



2021 Community Child Protection Team Annual Report

Community Child Protection Team 2021 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 met jointly every quarter on the first Friday of the month. The primary goals of

the meetings in 2021 were to review complex CPS cases and to work toward addressing the priority areas identified in the 2020 CCPT Annual Report. Any team member may recommend a case to be reviewed by CCPT, regardless of CPS involvement.

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Members

NCGS mandates that 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 2021 with double asterisks denoting the state-mandated members and single asterisks denoting members appointed by the Board of Commissioners:

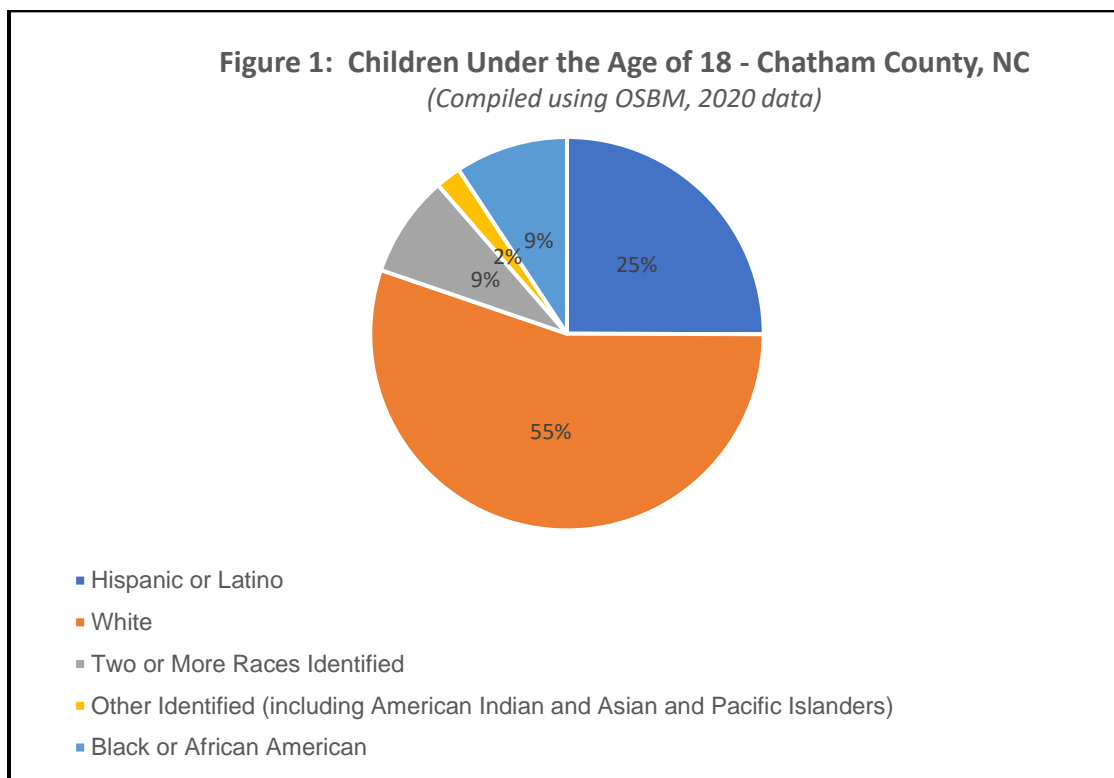
Jennie Kristiansen, Director, CCDSS, Co-Chair of combined team**	Scott Meulendyke, Chatham County Sheriff's Office **
Michael Zelek, Director, Chatham County Public Health Department, Co-Chair of combined team** (June-December)	Rodney West, Chatham County Sheriff's Office **
Kayley Taber, Assistant District Attorney**	Anne Chapman, Coordinator, Chatham County Child Victim Services*
Marcella Trageser, Assistant District Attorney**	Shirille Lee, Communities in Schools Chatham County*
Tracy Fowler, Director of Student Services, Chatham County Schools**	Deborah Flowers, UNC Beacon Program*
Thomas Droke, 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**	Carissa Brown, Center Director, Daymark Recovery Services*
Dr. Susan Pitts, Pediatrician, Piedmont Health, Moncure Health Clinic**	Courtney Pope, El Futuro*
Lora Rinaldi, Chatham County Sheriff's Office**	Della Richardson, Telamon Head Start**
Laquitia Cozart, Cardinal Innovations	Caitlin Howison, CPS Program Manager, CCDSS
	Cim Brailer, Program Administrator, 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 more than 76,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2020), representing over 29,000 households. Per the United States Census Bureau's "Household and Families 2019: ACS 5-Year Estimates Subject" table, the average household is comprised of 2 to 3 people, with over 50% identified as a married householder family, 14% as a single householder family and 30% identified as non-family households. Population estimates in 2020 found children under the age of 18 represented 25% of Chatham County. 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 respectively at 9%, while collectively American Indian and Asian and Pacific Islanders at nearly 2% (OSBM, 2020).



Poverty continues to be problematic in Chatham County. In 2019, the median income for Chatham County was \$67,031. According to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program 2020 report, 13.3% of children in Chatham County reside in poverty. This represents a rate of change increase of 6.7% from 2019. (SAIPE, 2020). Per the Massachusetts Institute of Technology "Living Wage Calculator" (2021), a household with two working adults with one child residing in Chatham County would need to make \$70,459, with each adult making nearly \$17 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 make at least \$80,528, nearly \$39 per hour/40 hours per week.

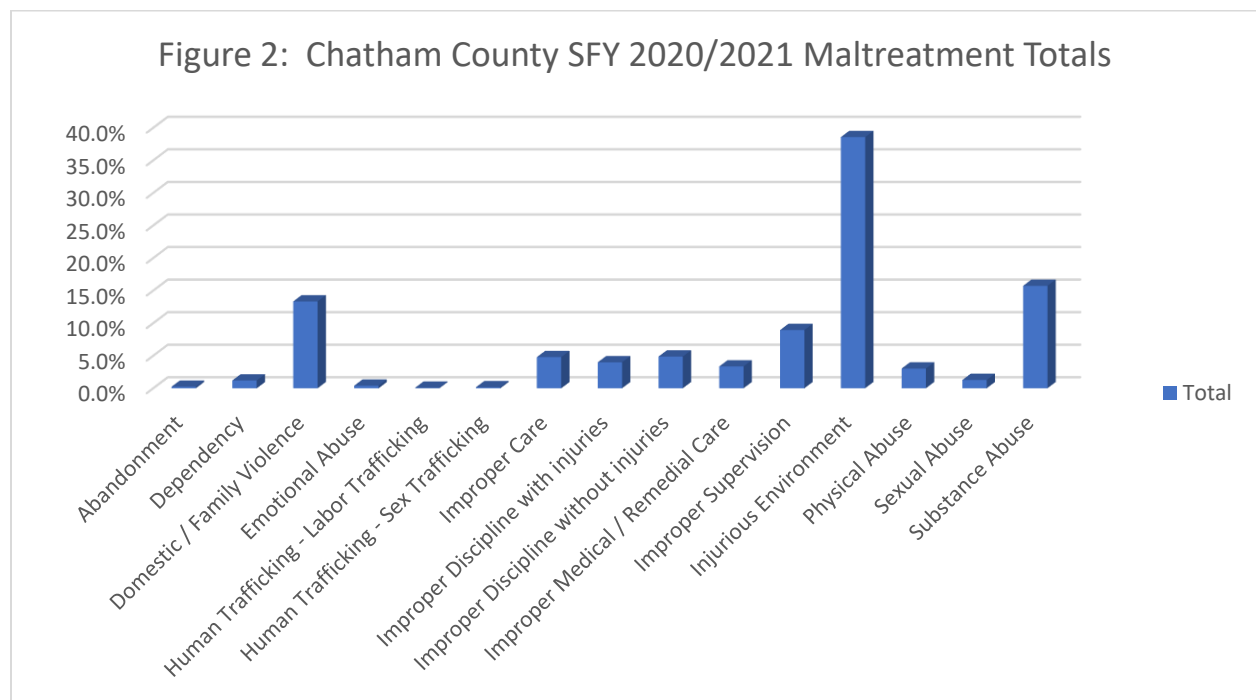
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Status of Child Welfare in Chatham County

Child Protective Services

In SFY 20/21, Chatham County Child Protective Services accepted 289 reports for child abuse, neglect and/or dependency, representing 632 unique children, compared to 281 reports and 555 unique children reported in the 2020 CCPT report. With over 55% of reports associated with injurious environments and substance use, there were 15 substance-affected babies who were referred to DSS for Plans of Safe Care during SFY 20/21.



Foster Care

During SFY 2020/2021, 138 children received foster care services in the county, representing a 20% decrease when compared to the prior year. Twenty-seven children exited foster care during the year; 14 were adopted, 7 reunified with parents or other legal custodians, with 4 achieving permanency through custody and the remaining 3 aging out of foster care at 18. Of the children receiving foster care services, over 63% and 28% identified as White and Black or African American respectively. Black or African American identified children continue to represent significant disproportionately in foster care when compared to children identified as Hispanic or Latino within the county.

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2021 Community Child Protection Team Summary

In 2021, the CCPT-CFPT met quarterly, with all meetings being held virtually. The team reviewed eight active child welfare cases involving twelve children. In seven families, the children were in foster care, however, in four families they were placed with family or kin. Children's behavioral health needs, substance use, domestic violence, and medical neglect were the primary reasons for removal of the children from the custody of their parents. Lack of engagement in substance use disorder and mental health treatment, criminal justice system involvement, and access to appropriate mental health treatment for youth were complicating factors in the children being reunified with parents.

As a result of the gaps identified in case reviews, the following recommendations were made for improving child welfare services at the local level:

- Additional supports for parents of adolescents who are exhibiting challenging behaviors, particularly those served by the child welfare and/or juvenile justice system.
- Develop a sustainability plan for Family Treatment Court.
- Collaborate with Vaya to better serve children and youth with behavioral health needs.

As a result of the gaps identified in case reviews, the following recommendations were made for improving child welfare services at the state level:

- Address the problem of children and youth with high level behavioral health needs who are staying in DSS offices and hotels due to lack of appropriate care.
- Identify solutions for children who are dually diagnosed with mental health and intellectual/developmental disabilities.
- Make programs available statewide that have shown to be successful in regional implementation.

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

- Chatham County Community Assessment
- COVID-19 Childhood Vaccination Updates, and COVID-19 Impacts on Youth
- Firearm Safety
- SIDS Awareness Month

Successes

Launch of Family Treatment Court

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In March 2021, Chatham County established a Family Treatment Court, funded with an \$870,000 three-year grant. This is a joint effort between Chatham County's Court Programs and Chatham County Department of Social Services. The grant will support parents and caretakers with much-needed treatment and support services, including financial assistance with transportation costs and parenting. Between March and December, the program has served 22 parents through the court programs. In addition, 20 parents participated in the parenting program.

Equity

Work on the *EMBRACe* project (Equity for Moms and Babies Realized Across Chatham) continued with the implementation of Story Circles to engage Chatham women in maternal and child service delivery and planning. DSS began a process to refer all potentially eligible children and parents to the WIC (Women, Infants, and Children) Program, resulting in a 210% increase in the number of referrals between May and July. Also, grant funds sponsored a series of webinars for employees at the Public Health Department and DSS to provide education regarding equity and the impacts on people served by both organizations. The goal of *EMBRACe* is to achieve equitable birth outcomes for women and infants in the county through system and service alignment across the grants' four partners: CCPHD, DSS, Chatham Hospital, and Piedmont Health Services. The initiative's development aligned with the return of labor and delivery services to Chatham Hospital, the first time these services have been available in the county for nearly 30 years. The *EMBRACe* steering committee meets monthly to align efforts and share updates, while the coordinating committee also meets regularly to plan strategies.

Single Point Assessment

The Chatham County Department of Social Services partnered with Vaya Health and Youth Villages to establish a single point assessment to strengthen the continuum of behavioral healthcare for children served through child welfare. Children receive a high-quality assessment through Youth Villages at the DSS office that is completed within 72 hours. These assessments serve as a critical component to ensuring access to appropriate services for children facing a range of emotional, mental, and behavioral challenges.

Permanency

Chatham County DSS continues to work toward improved permanency for children experiencing foster care. The District Permanency Collaborative, comprised of representation from DSS, Guardian ad Litem Program, and the District Court Judges Office, has met quarterly throughout the pandemic, studying permanency data with a goal of identifying meaningful data that translates to reductions in time to permanency. Chatham County saw an 8% reduction in the number of children experiencing foster

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care between fiscal year 2020 and 2021. For fiscal year 2022 (to date), there has been an additional 6% reduction.

Diligent Recruitment and Retention

Chatham County DSS has a workgroup to improve foster parent recruitment and retention. A primary focus in 2021 was identifying and implementing virtual options to allow training to occur safely and without interruption during the pandemic for both kinship families and prospective foster parents. During fiscal year 2021 CCDSS trained 14 regular foster families and 12 kinship families and licensed 6 foster families and 3 kinship families. Year to date in fiscal year 2022 CCDSS has trained 15 regular foster families and 8 kinship families with the goal of licensing 10 foster families and 3 kinship families total for the year. The accessibility and small group format of virtual training is appealing for many families, resulting in a significant decrease in the number of families who drop out during the training (in the last two sessions of 2021, all families except two completed training). An ongoing challenge is the training, licensing, and relicensing of foster and kinship families required to match the demands of new children entering foster care and to make up for the licensed families who decide to no longer foster due to adoption, other commitments, children no longer in a kinship placement, etc.

SIDS Awareness Month Campaign

The Chatham CCPT/CFPT developed a campaign to raise awareness around safe sleep practices. In recent years, safe sleep has been among the leading causes of preventable infant deaths in the county. The campaign took place in October to align with SIDS Awareness and included several social media posts and a press release highlighting the issue.

Opportunities for 2022

Improved Child Abuse and Neglect Reporting

NC DHHS, in collaboration with Evident Change (formerly the National Council on Crime and Delinquency and Children's Resource Center) and county DSS agencies, has developed a new and improved screening and response tool for reporting child abuse, neglect, and dependency. The goal is to improve consistency and accuracy across the state. Inter-rater reliability testing was completed in late 2021 with implementation anticipated later in 2022.

Family First Prevention Services Act

The Family First Prevention Services Act took effect in October 2021 and provides federal funding for evidenced based prevention services in exchange for a reduction in funding for children and youth in residential placements. This legislation represents a

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significant shift in the availability of supports to prevent foster care. While NC's Prevention Plan has been submitted to the Children's Bureau, it is awaiting approval. It is expected that additional evidenced based services for children who are candidates for foster care may be available by late 2022.

Transition to Vaya Health

In 2021, the LME-MCO (Local Management Entity- Managed Care Organization) serving Chatham County, Cardinal Innovations Healthcare, announced a merger with Vaya Health. With this transition comes additional supports for children and families served by child welfare including co-location of some services at the DSS office and additional specialized services (e.g., Child Assertive Community Treatment Team, Single Point of Assessment, etc.) Many services for children and youth in foster care require no prior authorization &/or are automatically expedited enabling them to receive needed services more quickly.

Opioid Settlement

Along with counties across the state and country, Chatham is slated to receive funding through the opioid Settlement Fund beginning in 2022. 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. The group developed an action plan in 2020, and this funding may provide financial support to implement strategies in the coming years.

Conclusion

While 2021 saw some progress toward the return of normalcy for children and families through the reopening of school buildings, the resumption of sports and activities, and the general availability of more face-to-face contact, the year has been very much shrouded in ongoing pandemic response and concerns about how children will be impacted. The CCPT recommendations both on a local and state level this year are a reflection of that uncertainty. Availability of additional resources through increased federal funding, Family Treatment Court, and the transition to Vaya Health present opportunities to make an impact by assisting families already struggling and making available more preventative supports. The strength of community in Chatham County remains a most critical asset and the ability to keep coming together in support of children and families will help ensure stability in the upcoming year.

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Citations:

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2021). "Living Wage Calculator." Retrieved on January 6, 2022 from <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/37037>.

Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM). (2020). "NC Census Data: 2020 Census Summaries - state, county, municipality, American Indian areas." Retrieved on January 6, 2022 from <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/population-demographics/nc-census-data>.

United States Census Bureau. (2019). "Households and Families - 2019: ACS 5- Year Estimates Subject." Retrieved on January 6, 2022 from <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/table?q=United%20States&t=Families%20and%20Living%20Arrangements&g=0500000US37037&y=2019&tid=ACST5Y2019.S1101>.

United States Census Bureau. (2020). "QuickFacts: Chatham County, North Carolina." Retrieved on January 6, 2022 from <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/chathamcountynorthcarolina/PST045221>.

Appendixes:

Figure 1: Office of State Budget and Management (OSBM). (2020). "NC Census Data: 2020 Census Summaries - state, county, municipality, American Indian areas." Retrieved on January 6, 2022 from <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/facts-figures/population-demographics/nc-census-data>.

Figure 2: NC DHHS NC Fast (2020). Data retrieved on January 7, 2022 for Chatham County Department of Social Services Child Protective Assessments open during SFY 2020/2021.