because it allowed the state to use federal funding for any purpose in foster care, rather than restricting that money to out-of-home care. It meant Florida could spend more on prevention services and keeping children in their homes. DCF provided guidance, support, and oversight.

Each CBC lead agency operated under the leadership of Community Alliances — a statutorily required office. It helped design and approve the systems of care tailored to meet communities' unique local needs. That choice moved the state from a one-size-fits-all standardized child welfare system to a locally driven, customized continuum of care.

The model proved to be right for Florida's children and families.

Today, the model ensures lead agencies are governed by local boards of directors. In addition, they are required to meet and exceed national standards through national accreditation.

These state and local partnerships — aligned with the intent of the legislative mandate — helped propel Florida's child welfare system under Community-Based Care from the "worst to first."

Outlined below are a few early improvements, milestones, and accomplishments of CBC. Look for more current trends in the upcoming series:

- [More children achieving timely permanency](#)
  - From January 1-December 2005, 20,623 children entered care; of which 10,342 (50.15%) achieved permanency within 12 months. <sup>[iii]</sup>
- [A decrease in caseloads](#)
  - In 2006, caseworker caseloads decreased from an average of 31 to 1 to 25 to 1. <sup>[iv]</sup>
- [A substantial reduction of children placed in out of home care](#)
  - Under CBC, there was a reduction in out of home care from a high of 26,148 children on December 31, 2004 to 18,159 on December 31, 2012. <sup>[v]</sup>
- [The implementation of front-end prevention and diversion services for at risk children and their families.](#)

- As a result of the attainment of the statewide Federal Child Welfare IVE Waiver in 2006, Florida through CBC led the nation in implementing front end prevention and diversion services. Twelve years prior to the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) being enacted by Congress to move the nation in the direction Florida adopted more than a decade earlier.
- [By 2013, CBC hit a 10 year low in the number of children living in out of home care<sup>\[vi\]</sup>](#)
- [Improved placement stability](#)
  - Placement moves decreased from 5.26 moves per 1000 bed days in 2005 to 3.61 in in 2013.<sup>[vii]</sup>
- [More children in care seen monthly](#)
  - Children under supervision seen every 30 days increased from 89.61% in 2005 to 99.30% in 2013.<sup>[viii]</sup>
- [Florida ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in the nation in 2017, for the number of adoptions among the big 5 states and 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation overall<sup>\[ix\]</sup>](#)

And while there is always more to be done to improve, refine and modernize the statewide system of care to ensure Florida’s children are afforded every opportunity to grow up safe, healthy, and well, it is important to note:

“Quietly, over the past decade, community-based care transformed our system from one of the nation’s worst to best.”

*Former Gov. Jeb Bush*

Part 2 of the series will explore the factors affecting change within Community-Based Care. Submission of any data, experiences, documentation, or information you would like to share is welcome!

(i) A comprehensive, multi-year review of the revenues, expenditures, and financial position of all community-based care lead agencies with system of care analysis state fiscal years 2017-2018 and 2018-2019 Department of Children and Families

(ii) The Foundation for Government Accountability, Tarren Bragdon, CEO

(iii) <https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/permanency-within-12.shtml>

(iv) LeNee, Carol and Whipple, Jennifer. (2006, June). Child Welfare System Performance Mixed in First Year of Statewide Community-Based Care. OOPAGGA Report, No. 06-50, 12. Retrieved from <http://www.oppaga.state.fl.us/reports/pdf/0650rpt.pdf>

(v) Florida Department of Children and Families. (2020). <https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/c-in-oooh.shtml>

(vi) Florida Department of Children and Families. (2018). *Children in Out-of-Home Care Statewide* <http://www.dcf.state.fl.us/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/c-in-ooH.shtml>

(vii) <https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/moves-1000.shtml>

(viii) <https://www.myflfamilies.com/programs/childwelfare/dashboard/seen-30.shtml>

(ix) [Right for Kids Ranking, \(2020\)](#), Andrew C. Brown, J.D., Nicole Pressley, Charissa Huntzinger, Texas Public Policy Foundation