

Understanding Florida's Community-Based Care System

Florida Coalition for Children

Improving Outcomes for Kids



Florida Coalition
for Children

DCF Operated Child Welfare: Pre 2000

Prior to 1999, the Department of Children and Families was responsible for providing care for the state's most vulnerable population: Florida's abused, abandoned, neglected and at-risk children. Services were provided through a mix of state employees and private providers. Under this system the state's child welfare community was experiencing leadership turnover, financial crisis, and children being abandoned, neglected and abused in record numbers.

"Abused children are spending nights in social workers' offices or being shipped out [of the county]." *Rita Elkins, Florida Today, June 12, 1999.*

"Staffing is such a problem that the state Department of Children and Families temporarily shut down its children's protective services office in Titusville last month." *Marilyn Meyer, Florida Today, June 1, 1999.*

"The previous director, Kathleen A. Kearney, resigned on Tuesday, after months of embarrassments, starting with the agency's admission in April that it had lost a child in its care, 4-year-old Rilya Wilson, without noticing for more than a year." *New York Times, New Child Welfare Head in Florida Drawing Fire, August 17, 2002.*

In response, in a bipartisan effort, lawmakers created a unique public-private partnership.

"As a candidate for Governor in 1998, I proposed moving Florida's foster care system to a community based model in response to the tragedies of children being abandoned, neglected and abused in record numbers. My belief was if business and community leaders would view these precious children as their own, there would be a more innovative response." *Jeb Bush, "Keep 'community' in community-based care to protect children from abuse," Miami Herald February 18, 2012.*

Lawmakers responded and during the 1999 Legislative Session created the state's community-based foster care system.

F.S. 409-1671: It is the intent of the Legislature that the Department of Children and Family Services shall outsource the provision of foster care and related services statewide. It is further the Legislature's intent to encourage communities and other stakeholders in the well-being of children to participate in assuring that children are safe and well-nurtured....It is the intent of the Legislature that the department will continue to work towards full outsourcing in a manner that assures the viability of the community-based system of care and best provides for the safety of children in the child protection system.

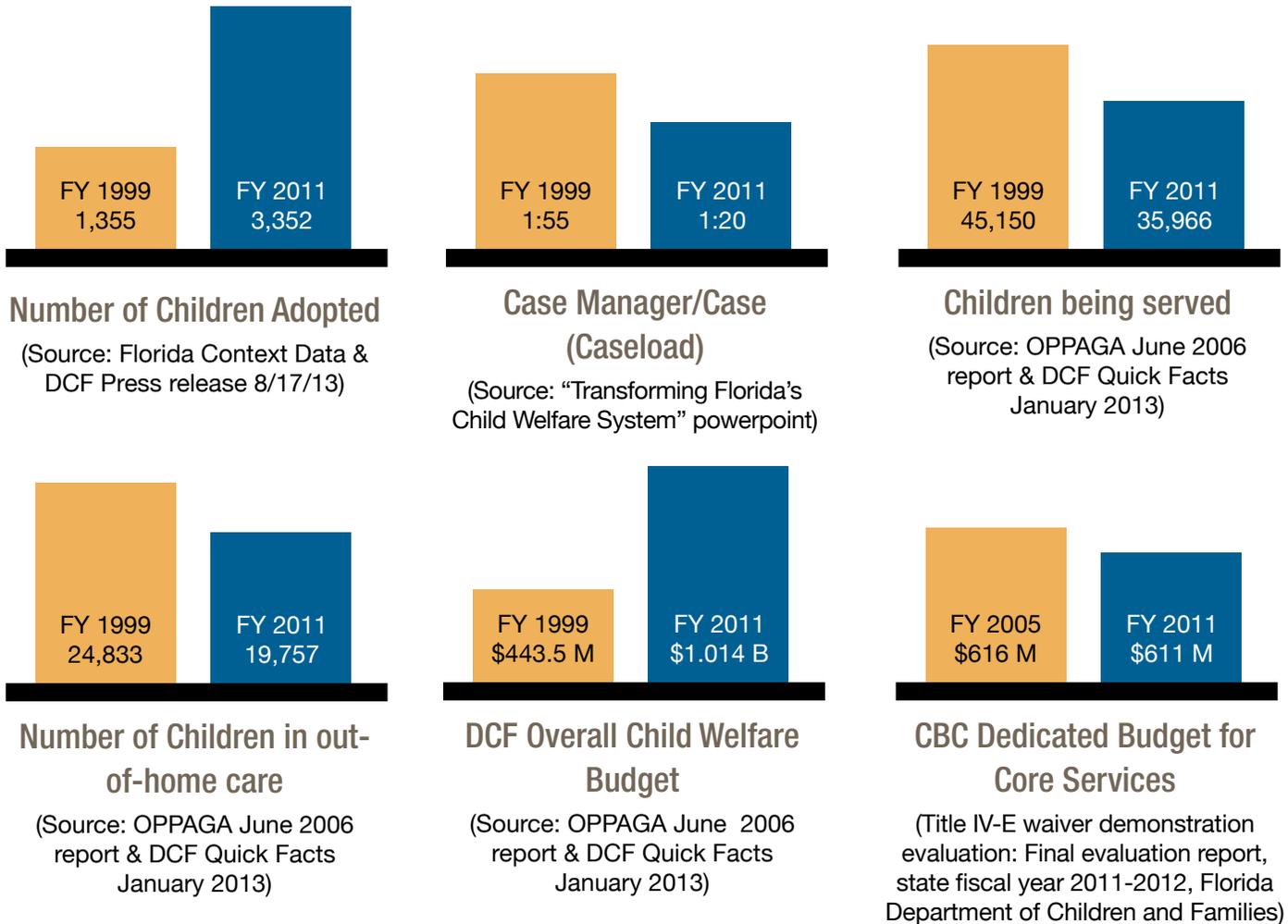
"The new system is not only better for the children but it also saves money." *George Sheldon, former DCF secretary, New York Times, July 25, 2009.*



Community-Based Care: Post 2000

During the 1999 Legislative Session, Florida lawmakers passed legislation requiring the Department of Children and Families to contract with community-based lead agencies who would assume many of the responsibilities previously handled internally. The Department remains responsible for program oversight and other functions such as the abuse hotline and child protective investigations. (OPPAGA report 06-50)

Pre and Post CBC System: A Comparison



Improved Outcomes

- Florida is among the lowest funded child welfare systems in the nation.
- Florida has the shortest length of stay in foster care when compared to the "Big Five" states.
- Florida is one of only 12 states to visit children monthly.
- Florida is ranked 4th in the nation for its child welfare system.

Legislatively Mandated Responsibilities

DCF Child Welfare Responsibilities

Hotline
Protective Investigations
Child Welfare Legal Services

Community-Based Care Responsibilities

Prevention
Diversion
Family Support
Case Management

Service Coordination
Foster Care
Adoption
Independent Living