



# **2022 Community Child Protection Team Annual Report**

## Community Child Protection Team 2022 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 2022 were to review complex CPS cases and to work toward addressing the priority areas identified in the 2021 CCPT Annual Report. Any team member may recommend a case to be reviewed by CCPT, regardless of CPS involvement.

### 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 2022 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, 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**	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*
Rebecca Madden, Chatham County Sheriff's Office**	Della Richardson, Telamon Head Start** (left in June)
Laquitia Cozart, Cardinal Innovations	Caitlin Howison, CPS Supervisor, CCDSS
Theresa Buchanan, Vital Records Deputy Registrar/Processing Assistant, Chatham County Public Health Department	Cim Brailer, Deputy Director, CCDSS
Alicia Doran, Public Health Social Worker, Chatham County Public Health Department	

### 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

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families including county demographics, child protection, and access to behavioral healthcare.

Chatham County is a large, rural county with an estimated population of nearly 78,000 residents (United States Census Bureau, 2021), representing over 30,000 households. Population estimates in 2021 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 each at 9%, while collectively American Indian and Asian and Pacific Islanders at nearly 2% (OSBM, 2020).

In the 2021 Chatham County Community Assessment, which was released in July 2022, three strategic priority areas were identified: mental health & substance use, transportation, and employment. The report noted concerning trends in youth mental health metrics, along with growing overdose rates across all ages, in prioritizing mental health and substance use. Issues with transportation were highlighted as a barrier to accessing needed services, and a shortage of local employment options affected economic resilience of residents (Chatham County, 2022).

Poverty continues to be a challenge in Chatham County. In 2021, the median income for Chatham County was \$76,791. According to the Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates Program 2021 report, 16.7% of children in Chatham County reside in poverty. This represents a rate of change percentage increase of 26% from 2020. (SAIPE, 2021). Per the Massachusetts Institute of Technology “Living Wage Calculator” (2022), a household with two working adults with one child residing in Chatham County would need to make \$78,351, with each adult making nearly \$19 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 \$89,528, nearly \$43 per hour/40 hours per week.

## Status of Child Welfare in Chatham County

### *Child Protective Services*

In SFY 21/22, Chatham County Child Protective Services accepted 300 reports for child abuse, neglect and/or dependency, representing 523 unique children, compared to 289 reports and 632 unique children reported in the 2021 CCPT report. Injurious environment allegations represented nearly 38% of reports, with domestic/family violence reflecting 15%. Substance use represented nearly 13% of the reported allegations for child protective services within the county. 13 children were born substance affected and referred for plans of safe care during the year.

### *Foster Care*

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During SFY 21/22, 140 children received foster care services in the county compared to 137 the prior year. Despite this slight increase, permanency was achieved for 60 children who exited foster care in FY22, compared to 27 in FY21. Of those exiting, 18 children were adopted, 14 were reunified with their parents/caretakers, 3 were placed with their non-removal parent, 2 had custody given to a relative and the non-removal parent, 2 were placed in the custody of a court approved caretaker, 11 exited through guardianship with a relative or another court approved caretaker, 8 children aged out of foster care at 18, and 2 petitions were voluntarily dismissed. Of the children receiving foster care services, 64% were classified as White, with Black or African American children representing 26%. 10% of children in foster care were identified as having some Hispanic or Latino heritage.

### **2022 Community Child Protection Team Summary**

In 2022, the CCPT-CFPT met quarterly, with all meetings being held virtually. The team reviewed eight active child welfare cases involving seventeen children. While in all eight families the children were in foster care, half were placed with kin instead of traditional foster homes or other therapeutic placements. Children's behavioral health needs as well as parental 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 were complicating factors in the children being reunified with parents.

As part of the annual survey, the CCPT developed a set of recommendations based on findings from case reviews.

Top recommendations for improving child welfare services at the local level:

- Increased availability of behavioral health services in Spanish (especially after-hours options)
- Improved access to affordable housing
- Expand availability of parenting programs like those offered through the Family Treatment Program (including having availability for Spanish speaking parents).

Top recommendations were made for improving child welfare services at the state level:

- Fast track solutions for children and youth with high level behavioral health needs who are staying in emergency rooms, DSS offices, hotels due to lack of appropriate care.
- Expand financial support of kinship care for children in foster care

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- Expand the NC Child Treatment Program to Ensure access to high quality, evidenced based treatment for all children served by child welfare across NC.

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

- 2021 Chatham County Community Assessment
- COVID-19 Childhood Vaccination Updates, and COVID-19 Impacts on Youth
- Firearm Safety
- SIDS Awareness Month

## Successes in 2022

### *Family Treatment Court*

Chatham County's Family Treatment Court completed the first full year serving, 24 individuals in the court and an additional 8 families received parenting services only. This three-year, grant funded program supports parents and caretakers with much-needed treatment and support services, including financial assistance with transportation costs and parenting. Family Treatment Court and DSS employees also attended Motivational Interviewing Training with UNC and a Family Treatment Court Best Practices Training.

### *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. Much of the focus of *EMBRACe* in 2022 was on sustaining these services at Chatham Hospital, which has faced challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic and staffing shortages. Nearly 80% of women who have delivered at Chatham Hospital since it reopened in 2020 have been women of color. The *EMBRACe*

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steering committee meets regularly to align efforts and share updates, while the coordinating committee also meets regularly to plan strategies.

### ***Vaya Co-Location at DSS***

The Chatham County Department of Social Services partnered with Vaya Health to co-locate a care manager at the DSS office and weekly case reviews were held throughout the year. The goal is to have a more responsive proactive approach to serving children and their families when the child has a behavioral health need.

### ***Enhancing Family Time and Visitation***

Chatham County DSS convened a working group to evaluate family time and visitation practices for children in foster care with the goal of improving reunification rates. The workgroup studied models used in other states and developed a plan that includes the development of training for DSS and Family Visitation employees, a checklist tool to capture behavioral change over time, and more frequent opportunities for parents and children to spend time together.

### ***Diligent Recruitment and Retention***

Chatham County DSS has a workgroup to improve foster parent recruitment and retention. This year a continued focus was given to the number of kinship families that become licensed. At the end of FY22 seven kinship families were licensed and 10 more were in the process of being licensed, more than doubling the goal for the year. During fiscal year 2022 CCDSS trained 17 regular foster families and 16 kinship families and licensed 9 foster families and 8 kinship families.

### ***SIDS Awareness Month Campaign***

During Safe Sleep Awareness Month in October, the Chatham CCPT/CFPT developed a new webpage to educate parents and caregivers on safe sleeping practices for babies, along with a press release and safe sleep information cards to be distributed in the community, including through programs like the car seat safety check program. Safe sleep is among the leading causes of preventable infant deaths in the county.

## **Opportunities for 2023**

### ***Medicaid Expansion***

It is anticipated that NC will expand Medicaid during 2023, providing much needed healthcare insurance for over 3,000 Chatham County residents. Medicaid expansion will provide reimbursements to both physical and behavioral healthcare providers.

### ***Family First Prevention Services Act (Updated)***

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

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funding for children and youth in residential placements. This legislation represents a significant shift in the availability of supports to prevent foster care. Although implementation of services has been slower than expected, two evidenced-based services should be available to families by the end of 2023 or early 2024. These services are Parents as Partners and Homebuilders.

### ***Community Wide Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Workshop***

In January 2023, Chatham County, in partnership with NC FASD Informed hosted a community wide virtual workshop highlighting the needs of person who are diagnosed with Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder. The workshop featured national experts and discussed how exposure to alcohol is the leading cause of intellectual and other developmental disabilities in the US. It is estimated that 1 in 20 children are born annually in NC. FASD is a lifelong brain-based disability which can cause school disruption, victimization, deficits in communication, difficulties in independent living, mental health and substance use, job instability, and involvement in the criminal justice system.

### ***Expanded Family Time and Visitation***

In 2023, Chatham County DSS is implementing a new family time and visitation plan. Training for social workers and family visitation staff is planned for spring 2023, work is underway to expand family time locations, and Vaya Sub Capitation funding is supporting the hiring of temporary employees to assist social workers in transporting children and parents for family time.

### ***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 will provide financial support to implement strategies in the coming years. Specific priorities that the funds will support include hiring an Overdose Prevention Coordinator to spearhead these efforts, early intervention and education (focused on youth), post-overdose response teams, reentry programs, and expanding medication-assisted treatment (MAT) in the detention center,

## **Conclusion**

The CCPT-CFPT remains hopeful that 2023 will bring additional resources to address the behavioral health crisis and ongoing impacts of child poverty. During 2022, NC Department of Health and Human Services published a Coordinated Action Plan outlining 13 different steps to improve services to children and families that center on



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the Department's strategic priorities: Behavioral Health and Resilience, Child and Family Wellbeing, and Strong and Inclusive Workforce. Locally, team members and their organizations are responding to the same challenges described in the plan and implementation could significantly benefit children and families across NC. The CCPT-CFPT remains encouraged by the community partnership and shared commitment to our youngest residents.