

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. Texas' Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) programs are proven to reduce youth involvement in the costly juvenile justice and foster care systems.

A targeted increase in PEI funding can help to close the current gap in capacity, strengthen more Texas families, and increase savings for taxpayers.

BUILDING ON EVIDENCE-BASED & COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY APPROACHES

In 2017, the Texas Legislature directed the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) to identify how to expand prevention programming across the state. The result of these efforts is Exceptional Item #8 in the DFPS Legislative Appropriations Request, which is a request to increase funding for Prevention and Early Intervention by 15% to serve nearly 12,000 additional Texas youth and families.

- **Services to At-Risk Youth (STAR)** is the *only* statewide prevention program available in all 254 counties. It offers youth and their families free crisis counseling and other services that are proven to keep them together safely.
- **Healthy Outcomes through Prevention and Early Support (HOPES)** targets children zero to five with evidence-based interventions tailored to the communities in which families live.
- **Community Youth Development (CYD)** has a long track record of diverting youth from the juvenile justice system.¹

WHAT IS STAR?

The STAR program has been in operation for more than 25 years and is currently the only **statewide program providing services in all 254 Texas counties.**

STAR is a prevention and early intervention program designed to keep youth under 18 and their families together safely. Services include short-term crisis counseling, family conflict resolution, parenting classes, and respite care.

STAR is a safety net for youth and families. In many communities, STAR is the only option for youth who have not been diagnosed with a severe mental illness but still have a critical need to receive free counseling services.

¹ Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Progress Report on Implementation of Five-Year Strategic Plan – Fiscal Year 2018, September 2018.

DATA SHOW SUCCESSFUL OUTCOMES AND LONG-TERM SAVINGS

The completion of STAR services results in improved situations for young people and their families. For example, in FY 2017:²

- 99.6% of children who received STAR services remained safe.
- 98.5% of children who received STAR services were not referred to juvenile probation.
- 97.5% of youth who received STAR services remained safe 3 years after services.

Providing these services to one youth and his or her family, on average, costs the state approximately \$600. This is much more affordable than the tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars it would cost if the youth ended up in the juvenile justice or foster care systems.

Recommendation

Increase PEI funding to close the gap between the families currently served by PEI and the targets outlined in statute. The DFPS exceptional item request includes:

- \$9.2 million in new money for STAR, to serve 6,000 more families;
- \$4 million for CYD 4,100 more youth and to expand the program to more zip codes;
- \$5.5 million for Home Visiting programming to serve 1,750 more families.

² Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, Legislative Appropriations Request for Fiscal Year 2020 and 2021, August 2018