

KENT COUNTY

Department of Social Services

2023 ANNUAL REPORT



Maryland Department of Human Services





Vision

We envision Kent County as a safe community where individuals and families strive for, achieve, and maintain independence.

Mission

Kent County Department of Social Services advocates for and protects vulnerable children, adults and families through partnerships and collaboration with our community.

Values

Self-Sufficiency: Every adult, child and family should be given the opportunity and means to establish stability and economic independence so that they become and remain self-sufficient.

Customer Service: We maintain a supportive environment that encourages collaborative customer service, high quality delivery of service, and respect for ourselves, our colleagues, and our customers.

Supportive Environment: We support individuals, families and the community by providing accessible services in a dignified and compassionate manner in partnership with our stakeholders.

FY 2023 Kent County Advisory Board Members

Caitlan Gartland, Co Chair

Beverly Birkmire, Co Chair

Ron Fithian, County Commissioner Representative

Dr. Vienna Walker - Kent County Board of Education Representative

Hope Braveheart

Portia Turner

Catherine Boyer- Sterling

Susan Ingersoll

Tom Herz

Director's Message

It is with great pleasure to present the Kent County Department of Social Services Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2023. I am pleased to share some of the agency accomplishments and to highlight the successes and outcomes that are achieved for the residents and stakeholders of Kent County.

We have entered into our second year of our three year strategic plan with a focus on ensuring the agency's mission, vision and values are at the forefront of the work we do with both our internal and external customers. We are able to accomplish this through our partnership with the community. Another key focus is that we want to deliver quality customer service. Customer service initiatives have a focus on outcomes, responsiveness and increasing accessibility. Our involvement in community events allows us to remove access barriers by serving residents in their communities with real time answers and reducing the need for multiple office visits. We acknowledge that we do not serve our customers in isolation but rather as part of a comprehensive service array with extraordinary community partners.

We experienced retirements of staff that have been here, serving the community for quite some time. With their long tenures to the Department, historical knowledge can be lost however through successful succession planning, we were able to continue providing services to the community with little interruption. There are several new faces to the department who bring a new outlook and initiative approaches to this work. Their enthusiasm to try new approaches is very inspirational and brings new energy to the agency.

The Advisory Board continues to be active through its non-profit foundation known as "CARES." Through Kent County CARES, this foundation fills gaps in services to children and vulnerable adults. The Board members display a broad spectrum of experience from banking, business, public education, public health, county government and the private sector. Having an array of experience is vital for the mission, vision and values of this agency. We are extremely thankful for their constant support and contribution they make to the community.

It is an honor to work with such an incredible group of internal and external professionals. It is through the hard work and service of the KCDSS staff with the support of the Board, community partners, government officials, stakeholders and customers that we continue our commitment to protecting our county's most vulnerable.

Respectfully,

Shelly Neal-Edwards, LCSW-C, Director

Child and Adult Services Division

The Services Division works collaboratively with our county citizens and community partners. Through our family-centered approach we strive to engage and support individuals and families in order to achieve safety, permanency, and wellbeing. While recognizing culture and tradition in our community, we utilize a strengths-based approach, tailoring services to the individual's needs. We have continued to promote and strengthen our community partnerships, recognizing a shared responsibility in protecting our most vulnerable citizens.

From July 2022 through June 2023(FY23):

- 74 Investigations of child abuse and neglect were conducted.
- 44 were Investigative Response
- 30 were Alternative Response.
- 12 Family Team Decision Making Meetings (FTDM) were held. 2 children were diverted from out of home placement following a FTDM.
- Mandated Reporter training was provided for multiple community partners in the fiscal year.



Family Preservation Services now encompasses all In-Home programs. These services vary in the intensity and frequency of home visits as determined by the safety and risk factors present in the home environment.

- 39 families were served during FY2023.
- 13 families with substance exposed newborns were served. During the assessment process the focus is on assessing the safety of, and risk of harm to, the newborn (and other children in the home) to determine whether any further intervention is necessary.
- 5 assessments were conducted, this is a voluntary assessment and service provision program for families requesting assistance by preventing further breakdown in family functioning which, if not addressed, might require either Child Protective Services intervention, out-of-home placement, or dissolving of the family unit.
- 12 requests from other agencies were completed. These requests come from other jurisdictions both in and out of state, law enforcement agencies and the courts.

- 9 families received ongoing, In-Home Services from the Department.
- The Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team (START) served 2 of those families in FY2023. START is a program which serves families with parental substance use disorder who have children from 0-5 including substance-exposed newborns. The program involves collaboration with the Kent County Health Department.
- Kinship Navigator Program assisted 13 families in FY23 with diverting out of home placement, preserving family ties, and assisting with the coordination of community resources.

Out-of-Home Placement

- 14 children were served in Out-of-Home Services and 3 of the 10 were in a Voluntary Placement during FY 2023.
- KCDSS has 5 Resource Homes. In FY 2023, we received 6 inquiries about becoming a resource home and 4 applications. We also hosted PRIDE training for the recruitment of new Resource Parents.
- Annual Christmas Gift delivery for 7 youth from community partners.
- An Appreciation event for Resource Parents was held in Kennedyville, MD in recognition of Foster Care Month 4 resource families participated in this event.
- Permanency was achieved for 6 youth: 5 youth were reunified with parents and 1 youth has a plan of adoption.

Social Service to Adults

- 12 adults were served with Social Services to Adults Case Management.
- 10 adults were served with Social Services to Adults Information and Referral.
- Provided training and educational resources to the community on Adult Services programs.
- Provided Personal Care Services to 4 In-Home Aide Recipients.

Adult Protective Services

- 33 Adult Protective Service Investigations were completed.
- 6 Adult Protective Services Continuing customers.
- 5 Persons are in Adult Public Guardianship.
- Provided community outreach and education for Financial Exploitation at local financial institutions on World Elder Abuse Awareness Day.

Family Investment Division

The Family Investment Division helps families achieve independence through work, personal responsibility and community involvement. In addition, a variety of family-centered supportive services and assistance are provided. These include Temporary Cash Assistance, Temporary Disability Assistance, and Emergency Assistance to Families with Children, Local Emergency Assistance, Food Supplement Assistance, Medical Assistance, Work Readiness and Job Placement programs. Home heating needs are supplemented through our Office of Home Energy Programs.

From July 2022 through June 2023:

- Served 20 families through the Adopt-A-Family Holiday Program, which matches families referred by employees with community sponsors. 19 community members and/or organizations served as sponsors who purchased gifts for the families. 148 Families from Kent County were referred to the Star Democrat's Brighter Christmas Fund, and 82 individuals and families were referred to the Lions Club of Kent County for the Christmas Basket Program. Kent County Elks supplied 24 Christmas Dinner boxes to our needy families.
- Provided assistance totaling \$1,666,601 to 951 Kent County households through the Maryland Energy Assistance Program (MEAP) and the Office of Home Energy Programs (OHEP).
- Issued Food Supplement Program Benefits averaging a total of \$627,274 per month (\$7,527,973 Total) to an average of 1,558 households per month.
- Served an average of 994 families receiving Community Medical Assistance and 91 individuals receiving Long Term Care Medical Assistance each month. .
- Our Work Opportunities Program funding provided 3 TCA youth ages 14-17 the opportunity to participate in the Regional Summer Youth Employment Program. The 4 week program began July 5th. Participants were provided wages and a stipend for their hours of service.
- Kent County was selected to participate in the FY23 Summer Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. In Partnership with The Kent County Commissioners, 266 school aged children with limited access to Summer Meal Programs received additional SNAP benefits of \$30 in months of June, July, and August; and \$10 in the month of December.



Child Support Administration

The Kent County Office of Child Support Administration is committed to the philosophy that all children in the State of Maryland deserve emotional and financial support from both parents to enable them to mature into healthy and productive citizens.

The Child Support Administration Office provides assistance to custodial and non-custodial parents in the pursuit of child support services. The office can assist with the establishment of paternity via an affidavit of parentage or court order and by providing genetic testing services, establishing an order for support and health insurance, collection of arrears and modification of an existing order(s) and by assisting non-custodial parents to secure employment.

Federal Fiscal Year 2023 Accomplishments Include:

- Collected over \$1.3 million in current support and payments towards arrears.
- Successfully reached and exceeded our Federal Performance Goal in the area of Paternity Establishment.
- Referred 21 Non-custodial parents to our regional employment and training program, “Re-engaging Individuals through Successful Employment” which assists in obtaining and maintaining employment.
- Continue to be a driving force behind the “Regional Best Practice Forum”; a quarterly collaboration with our regional counterparts to discuss strategies to improve services to custodial and non-custodial parents to ensure the financial stability of their children.
- Staff continue to participate in a variety of community outreach activities to further strengthen our presence in the community.



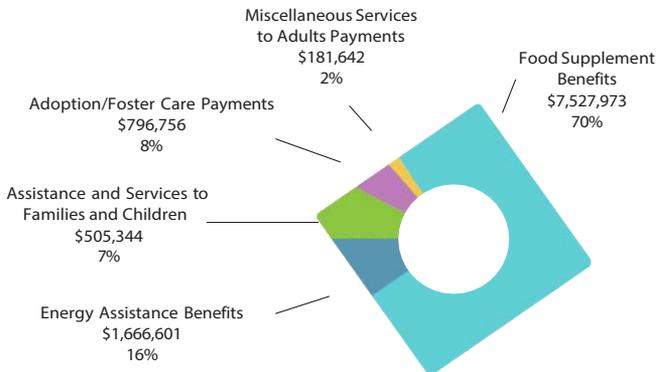
Administrative Division

The Administrative Division provides a wide variety of support to the employees of Kent County Department of Social Services which enables them to provide quality services to customers. Support functions provided by this division include human resources, budget management, accounting operations, procurement/contract management, information technology and communications, fleet operations, inventory and supply management, mail services, facilities and lease management and security services.

Benefits to Customers

Kent County Department of Social Services distributed more than \$10 million in benefits to families and children for fiscal year 2023 from July 2022 to June 2023.

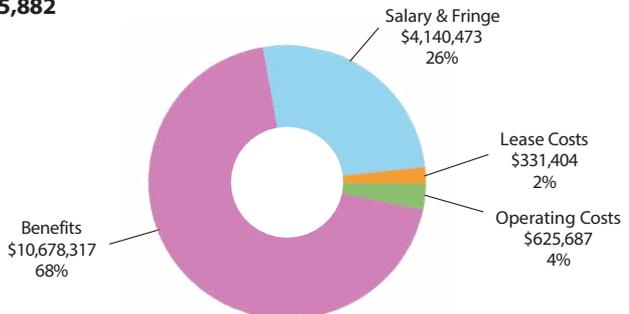
TOTAL \$10,678,317



Operating Budget

Kent County Department of Social Services's overall expended budget of nearly \$16 million included \$4,140,473 in salary & fringe benefits, \$625,687 in administrative operating costs, and \$331,404 in lease costs.

TOTAL \$15,775,882





DHS Customer Service Excellence Award

Cassandra “Sandy” Richardson



Cassandra Richardson, “Sandy,” has worked as a Certified Peer Recovery Specialist for the past 4 years. She is the Kent County START(Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Team) peer recovery specialist. Prior to this, Sandy worked in the Kent County Public Schools system for 18 years providing instructional and behavioral support to students in and outside of the classroom.

Sandy is playing an instrumental role in developing a new START initiative to expand the age ranges of children that we currently serve through START. This will enable more families to benefit from this program. With her experience as a certified peer mentor in the START program, Kent County will be the first to pilot this new initiative. Sandy willingly volunteers for community events like the Kent County Community Baby Shower, Backyard Bash with Recovery in Motion, 4-H fair and Kent Goes Purple Events. She believes in being out in the community sharing all of the resources of Kent County DSS and “putting a face to a name”.

In many ways, Sandy has helped to reduce the stigma of social services. She is always transparent and eager to share her life journey to assist her customers. Sandy is passionate, kind and a team player. Her knowledge as a peer mentor for the START program is literally unmatched as she is the longest serving START mentor in Maryland.

Sandy takes her role as a peer mentor seriously and uses her knowledge of all of Kent County’s community resources to assist the families she is serving. She creates a space for the customers that is so welcoming and safe which allows for a connection to form almost immediately and the customer observably becomes more at ease. Sandy leverages her own life experiences to relate to individuals and families on deep levels, often able to connect with individuals that may not otherwise engage with services. She is well known and respected in the community and it shows with her work with the families and agency partners. Sandy is positively engaging with customers, peers, and is an invaluable link between KCDSS and other community organizations. When she is out within the county, the community is happy to see her. The genuine care for the community shines through in every interaction, leaving a lasting positive impression.

Sandy chose to re-invest in her home community and the impact she has made is obvious. The community knows that her word means something and she takes confidentiality seriously. Sandy willingly accompanies workers on home visits, provides transportation for families, follows through on obtaining items that families may need. She inspires happiness, respect, honesty, joy, passion, humanity and overall presents a positive attitude toward the very challenging tasks that our agency handles. She has supported adult services and out of home services staff over the last two months with challenging situations by offering her knowledge, compassion and resources. Sandy is a “cheerleader” to our services team and strives to promote a positive work environment. She continually pursues training to enhance her skills. Sandy uses her knowledge of the various community programs in Kent County to resolve issues that our families may be facing. Her dedication, empathy and authenticity sets a standard that inspires and elevates the Kent County community as well as our entire team! Sandy describes customer service excellence as going above and beyond to keep customers happy, and always having a “people first” attitude.

Elder Abuse Awareness



Alison Farmer and Chamine Brooks
at the Kent County 4-H Fair





Kent County DSS participated in the Kent Goes Purple 5K, team #familiesfirst represented us well!

Breast Cancer Awareness Month



Showing support for the new Judy Center at Galena Elementary



Kent County DSS Team members participated in the United Way Kick Off Campaign, and First Friday





After working on management strategies the Department Management staff had a team building day at Wilmer Park. Complete with Jenga, golf and many other fun activities.





Trunk or Treat was a great success this year!



We had several community partners participate in the festivities



The Staff and the kiddies all had a great time



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