



2024 Community Child Protection Team Annual Report

Community Child Protection Team 2024 Annual Report

Overview

The Community Child Protection Team (CCPT) is an interdisciplinary group of community representatives who meet regularly to promote a community-wide approach to the problem of child abuse and neglect (NCGS 7B-1406). CCPTs are North Carolina's response to the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) requirement to have "citizen review panels." CAPTA charges citizen review panels with the responsibility to 1) review Child Protective Services (CPS) practices, policies, and procedures; 2) make public comment on the impact of CPS procedures and practices; and 3) recommend improvements to state and local CPS agencies.



Every county in NC has a local CCPT, many of which are merged with the local Child Fatality Prevention Team. The Chatham County CCPT and CFPT merged in 2018 and meet jointly every quarter on the first Friday of the month. The primary goals of

the meetings in 2024 were to review complex CPS cases and to work toward addressing the priority areas identified in the 2023 CCPT Annual Report. Any team member may recommend a case to be reviewed by CCPT, regardless of CPS involvement.

Members

NCGS mandates certain individuals serve on the CCPT. Additionally, the County Board of Commissioners has appointed five additional members to serve on the CCPT. The following individuals served on the Chatham CCPT in 2024 with double asterisks denoting the state-mandated members and single asterisks denoting members appointed by the Board of Commissioners:

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Jennie Kristiansen, Director, Chatham County Department of Social Services, Co-Chair of combined team**	Rodney West, Chatham County Sheriff's Office **
Michael Zelek, Director, Chatham County Public Health Department, Co-Chair of combined team**	Anne Chapman, Coordinator, Chatham County Child Victim Services*
Lynn, Kelly, Assistant District Attorney**	Shirille Lee, Communities in Schools Chatham County*
Tracy Fowler, Senior Executive Director of Student Services and Support Programs, Chatham County Schools**	Heather St. Clair, Chatham County Partnership for Children
Memory Dossenbach, Chatham County Board of Social Services**	Natasha Elliott, Central Piedmont Community Action Agency **
Nickie Siler, Guardian ad Litem Supervisor, Guardian ad Litem Program District 15-B**	Noel Martin, Center Director, Daymark Recovery Services*
Dr. Susan Pitts, Pediatrician, Piedmont Health, Moncure Health Clinic**	Dr. Lucy Vidal, El Futuro*
Nicholas Victorino, Medical Examiner**	Marisol Mondragon, Telamon Head Start**
Jenny Ritchea, First Health**	Laura Sharpe, Vaya Health**
Theresa Buchanan, Vital Records Deputy Registrar/Processing Assistant, Chatham County Public Health Department	Caitlin Howison, CPS Supervisor, CCDSS
Alicia Doran, Public Health Social Worker, Chatham County Public Health Department	Cim Brailer, Deputy Director, CCDSS

Demographics of Children and Families in Chatham County

Given the CCPT's charge to promote a community wide approach to child abuse and neglect, information is included on factors that affect the well-being of children and families including county demographics, child protection, and access to behavioral healthcare.

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Chatham County is a large, rural county with an estimated population of 81,634 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2023), representing 32,253 households. Population estimates in 2023 found children under the age of 18 represented 20% of Chatham County residents. Race data for age demographics are updated every 10 years in the annual census. In 2020, white children represented the largest population at 55%, with Hispanic or Latino children at 25%, Black or African American and children identified as two more races each at 9%, while collectively American Indian and Asian and Pacific Islanders at nearly 2% (OSBM, 2020).

The 2024 Chatham County Health Alliance released its priorities for the next three years. The priorities identified were substance use treatments and supports, additional health care options and increased activities for youth. During the evaluation phase, which included surveys and focus groups with the community, transportation, housing and water conditions were also areas of concern. (Chatham County Health Alliance, 2024).

Census data for Chatham County reflected a shift in household status. The estimated populations for under 18 and over 65 years of age are increasing, with the median age being around 48 years. The median household income increased from \$84,222 in 2022 to \$88,534 in 2023. According to the United States Census data profile and the American Community Survey, 15% of children in Chatham County live in poverty, compared to 11% in 2022, reflecting a negative 36% change. (Census Bureau Profile, 2023).

Per the Massachusetts Institute of Technology “Living Wage Calculator” (2024), a household with two working adults with one child residing in Chatham County would need to gross at least \$91,645 annually for a livable wage, with each adult making at least \$22 per hour/40 hours per week before taxes to support the household. Comparatively, a single working head of household with two children would need to gross at least \$100,277, just over \$48 per hour/40 hours per week.

Status of Child Welfare in Chatham County

Child Protective Services

In FY 24, Chatham County Child Protective Services accepted 281 reports for child abuse, neglect and/or dependency, representing 614 unique children, compared to 312 reports and 591 unique children reported in the 2023 CCPT report. Injurious environment allegations represented nearly 42% of reports, same as prior year, with domestic/family violence reflecting 16%, same as last year. Substance use represented 9% of reports with improper supervision accounting for 8% of reports. Of note, these four allegation types remained the highest reported, representing 79% and 75% of reports for each fiscal year, respectively. In FY 24, 8 children were born substance

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affected and referred for plans of safe care, compared to 17 children in FY 23. (Datawarehouse/CWIS, 2024).

Foster Care

During FY 24, 116 children and young adults received foster care services in the county compared to 128 the prior year. Of the children receiving foster care services, 68% were classified as White. Black or African American children represented 28% and children of more than one race represented 4% of the foster care population. 22% of children in foster care were identified as having some Hispanic or Latino heritage.

In FY 24, 37 children and young adults exited foster care during FY23, compared to 51 in FY 23. The disposition of discharges was:

- 15 children were adopted
- 1 child was placed in custody with their non-removal parent
- 6 children were placed in custody with non-removal relatives or another court approved caretakers
- 3 children were in guardianship with a relative or other court-approved caretakers
- 9 children were reunified with their parents
- 2 youth turned 18 and enrolled in the Foster Care 18 to 21 program, NC's extended foster care program
- 1 young adult terminated their Voluntary Placement as part of the Foster Care 18 to 21 program.

2024 Community Child Protection Team Summary

In 2024, the CCPT-CFPT met quarterly, with two meetings held virtually and two in-person meetings. The team reviewed eight active child welfare cases involving sixteen children. Six families reviewed had children in foster care, and five families were able to utilize kin or relatives for placement. Physical and sexual abuse, parental substance use, and domestic violence were the primary reasons for removal of the children from the custody of their parents. Children who were reviewed needed ongoing mental health and substance use treatment, educational support (including special education services for Intellectual and Developmental Disorders), services for exposure to domestic violence, and medical care (including dental treatment). Parents also demonstrated many of the same needs. Lack of engagement in substance use disorder and mental health treatment, trauma exposure (parents and children), barriers to stable employment, housing, and criminal justice involvement were complicating factors in the children being reunified with parents. Six of the eight families reviewed had at least one parent with current, serious justice involvement including domestic violence, drug trafficking, or assault. In two families, parents had a history of incarceration.

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Top recommendations made for improving child welfare services and supporting local teams:

- Adequate safe housing is consistently a challenge for parents involved with the child welfare system, especially when they do not have extended family support. Identify specialized housing vouchers or other resources that could make available housing support for parents who are at risk of losing custody or are working toward reunification and housing is an identified need for the family.
- Require coordination and accountability across the DHHS divisions including DSS, DHSR, and DMH/DD/SUD/, and DHB to ensure that the behavioral health needs of children and youth are met as evidenced by a reduction in boarding in Emergency Departments, DSS Offices, and other inappropriate placement settings. While Chatham County has been fortunate to have minimal problems with children/youth boarding in inappropriate placements, it often requires an extensive amount of time and resources to identify placements for children with significant behavioral health needs.
- Enhance and expand training to the child welfare workforce, including addressing the impacts of secondary traumatic stress. Child welfare workers should have timely access to training and leave training believing that it was a good use of their time.

In addition to case reviews, the team heard presentations and participated in discussions on the following topics:

- Review of the 2023 Community Child Protection and Child Fatality Prevention Team Annual Reports
- Legislative Changes to the NC Child Fatality System

Successes in 2024

Expanded Community Based Services and Education

The Public Health Department has ramped up efforts focused on birthing people and infants. The department continues to expand childbirth classes, including offering in-person and virtual classes as well as Spanish classes. The department has seen an increasing demand for these classes. In addition, the department has expanded its Child Passenger Safety Program, which served 162 families in 2024. In 2025, the Public Health Department will leverage additional CFPT funds to purchase car seats for distribution through the program.

Homebuilders

The Family First Prevention Services Act took effect in October 2021 and provides federal funding for evidence-based prevention services in exchange for a reduction in

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funding for children and youth in residential placements. The first evidence-based service, Homebuilders, was implemented in Chatham County in spring 2024. This program is available to families receiving in-home services and thus far two families have been served.

Opioid Settlement

Along with counties across the state and country, Chatham has started to receive funding through the Opioid Settlement Fund. For the last several years, the Sheriff's Prevention Partnership for Controlled Substances (SPPCS) has met to coordinate efforts to address substance use issues, including opioid overdose prevention. In 2024, the county filled a vacancy in the Overdose Prevention Coordinator position to oversee collective action. The SPPCS continues to work on several initiatives, including community education and distribution of naloxone. In fall 2024, the Public Health Department opened a Wellness Kiosk outside of its Siler City clinic. The kiosk has a number of resources, including naloxone, available at no cost to the Chatham community.

BOLD Goal

The United Way of Chatham County collaboratively launched their Bold Goal Campaign. The focus is to reduce poverty for 2000 people in 2000 days (2030). The project's initial focus will be on students enrolled at Siler City Elementary School and their families. Supports will be centered on five outcomes including increased earned income, stable housing, child educational success, alignment of programs to support system change, and increased opportunities for success for households experiencing poverty. While the program launched in 2024, as of spring 2025, three families (thirteen individuals) have been enrolled in the program.

Sobriety Treatment and Recovery Teams (START)

NC DHHS began implementation of the START model, an evidence-based program for child welfare involved families where at least one parent is struggling with a substance use disorder. The program is designed to prevent entry into foster care but can still be offered to families if children are removed from the parents. A key component is the utilization of parent partners who have lived experience and are part of a dyad, working with the child welfare worker to support the family. Although not participating at this time, Chatham County went through an evaluation process with DHHS, the technical assistance provider, and the model purveyor to determine feasibility for a future project.

Opportunities for 2025

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Success Coach

The Success Coach Program, originally developed in collaboration with Catawba County Department of Social Services and the Duke Endowment, is NC's first post-permanency support model. This means that children and families who have exited the child welfare system through reunification (with a parent or caretaker), adoption, or guardianship can voluntarily access this program when a need arises. Needs could include a child's behavioral health concern, school issues, ongoing emotional support for children or families, assistance with financial needs or childcare, or parenting skills. The Program can follow a family for up to two years. Children's Home Society will be providing the service in Chatham County and is expected to start in the Spring of 2025.

Child Advocacy Center

In response to a growing number of children needing Child Medical Evaluations (CME) for alleged abuse or neglect, representatives, including leadership, from organizations participating in the Multi-Disciplinary Team met to study the feasibility of establishing a Child Advocacy Center in Chatham County. This would offer a family-friendly location that is designed to be sensitive to the needs of children who have experienced abuse or severe neglect where they can receive a trauma-informed evaluation to inform treatment and recovery.

Child and Families Specialty Plan

In August 2024, NC Department of Health and Human Services awarded the contract for the statewide Medicaid plan for children and families served by the child welfare system to Blue Cross Blue Shield of NC. The plan, called Healthy Blue Care Together is scheduled to launch in December 2025 and is designed to offer consistent health and behavioral health services across the state, regardless of where the family resides. Goals include reduction in institutional placements, psychotropic medications, disparities, and placement disruptions for children in foster care. The plan also includes a program specifically for caregivers (i.e., kinship, adoptive, foster parents, and biological parents) with 24/7 support called Kindred Village.

Tax Relief Program

Chatham County launched the Tax Relief Program in February 2024 to offer up to \$500 in property tax assistance to long-term residents who are homeowners and earn at or below 60% Area Median Income (AMI). The goal of this program is to support individuals and families at income levels where they may be disproportionately impacted by the increasing tax expense due to rising property values in Chatham County.

Conclusion

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In 2025, NC's Child Fatality System is undergoing restructuring and CCPT-CFPT's will transition into a new "Local Team" with some modified responsibilities including the use of a national data system to better understand contributing factors to child death, and a more limited fatality review for children whose deaths were not expected. Chatham County's team has elected to continue child welfare case reviews, which is seen as an important way to understand the problems facing the most vulnerable families.

While there remains a lot of uncertainty about federal funding and how that may impact local communities, there are reasons to remain hopeful. The opportunities for 2025 outlined in this report are set to move forward and do not appear to be currently at risk. Child safety, health and well-being are prioritized in the Team's daily work, helping to ensure that services and supports are available to children who are at risk of abuse and neglect. Chatham County is fortunate to have continued support and input from a strong group of community leaders who demonstrate commitment to serving the community and supporting bright futures for our youngest residents.