



CABINET FOR HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES

Child Welfare in Kentucky

Health and Human Services Delivery System Task Force
July 24, 2023

Department for Community Based Services (DCBS)

Lesa Dennis, Commissioner

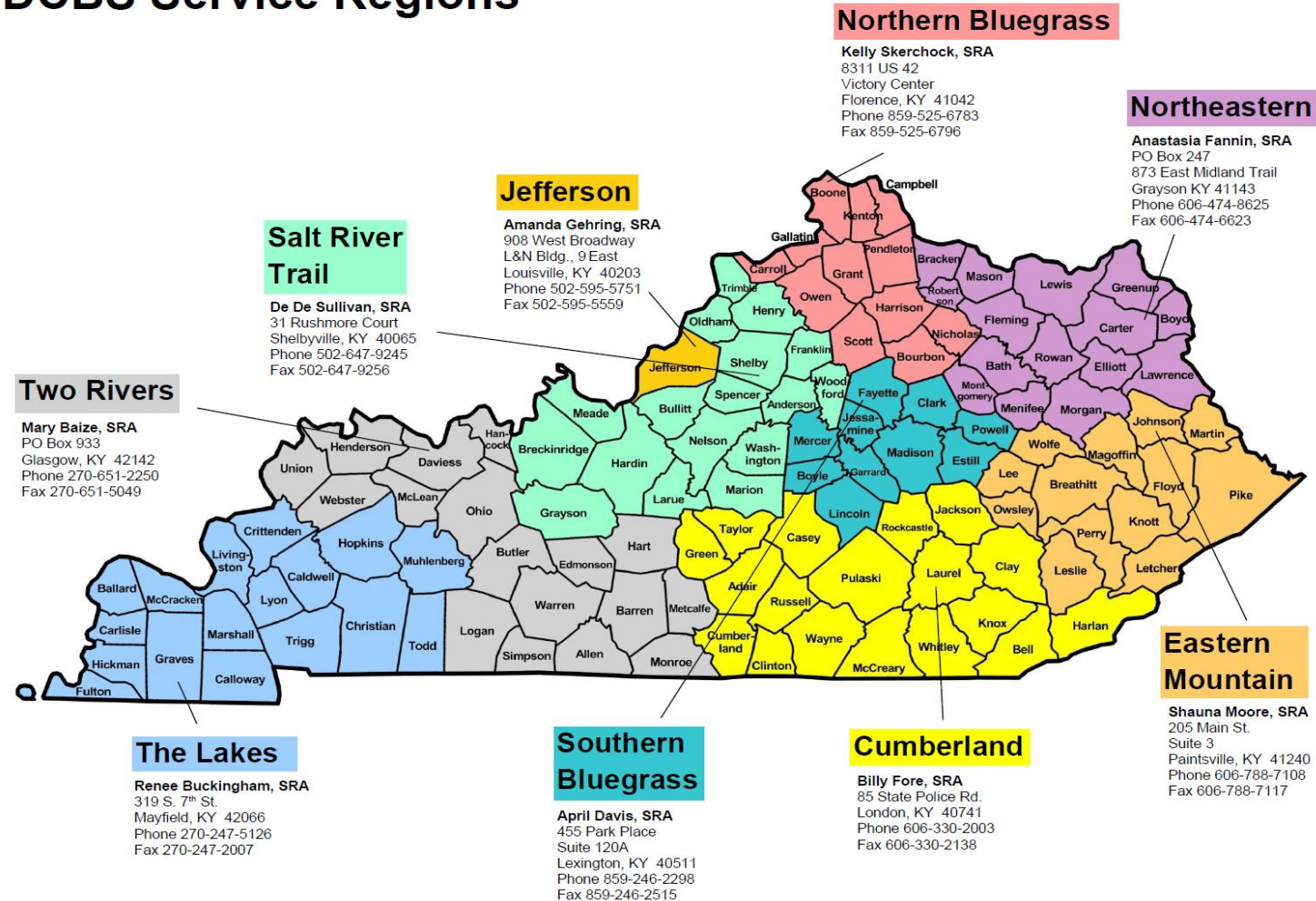
Mary Carpenter, Executive Advisor

Melanie Taylor, Director, Division of Protection and Permanency

DCBS Personnel

4,393 Full-Time Employees Statewide

DCBS Service Regions

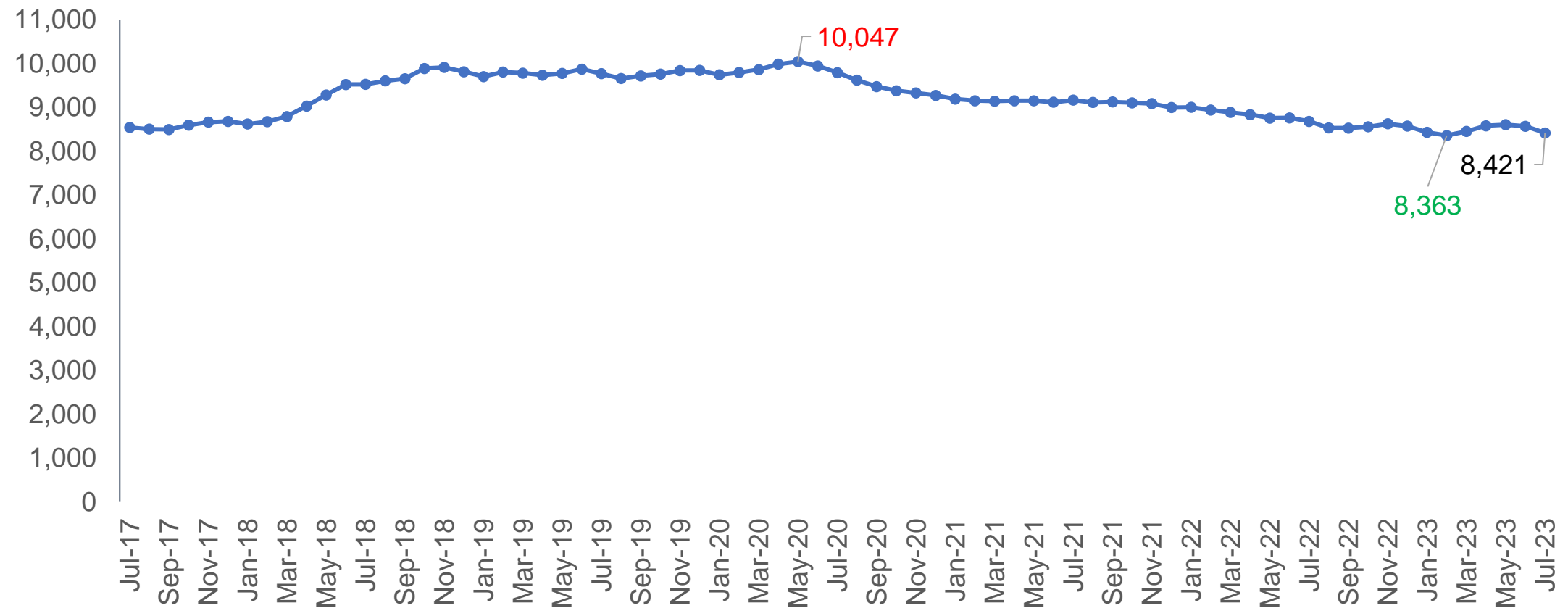


Social Worker Retention Rates Improving

2020 DCBS total 12.93%	Social worker front line classifications: 29.60% Family support front line classifications: 28.50%
2021 DCBS total 20.41%	Social worker front line classifications: 40.44% Family support front line classifications: 29.14%
2022 DCBS total 14.06%	Social worker front line classifications: 33.86% Family support front line classifications: 23.03%

Statewide: Children in the Custody of or Committed to the Cabinet

July 2017 – July 2023



Barriers for Youth in Out-of-Home Care

Barriers:

- Appeals have increased, including the number being overturned
- Findings are not being made in termination of parental rights (TPR) hearings
- Lack of services to fathers
- Delays with goal changes and setting hearing dates
- High acuity youth are taking up staff time/resources

Strategies:

- DCBS and the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) are piloting OLS representation of cases in two regions
- AOC Upstream pilot
- Communication plans
- Relationship Matters in Child Welfare Training
- Judicial Commission on Mental Health
- DCBS has a new contract with Commonwealth Center for Fathers
- Family Recovery Court
- Sustainability payments and mid-cycle rate adjustment to private child placing and child caring providers

High Acuity Youth in Non-Traditional Settings Trends

High acuity youth refer to children in DCBS custody that present with needs for intensive behavioral health issues; sometimes paired with physical health issues

- Likely to be an adolescent (median age 15 years)
- Likely to be male (52%)
- Likely to be committed for dependency (51%)
- Likely to have involvement with the Department for Juvenile Justice (41%)
- Other trends have included adoption disruptions (18%) and medically complex youth (3%)

Common factors include:

- Aggression to self, others or property
- Co-occurring physical health condition
- Problematic sexual behaviors

High Acuity Youth in Non- Traditional Settings

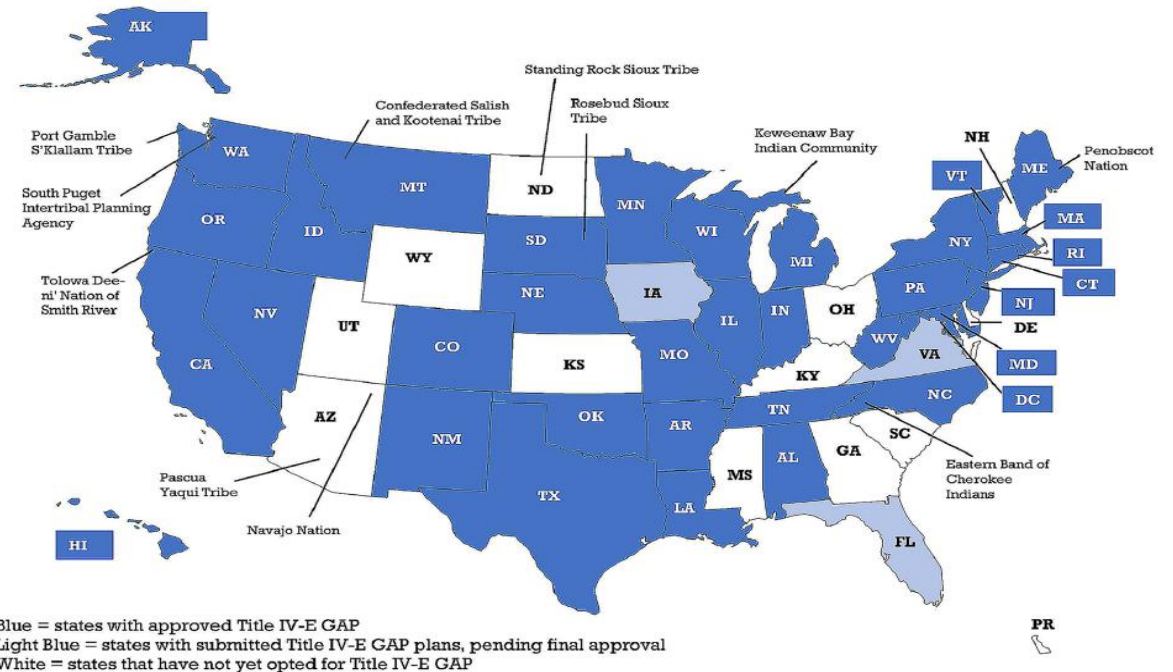
Nontraditional Placement Setting	Range of Consecutive Days	Total Days All Youth	Count of Episodes	Count of Unique Youth
DCBS Office	1 - 17 days	242	77	64
Hospital (Not Admitted)	1 - 15 days	69	21	19
Hotel	1 - 7 days	31	9	9
State Park	1 - 9 days	29	7	5
Interim Caregiver	4 - 27 days	61	4	4
Community Center	1 day	1	1	1
PCP/PCC Office	1 day	1	1	1
Grand Total		434	120	103

Caregiver Supports

- Senate Bill 8 (22RS) – fictive kin changes
- KTAP increases for relative caregivers
- Expansion of Kinship Navigator Program
- Development of Guardianship Assistance Program to further build upon the relative service array first implemented in 2019

Approved Title IV-E Guardianship Assistance Programs

35 states, D.C. and 11 tribes as of 10/1/19



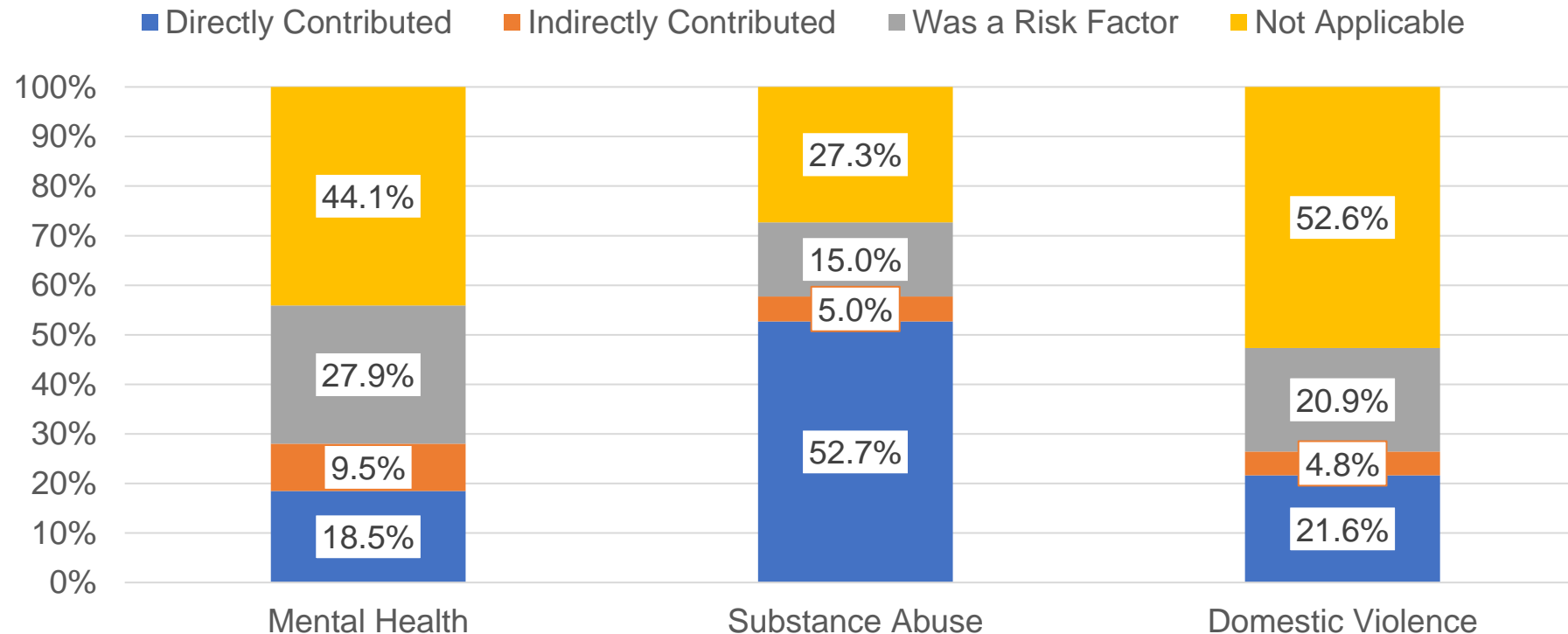
Partnerships and Community Engagement

- DCBS is the child welfare agency, not the child welfare system
- Real change has to be driven by family, youth, and community
- Increased investments in primary and secondary prevention to help families avoid child welfare involvement



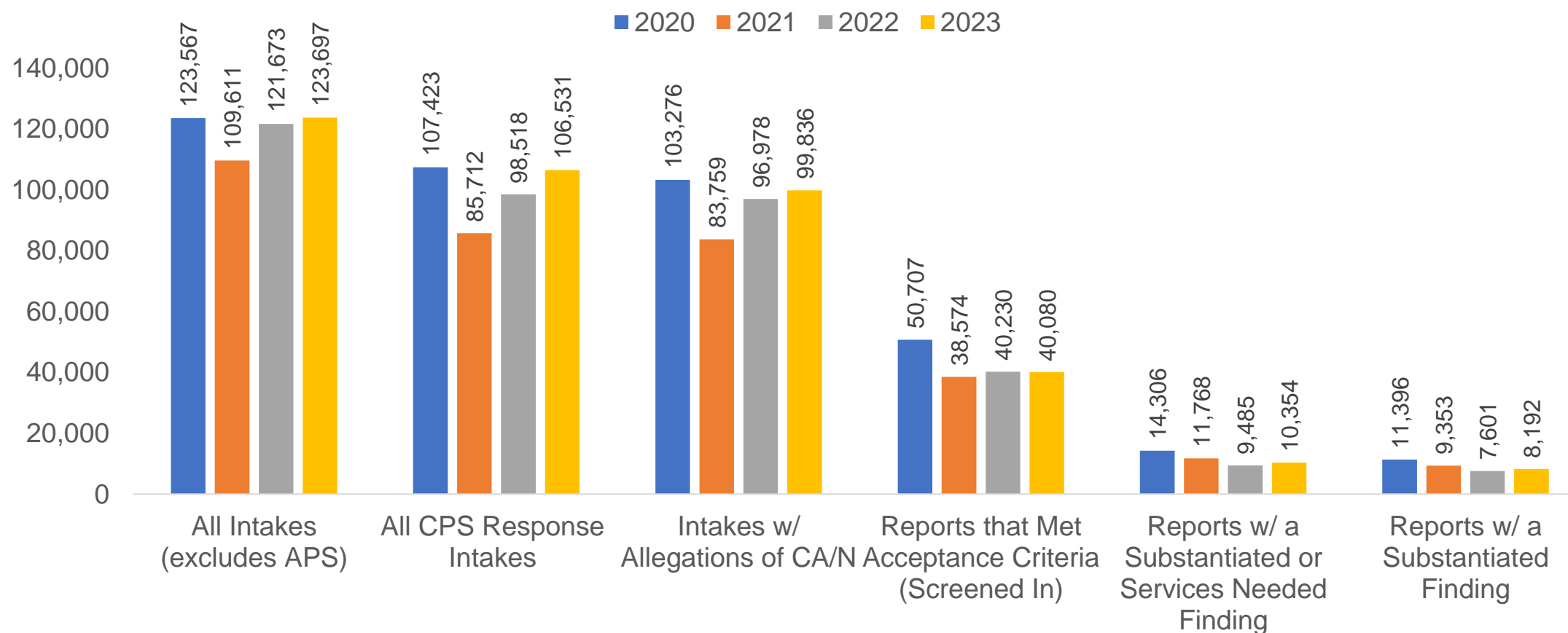
Risk Factors

Children in Reports with a Substantiated or Services Needed Finding and an OOHC Case Disposition
SFY 2016 – SFY 2022



Child Protective Services (CPS) Intakes

SFY 2020 – SFY 2022



Kentucky Safety Model

- In 2020, DCBS developed clear definitions of safety and risk based on research and federal guidance
- In 2020, DCBS also implemented the use of new safety and prevention plans and to align with new definitions
- In 2022, DCBS implemented research-based structured decision making tools used by frontline workers to assist in the consistent assessment of safety and risk
- Future implementation planned for SFY 24 to put structured decision making risk re-assessment and reunification tools into use

Alternative Response

- Family centered and strengths-based approach to reports that meet acceptance criteria
- Traditional response (investigation) remains for high risk reports
- Alternative response will focus on low-to-moderate risk reports tied closely to poverty (allowed by Senate Bill 229 – RS2023)
- Caseworkers build rapport and offer assistance and services identified as needed by the family on the frontend
- Research shows that when families have their basic needs met, there is less likelihood for abuse/neglect
- Identified caseworkers in each region will be specifically trained to work alternative response case

Initial Implementation Timeline

Northeastern and Two Rivers Regions



Summer 2023

Stakeholder engagement and community
education
Training development



Fall 2023

Training for staff
Implementation
Northeastern – September 2023
Two Rivers – October 2023
Implementation Support

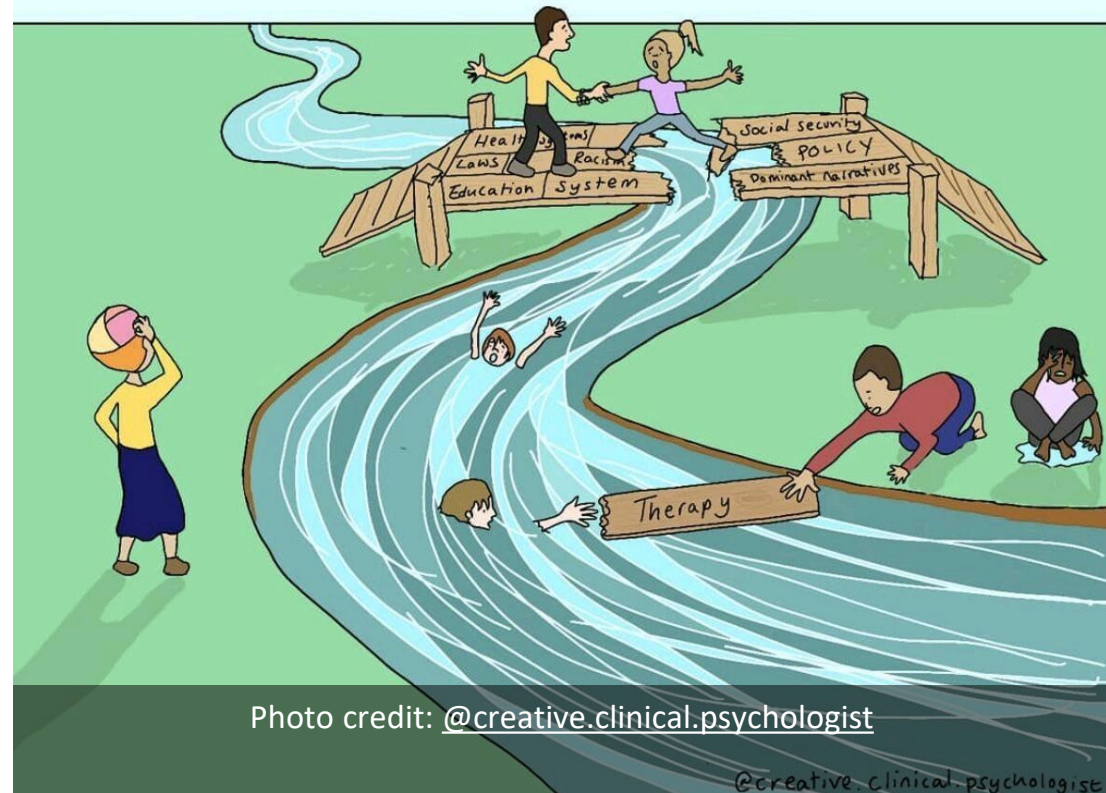
The Division of Prevention and Community Well-Being



Primary Prevention

- Universal needs
- Proactive
- Access to services and support

There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. Some of us need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in. (Desmond Tutu)



Primary Prevention & Protective Factors

- Safe, stable housing
- High-quality preschool
- Nurturing and safe childcare
- Safe, engaging after-school programs and activities
- Medical care and mental health services
- Economic and financial help
- Work opportunities with family-friendly policies

(From Risk and Protective Factors | Child Abuse and Neglect | Violence Prevention | Injury Center | CDC)



Photo credit [Center for Engagement and Neighborhood Building \(alliance1.org\)](https://alliance1.org/)

Thriving Families, Safer Children: Kentucky



- Joint initiative
- National effort
- Round 2 jurisdiction
- Kentucky priorities
- AOC's Upstream initiative will bolster and build upon DCBS' efforts

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA)



CASA IS DIRECTED BY STATUTE



VOLUNTEERS ARE APPOINTED
BY LOCAL JUDGES

What works and doesn't work...

CASA is an objective third party.



Summary

- Collaboration is key and including the parent and youth voice will be important in building a system that promotes family well-being.
 - ✓ AOC Upstream initiative will bring communities together and be led by judges
 - ✓ Judicial Commission on Mental Health will address systemic issues
 - ✓ DCBS will continue to pilot agency legal presentation and monitor outcomes
- Investment in prevention must be a priority, including economic and concrete supports.
 - ✓ Funding must be flexible to allow for investment in evidence-based practices, concrete supports, small non-profits, cross government collaboration, etc.
 - ✓ DCBS continues to collaborate with many partners to implement strategies that will best serve families

Recommendations

- Ongoing review of neglect statutes
- “Reasonable efforts” are defined in statute, however **active** efforts must be made with parents – especially fathers and incarcerated caregivers – to navigate systems that are very complex and to connect them with services

Questions or Feedback

