

The best, most cost-effective way to serve young people and their families is to prevent problems before they escalate into a crisis and threaten the health of a household. The Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) contracts with organizations in communities across the state to provide services and interventions that are proven to prevent children and youth from ending up in the more expensive foster care and juvenile justice systems.

THE TEXAS LEGISLATURE HAS AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD ON PAST SUCCESS

In 2015, the Texas Legislature voted to protect these critical services by keeping the PEI division within DFPS, rather than transferring it to HHSC as had been proposed. This decision to keep the division within the state's child welfare agency has helped to preserve the role of prevention as a crucial first step in the continuum of care for child welfare.

PEI programs have track records of success. Common outcomes include improved parenting skills, greater family economic self-sufficiency, increased father involvement and support, and enhanced connections to support networks, such as extended family members, other parents and faith-based organizations.¹

ENHANCING PEI PROGRAMS IS CRITICAL TO ADDRESSING TEXAS' CHILD WELFARE CHALLENGES

There is no question that the state's child welfare system is overwhelmed with young people in need of protection. An important piece of addressing this problem is to enhance PEI services that keep homes healthy and prevent CPS involvement in the first place.

We support the recommendations for PEI services in the DFPS Legislative Appropriations Request (LAR):

- \$13.3 million to maintain expansion of PEI programs that was funded by the 84th Legislature²
- \$26.7 million to strengthen PEI and its programs³, which includes:
 - \$14 million to strengthen the Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) program, including by increasing contractor flexibility to provide services beyond crisis intervention
 - Funding to enhance PEI's ability to conduct research, evaluation, and quality monitoring/reporting to inform programming; to ensure efficient and effective execution, management, and monitoring of contracts in an increasingly transparent and collaborative manner; and to grow the state's ability to proactively address child maltreatment and provide independent reviews; to coordinate data and research with other state agencies, the health care industry and national organizations; and to provide training to agency staff
 - Funding to grow public awareness campaigns to influence attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to parenting and child safety

Let's support these proven methods for stopping problems before they start and giving Texas' youth and their families a better chance at a healthy, successful future.

¹ PEI Five-Year Strategic Plan published in September 2016

² Exceptional item #1 in DFPS LAR

³ Exceptional item #6 in DFPS LAR

STAR: ONE OF TEXAS' MOST SUCCESSFUL STATE PROGRAMS

For proof of the positive impact of prevention and early intervention programs, simply look to the track record of Texas' Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR) program. The STAR program has been in operation for over 25 years, providing services to youth and families in all 254 Texas counties to keep those who would otherwise "slip through the cracks" from entering the foster care and juvenile justice systems.

WHAT IS STAR?

STAR is a prevention and early intervention program designed to support young people and their families who are in crisis before situations escalate to the point that more expensive and intrusive services are needed. STAR services are available 24 hours a day in all 254 counties in Texas, to youth under the age of 18 and their families. Services include family conflict resolution, short-term counseling, parenting classes, and emergency shelter for youth who need respite care.

STAR is a safety net that comes to the rescue when a parent is at the end of their rope, a young person is at risk for going down the wrong path, and a family is at its breaking point. In many communities, STAR is the only option for youth who have not been diagnosed with a severe mental illness to receive free counseling services.

DATA SHOW SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES – AND SAVINGS

Data show that the completion of STAR services results in improved situations for young people and their families. For example, in FY 2013:

- 99.7% of children who received STAR services remained safe.
- 93.6% of children who received STAR services were not referred to juvenile probation.
- 86.5% of youth who received STAR services had better outcomes 90 days after services.

Providing these services to one youth and his or her family carries a total average cost of roughly \$600. That is compared to the tens of thousands of dollars that would be spent over the same time period if the youth ended up in the juvenile justice or foster care systems.

A COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACH IS KEY TO SUCCESS

One of the reasons STAR is so successful is that it utilizes resources already at work in communities across Texas. Rather than creating extensive new infrastructure at the state level, STAR applies state funding to faith-based programs, nonprofits, and other organizations that are already successfully operating in the communities where youth and families need their help.

Part of DFPS's Legislative Appropriations Request in the area of PEI services includes \$14 million to strengthen the STAR program, including increasing the flexibility of these local contractors to provide services beyond crisis intervention to families with children 6-17 years of age. TNOYS recommends following this request, and placing more resources behind this proven program to help ease the challenges facing the state's child welfare system.



THEIR FUTURE IS OUR BUSINESS.