



DCF's Strategic Plan 2019 - 2021

Since its creation in 2006, the NJ Department of Children and Families has designed and managed a strong, state-wide network of core services including child protection and child welfare services, children's behavioral health care, programming to support children with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families, community-based family strengthening services, specialized educational programming, and services and programming to support women. Over 100,000 New Jersey constituents are impacted by these services each month.

In keeping with Governor Phil Murphy's platform of a stronger, fairer New Jersey, the New Jersey Department of Children and Families is undergoing an urgent transformation that is informed by evolving national best practice, ongoing self-evaluation of the Department's performance, and advances in science, and staff and consumer voice.

Vision

DCF's vision is that all New Jersey residents are safe, healthy and connected:

- **Safe:** absent harm or maltreatment
- **Healthy:** refers to physical, mental, developmental and emotional wellbeing.
- **Connected:** bonded or tied together through biology, familiarity and/or community.

These conditions are inter-dependent. Decades of research from the fields of psychology, medicine, and sociology have demonstrated that human beings cannot fully attain any one of these conditions without the others. For example, humans need social connections in order to maintain health and safety. And, it is difficult to have a positive, reciprocal relationship with others when a person is emotionally unwell. In recognition of these inter-dependencies, DCF is re-orienting its work to support work toward all three conditions, together.

Values

DCF's values guide the work of the Department, serving as the professional compass for decisions large and small, in all that we do.

- **Collaboration** is a willingness and intention to work in teams, in comfortable and uncomfortable ways. It means teaming and sharing power with the youth, men, women, children and families served; it means partnering across state and local government,

philanthropy and the private sector, and it means being open to, and accepting, input and assistance from traditional and non-traditional partners in service. This includes contracted agencies, clients, staff and consultants.

- **Equity** means making sure that staff throughout the Department do what is needed to support and assist each person served to be safe, healthy and connected. It means recognizing that the goal is equitable outcomes, and that the pathway to equity may require different efforts and levels of effort for each constituent.
- **Evidence** refers to the use of evidence-based and evidence-informed practices, and the use of data and outcomes as a basis for advancing - or ending – certain programs and services. Evidence also is an important value in decision making in specific cases in the sense that any time DCF makes decisions that will change individuals’ or families’ lives, those decisions need to be made on the basis of clear criteria.
- **Family** is DCF’s primary focus. DCF’s work is in the interest of family and should be determined, as much as possible, by listening to their needs and providing appropriate supports. This includes the family of staff, all of whom have valuable input to DCF’s goals and processes.
- **Integrity** means that DCF is honest, reliable and respectful in all that we do.

Core Approaches

As DCF moves ahead, we have identified a set of core approaches that we will work to embed across the Department. These are not initiatives or programs, but instead are practices that DCF will be embedded in all aspects of our work:

- **Race equity** – DCF recognizes that that racial bias impacts families’ circumstances and the ways in which public systems - such as those operated by the Department – interact with families. In consultation with a national expert, DCF is launching work to attend to race equity in all areas of the Department, with the ultimate goal of promoting equitable treatment for all NJ constituents, and equitable outcomes for DCF services.
- **Healing Centered Practice** – Many of the parents and children DCF works with have experienced adversity or trauma. DCF is working to ensure that its staff and service network have the skillset and orientation to promote healing and resilience. Enriching staff with training and professional development is central to that effort. In addition, DCF is advancing the development of a culture of safety throughout the department and utilizing a safety science approach to resolve and learn from critical incidents. Staff that has lived through and healed from trauma including vicarious and secondary can recognize it and support others’ healing journeys, as well. Approaching every interaction from a perspective of healing creates an environment that is safe, welcoming and productive – all elements essential in DCF’s work, both internally and externally. DCF’s

practice models, customer service, physical spaces and services purchased on behalf of New Jersey residents will promote healing.

- **Protective Factors Framework** – DCF is structuring its practice models and purchased services to assess for and to promote the five (5) protective factors, conditions which - when they are in place within individuals, family systems, and/or communities - reduce risk to health and well-being: parental resilience, social connections, concrete support in times of need, knowledge of parenting and child development, and social and emotional competence for children.
- **Family Voice** – Individuals and families know better than anyone else what they need to thrive. DCF’s new Office of Family Voice will use innovative approaches to organize and elevate the voice of constituents, ensuring that those with lived experience are included in decisions regarding policy, operations, and practice throughout the Department. DCF’s new Office of Family Voice will be responsible for planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating these constituent voice efforts.
- **Collaborative Safety** – This is a model of behavior as much as it involves operations. DCF is incorporating the type of science that is used in aviation, heavy industry, health care and other safety critical sectors into child and family services so that staff do not merely respond to adverse events, but learn from them in such a way that the department can reliably prevent future adverse events from happening. This way of working rests on an ability to create a safe space for staff to advise where the weaknesses exist before critical events occur, and the ability of the Department to assess critical events from a systems, rather than an individual, perspective.

Strategic Priorities & Strategic Goals

DCF’s strategic focus identifies major priorities for the Department as we strive to maintain excellence in core service delivery, while achieving a large-scale, fundamental transformation. In the coming years, DCF will manage to this integrated set of priorities.

Service Excellence

Throughout 2018, DCF undertook an assessment of the Department’s performance, examining outcome and management data, needs assessments, and holding a statewide listening tour. As a result of this assessment period, the Department has identified the following as the major areas of focus:

- Incorporating behavior based case planning in New Jersey’s child welfare practice model
- Improving safety assessment and safety planning in child protection services
- Achieving timely permanency for children and youth in foster care
- Recruiting and sustaining a strong resource family care network, which operates in partnership with families of origin

- Promoting empowerment for women and girls
- Further developing a high quality, high-impact network of community-based primary prevention services
- Promoting interdependence and thriving amongst transition age youth
- Maintain and support quality assurance and customer service in integrated health services
- Cultivate and sustain relationships with internal and external partners and providers in supporting youth with behavioral health and disability services.

Transformational Goals

The service excellence goals referenced above are all important goals, but they are goals set within the parameters of traditional service delivery. In order to achieve the vision of *safe, healthy and connected*, however, DCF will need to fundamentally transform. The engine of this transformation will be four (4) major priorities:

Primary prevention of maltreatment and maltreatment related fatalities - This includes child maltreatment, domestic violence and sexual assault prevention. DCF's Divisions on Women, Family and Community Partnerships, Child Protection and Permanency all offer programs and services focused on strengthening families. Through its 57 Family Success Centers, Child Assault Prevention Programs, Home Visitation, School Based Youth Programming and more, DCF is working with children and families to help them be their best selves.

Preserving kinship connections - Child and family services, whether through child protection or behavioral health services, has the authority to separate families. Family separation is a damaging and imperfect tool that can inflict trauma on the children it is meant to be helping. When it is absolutely necessary to separate children from families to ensure the safety of the child, however, DCF will focus on making sure that children can remain with extended family or family friends.

Staff health and wellness - Staff working in fields such as child protection, behavioral health, sexual violence and intimate partner violence are at high risk of experiencing vicarious trauma. DCF will focus on staff health and wellness to ensure that public servants who dedicate their professional lives to working with highly traumatized clients are working in environments that provide state-of-the art supports to them; and to create work environments and supports that set frontline staff up to succeed in engaging with children, youth and families.

A fully integrated and inclusive Children's System of Care (CSOC): Youth and their families will benefit from integrated health services provided through a collaborative of primary care/behavioral health care management models and a strengthened delivery system of integrated care for co-occurring emotional/substance use/intellectual and

developmental disabilities. This spectrum of effective, culturally and linguistically competent community-based services and supports is organized into a coordinated network and comprised of meaningful partnerships with families and youth so that children and youth can thrive at home, in school, in the community, and throughout life.

Opportunities to Engage

DCF welcomes all constituents to join us in advancing these strategies. We are developing multiple methods for ongoing dialogue and participation, as well as mechanisms to share the findings of our ongoing self-evaluation of progress. These include:

- Office of Advocacy and Constituent Relations - Families with questions or constructive feedback are encouraged to call DCF's Office of Advocacy and Constituent Relations (1-877-543-7864) for information and referral or to share their thoughts and insight on available programs and services.
- Regional Forums – In collaboration with ACNJ, DCF will continue to hold 6 regional forums each year, to discuss the work of the strategic plan with a diverse group of professional stakeholders
- Commissioner's Listening Tour – After her confirmation, Commissioner Beyer began a 21-county listening tour, meeting with youth, families, women and men engaged in DCF's programs and services to hear directly from them their lived experiences. The insight has been integral to DCF's transformation and the Commissioner continues to meet regularly with families, providers and staff to learn from their feedback.
- Constituent Councils – DCF's Office of Family Voice will be supporting the creation of a statewide network of parent councils and youth councils, to directly engage constituents
- Commissioner's Monthly Report – the DCF Commissioner's Monthly Report, published to the DCF website, shares up to date metrics regarding Departmental operations and performance
- New Jersey Child Welfare Data Hub – Through a partnership with Rutgers University, the Child Welfare Data Hub disseminates comprehensive data regarding the welfare and well-being of New Jersey's children and families
- DCF Annual Report – DCF will publish annual reports regarding progress toward the strategic plan