



The Services to At-Risk Youth (“STAR”) Program

The STAR program is housed within the Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) division at the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS). It has its own line item, C.1.1., in Article II of the state budget. The current funding level for STAR is \$18,203,303. This is a 13.6% cut from the FY2010-2011 funding level of \$21,000,860.

What is STAR?

STAR is a prevention and early intervention program designed to support youth 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 up to age 18 and their families. Services include family conflict resolution, short-term counseling, parenting classes, and emergency shelter for youth who need respite care.

Why is the STAR program important?

The program is a safety net that offers communities resources to come 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. There is no other statewide program or service like STAR. 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. The STAR program prevents youth and families from ending up in the much more costly foster care and juvenile justice systems.

How much is it to serve a youth and his or her family through STAR?

In 2012, the cost of providing STAR services averaged \$626 per youth and family served.

Does the STAR program work?

Yes. Data show that the completion of STAR services results in improved situations for young people and their families.

For example, in 2012, 97% of clients with a family conflict problem who successfully completed services reported at follow-up that the situation had improved. Fewer than 2% of clients who were delinquent when they were referred to the program were delinquent again after completing services. Nearly 95% who had run away did not run away again, and more than 98% were either not truant again or were truant less often.

Restore funding for the Services to At-Risk Youth (“STAR”) program.

Does the STAR program prevent child abuse & neglect or juvenile delinquency?

The STAR program prevents child abuse and neglect as well as juvenile delinquency. Families are complex and many are dealing with multiple challenges at the same time. When a youth and his or her family receive STAR services, the more costly service that STAR is preventing is sometimes unclear. For example, imagine a scenario (not at all uncommon) where a parent is at the end of her rope with her teenage daughter's out of control behavior. They are fighting constantly and the fights get very intense because they both have many other stressors in their lives and few supports. When they threaten violence to one another, both mother and daughter realize that they need help. There are several possible risk scenarios that could play out if nobody intervenes:

- (1) the mother could kick the daughter out of the home and she could become homeless
- (2) the daughter could get fed up and run away from home
- (3) the fighting could get more physical and someone could get seriously injured
- (4) the situation could escalate and the daughter could act out with criminal activities

When these situations escalate to the point that social service agencies such as Child Protective Services or the juvenile justice system get involved, the costs of services increases dramatically and the results often fracture families permanently. It makes more sense to operate a program that protects children and families by resolving conflicts before situations escalate to family separation.

How have the cuts made last session affected the program?

Last session, the STAR program was cut by 13.5%. This cut significantly diminished the ability of STAR providers to serve youth and families in crisis. Providers have been forced to lay off staff, close outlying offices, decrease outreach services, and increase wait times, in order to operate with fewer dollars despite growing demand for services. STAR was already under-funded prior to the 13.5% cut, as it has not received an increase to keep up with population growth in many years.

How could moving STAR funds over to the Texas Juvenile Justice Department destroy the program?

Moving the STAR program over to TJJD could destroy a program that has worked successfully for decades. Some of the dollars that fund STAR must be used specifically for child abuse prevention and would not follow the program to a new agency. It is unlikely TJJD could maintain a statewide program that provides services in all 254 counties with only a portion of current STAR funds, given they are already stretched so thin. Moving STAR funds to TJJD would likely result in a handful of disjointed programs, rather than the statewide safety net provided through STAR.

Additionally, STAR is primarily a voluntary program and the stigma of receiving services within the juvenile justice system could deter youth and families from seeking services. The TJJD is in the business of providing court ordered punitive services, not voluntary services to strengthen and support families. Last, most STAR providers maximize the value of state dollars by supplementing them with grants, donations, and other community support. It is less likely that an agency focused on corrections would be able to effectively leverage taxpayer dollars in this manner.