



COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PROTECTION. PREVENTION. PARTNERSHIP.

5-YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN



FY 25/26-29/30

Mission Statement

Children & Family Services promotes safety, well-being, and permanency through collaborative actions that empower children and families across Riverside County.

Vision Statement

Safe, resilient, and healthy children and families in Riverside County.

Our Strategic Priorities



PROTECTION

Safeguarding children from abuse and neglect through accountable action that promotes stability, dignity and healing.

PREVENTION

Helping families stay strong and supported so we can stop abuse before it happens and build a resilient child welfare team.

PARTNERSHIP

Working together with families, communities, and partners to create a caring, trauma-informed network that supports every child's well-being and future.

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About Children and Family Services

At the heart of Children and Family Services is the simple, unwavering belief that every child deserves protection, every family deserves support and every community thrives when prevention and partnership guide our work. These principles shape how CFS fulfills our mission each day, ensuring that safety, stability, connection and the voices of those we serve remain central to every decision.

Riverside County, home to 2.53 million people, is one of the most dynamic regions in the nation. As the fourth most populous county in California and the tenth in the United States, our region flourishes with diversity. Community bonds are strong, and these connections are essential to how we fulfill our mission, working alongside families, caregivers, educators, health providers, law enforcement and the community partners to safeguard children.

With just two employees in 1923, the Board of Supervisors formed what is now the Riverside County Department of Public Social Services. At its inception, the department's sole state funded program focused on the placement of "orphans." More than a century later through its multiple programs, DPSS serves almost 1.2 million people each year, from newborn infants to elders who have lived more than a century.

CFS has also grown significantly since those early years, represented by the growing number of children and families we serve and the workforce whose skill and compassion make this essential work possible. Within CFS, more than 1,300 social workers, supervisors and staff members support children and families across Riverside County's 7,300 square miles, partnering with them through moments of crisis and moments of hope.

In 2025, we strengthened our commitment to prevention with the launch of the Office of Child Abuse Prevention. The office promotes evidence based strategies that reduce maltreatment and support families long before crises emerge. By coordinating resources and expanding partnerships with public and private organizations, the office advances a prevention focused approach that keeps children safe within their communities.

Our commitment is to protect children, support families and expand families' access to vital support in ways that honor their strengths, experiences and aspirations. By prioritizing children's well being and collaborating across the community, CFS strives to build a future where Riverside County's children and families are protected, strengthened and able to thrive.

2024 Snapshot

Child Abuse Hotline Calls: 64,000+

Investigations Completed: 24,000+

Children in Foster Care: About 3,500

Children Served While Living Safely With Parents/Guardians: About 1,900



A message from our **Assistant Director**

The new strategic plan for Children and Family Services is built upon a steadfast commitment to better outcomes for at risk children and families. It reflects our conviction that children and those who serve them deserve protection, prevention and partnership in vulnerable times. It charts a focused path toward the year 2030 centered on early support, family stability and strong collaboration across communities.

Keeping children safely within their families of origin is central to our direction. When that cannot be achieved, we prioritize placement with relatives to preserve bonds, identity and continuity. This priority reinforces our broader work, and we are striving toward a kinship placement rate of 75 percent because children do best when surrounded by people they know and trust.

Our mission is carried forward by the people who stand with at risk children and families during some of the most difficult moments they will ever face. Social workers are often the first partners a family in crisis meets, offering steadiness, clarity and compassion when it matters most. Their role is demanding and takes an emotional toll. Protecting the well being of our child welfare workforce is essential to prevent burnout, unnecessary attrition, and ensuring they feel equipped to continue their vital work with strength and humanity.

This strategic plan is our roadmap, outlining ways we can prevent harm before it occurs, how we protect when safety concerns arise and how we build strong partnerships across households, agencies and communities. The plan aligns our efforts and provides guideposts to keep us moving forward together, sharpening priorities and strengthening decision making informed by data, research and the lived experiences of children, families and staff. Every element within the strategic plan is designed to expand support, strengthen stability and improve long term outcomes.

As we head toward 2030, our path is lighted by a shared commitment to a future defined by greater safety, stability and opportunity across Riverside County. It honors the resilience of families, the dedication of our staff and the strength of communities working together. Thank you for your partnership, your trust and the heart, skill and humanity you bring to this work every day. Protection, prevention and partnership remain our compass as we move ahead with purpose for every child and family.

In Partnership,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bridgette Hernandez'.

Bridgette Hernandez, MSW, MS
Assistant Director



Racial Disproportionality & Disparity (RDD) Committee

CFS is committed to transforming the child welfare system into one that is fair, respectful, and effective for all children and families. Equity, Access, and Opportunity (EAO) is embedded in every CFS goal, guiding efforts to address systemic inequities and ensure equal access to services.

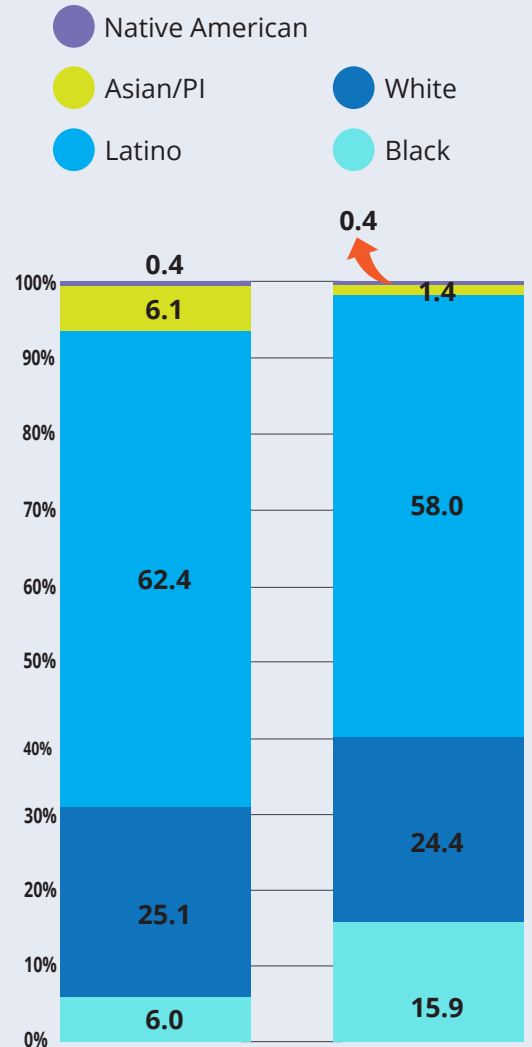


To advance this commitment, CFS established the Racial Disparity and Disproportionality (RDD) Committee, led by executive leadership. The committee develops strategies to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities—particularly those affecting Black children, who are disproportionately represented in foster care and face greater challenges in achieving permanency and stability.

The RDD Committee focuses on four strategic areas:

- Practice: Enhancing casework to reduce bias and support equitable family reunification.
- Workforce: Equipping staff with training and tools to engage all families effectively.
- Community: Partnering with local organizations to deliver culturally responsive services.
- Healthy Crownz: Promoting identity development and providing hair care education for Black children and their caregivers.

These efforts work together to dismantle systemic barriers and build a child welfare system rooted in dignity, fairness, and inclusion for all.

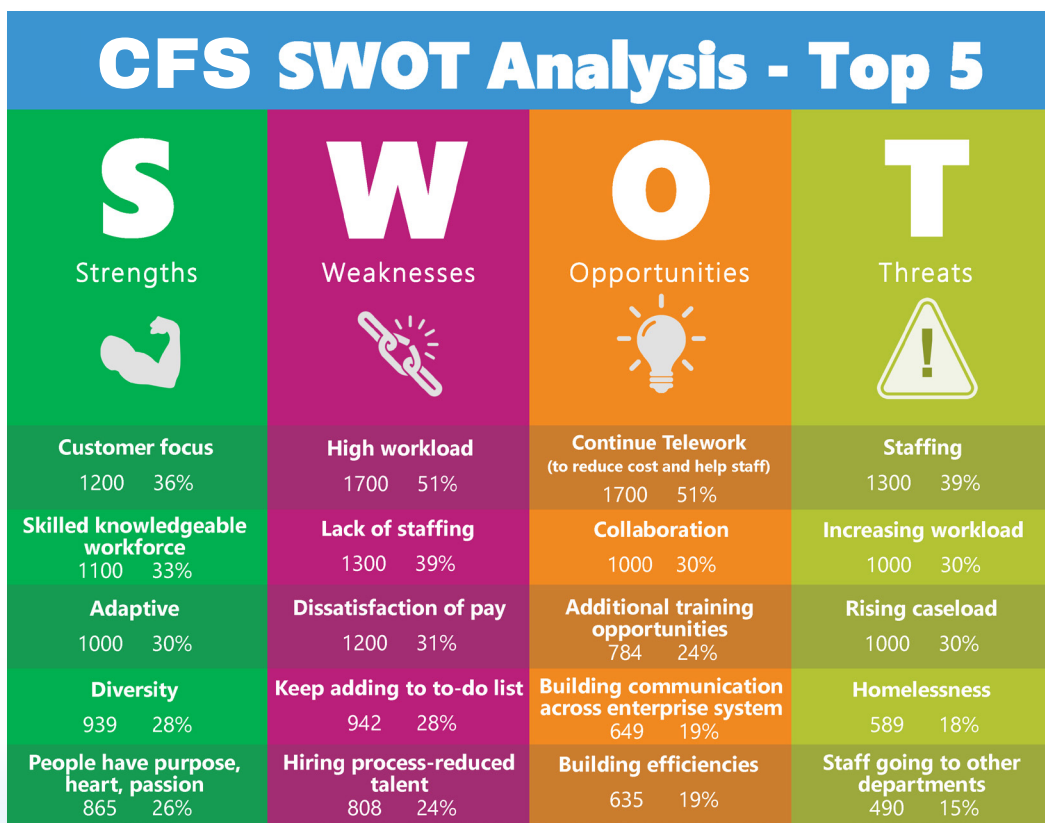


Black Disproportionality $15.9/6.0=2.65$
White Disproportionality $24.4/25.1=0.97$
Black/White Disparity $2.65/0.97=2.75$

“Black children are 2.75 times as likely to enter foster care as White children.”

CFS' Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

In 2024, the CFS division prioritized feedback and realignment as key drivers of its initiatives, emphasizing employee engagement and leadership development while reinforcing its commitment to being a learning organization and a collaborative partner within the community. As part of the process to establish new goals and objectives for CFS, a survey was launched during an All Staff Meeting in February 2025 aimed at engaging staff to share their perceptions of the division's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. The SWOT survey yielded valuable insights that informed the development of goals and strategies for the period of 2025-2030. The key findings regarding the top five strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats are summarized in the accompanying figure.



Strategic Priority 1:

OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE

Overview

Operational Excellence is rooted in our commitment toward continued improvement with consistently and efficiently delivering high-quality services to children and families while ensuring that resources are used effectively, and outcomes are optimized. Our focus is on improving the day-to-day operations within the organization, ensuring that every process, from case management to resource allocation, is as effective, efficient, and responsive as possible. Achieving operational excellence is a continuous effort that involves refining practices, reducing inefficiencies, and enhancing the quality of service to ensure the best outcomes for children and families in need.

GOAL 1:

Safely Reduce Caseloads

CFS will implement a multifaceted strategy to safely reduce caseloads through resource optimization, technology integration, preventive services, strong community partnerships, effective screening protocols, and timely case resolutions. A comprehensive approach ensures child safety, supports families, and creates manageable workloads for social workers.

STRATEGY A:

Strengthen Investigative Practices

Objectives:

- Improve use of SDM tools for accurate and consistent referral screening and risk assessment
- Ensure timely completion of investigations by monitoring aged referrals and setting clear caseload guidelines
- Establish sustainable workload expectations for Court Dependency Unit staff

STRATEGY B:

Enhance Case Management Post Jurisdiction/Disposition

Objectives:

- Use SDM tools to guide visitation and reunification planning
- Shorten time in out-of-home care by streamlining case processes and permanency planning
- Conduct timely Concurrent Planning Reviews (CPRs) to support clear, actionable plans for each child
- Maintain 95% timeliness in court report submissions to support permanency outcomes



GOAL 2: Develop Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) System

CFS employees will integrate CQI strategies into daily operations, continuously recognizing strengths, identifying areas for improvement, and implementing solutions across regions and service areas.

STRATEGY A: Increase CQI utilization across programs and initiatives

Objectives:

- Build easy-to-understand dashboards to track how well services are working
- Create a clear process to improve how quickly and effectively we respond to the needs of children and families
- Use technology to strengthen communication within the agency and with the community

STRATEGY B: Improve how we share, listen, and learn

Objectives:

- Create a clear and consistent way for teams to share what's working, talk about challenges, and apply lessons learned in everyday work.
- Set up regular ways to gather feedback from staff at all levels and from community partners—making sure their ideas help shape real improvements.
- Keep everyone informed by sharing updates on progress, challenges, and changes, helping build trust and transparency across the organization.

GOAL 3: Increase Lean Knowledge

CFS will embed Lean principles into its culture, processes, and staff development, fostering a Lean management philosophy that drives measurable improvements in operational efficiency, service delivery, and outcomes for children and families.

STRATEGY A: Increase Lean Six Sigma Training

Objectives:

- Ensure all staff receive foundational Lean Six Sigma training, with targeted advanced training to build internal expertise and lead process improvements.

STRATEGY B: Cultivate a Culture of Process Improvement

Objectives:

- Create a clear and consistent way for teams across the agency to identify and carry out small changes that improve how services are delivered and make daily work more efficient.



Strategic Priority 2:

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT & RETENTION

Overview

Workforce development and retention are critical components of ensuring that CFS can effectively meet the needs of children and families. Our workforce plays a direct role in safeguarding vulnerable children, supporting families, and achieving positive outcomes. It is essential for CFS to focus on strategies that support the growth, well-being, and satisfaction of our workforce.

GOAL 4: Increase Employee Satisfaction & Retention

CFS will foster a supportive, rewarding work environment to reduce turnover and burnout while strengthening organizational culture. By prioritizing respect, inclusion, and open communication, CFS will cultivate a workplace where staff feel valued, engaged, and motivated to stay.

STRATEGY A: Strengthen Engagement, Recognition, and Communication

Objectives:

- Increase employee satisfaction by 10% and retention to 80% or higher
- Use focus groups and structured feedback loops to turn staff input into action
- Form a Morale Committee and standardize recognition practices across offices
- Use daily huddles and communication boards to celebrate success and keep staff informed

STRATEGY B: Support Workload Balance and Staff Well-Being

Objectives:

- Use caseload dashboards and referral systems to improve workload equity
- Leverage daily huddles to manage workload in real time
- Expand wellness initiatives and explore flexible work options
- Integrate StrengthsFinders© into supervision to support development

GOAL 5: Leadership Development

CFS will expand leadership development opportunities to strengthen technical, adaptive, and interpersonal skills across all leadership levels. By equipping supervisors and managers with the necessary tools and guidance, CFS will cultivate a leadership pipeline that promotes continuous growth, accountability, and organizational excellence.



STRATEGY A:
Strengthen Supervisor and Manager Development

Objectives:

- Provide structured coaching for all new supervisors and managers during their first two years
- Define core training needs and offer practical leadership development opportunities
- Reinforce consistent leadership practices through the System of Supervision
- Expand learning to include communication and presentation skills
- Launch a Leadership Café to support ongoing learning and collaboration

STRATEGY B:
Build Leadership Pathways and Succession Planning

Objectives:

- Create a clear leadership progression map for staff at all levels
- Improve access to leadership training and mentorship opportunities
- Promote transparency and engagement in leadership development initiatives

GOAL 6:
Strengthen Staff Development

CFS will invest in staff development by fostering growth and skill-building opportunities, ensuring a resilient workforce capable of adapting to the evolving needs of children and families.

STRATEGY A:
Strengthen Staff Training & Learning Culture

Objectives:

- Safeguard dedicated time for staff training, ensuring professional development remains a priority
- Review and refine the induction training process, identifying key areas for improvement to better support new staff
- Expand hands-on training opportunities, allowing staff to actively practice key concepts learned in formal instruction
- Refine the structured process for sharing case review insights, promoting continuous learning and skill enhancement
- Implement Motivational Interview training, equipping staff with tools to enhance customer engagement and communication effectiveness



GOAL 7: **Create a Culture of Safety**

CFS will establish and sustain a safety-focused environment that protects children, families, and staff while fostering a culture of psychological safety, transparency, and well-being.

STRATEGY A: **Implement Safety Science in Practice**

Objectives:

- Formalize a partnership with the National Partnership for Child Safety, leveraging best practices to strengthen agency-wide safety initiatives
- Provide refresher training on all SDM tools, ensuring fidelity to decision-making protocols
- Embed Reflective Supervision as a core leadership model, fostering a culture of trust, learning, and continuous improvement
- Refine structured case review processes, ensuring lessons learned are systematically analyzed, shared, and integrated into practice

STRATEGY B: **Reintegrate Safety Organized Practice (SOP)**

Objectives:

- Embed SOP at all key decision points across all programs, reinforcing consistency in safety-oriented decision-making
- Develop SOP champions throughout the division, empowering staff to lead implementation and advocacy efforts
- Establish ongoing SOP training programs, ensuring staff remain proficient in safety-driven engagement strategies



Strategic Priority 3:

CUSTOMER SERVICE PARTNERSHIPS

Overview

Customer service partnerships play a pivotal role in ensuring that families, children, and community stakeholders receive the support and services they need. These partnerships can improve access to resources, streamline communication, and create a more responsive system that is centered around trauma informed care and the well-being of those being served.

GOAL 8: Enhance Community Supports

CFS will strengthen community networks and form meaningful partnerships to improve outcomes, build family resilience, and expand prevention efforts, reducing reliance on formal care systems.

STRATEGY A: Expand Prevention & Early Intervention Networks

Objectives:

- Develop and strengthen the Office of Child Abuse Prevention, ensuring a structured approach to prevention and intervention
- Establish a community pathway for hotline referral diversion, redirecting to appropriate community-based support systems for timely intervention
- Form a consortium of public and private agencies, creating a unified prevention network that enhances service coordination and resource-sharing

STRATEGY B: Strengthen Collaboration with Community & County Partners

Objectives:

- Enrich partnerships with law enforcement agencies, identifying shared strategies to support child welfare efforts

- Expand Multi-Disciplinary Team protocols, improving engagement, case coordination, and outcomes for families
- Increase the number of Innovative Model of Care providers, enhancing service accessibility and effectiveness for complex needs youth
- Leverage the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) to strengthen collaboration between caregivers and parents, reinforcing shared parenting principles and support networks

STRATEGY C: Establish a Kin First Culture

Objectives:

- Increase kin placements to 75%, ensuring children remain connected to family whenever possible
- Develop a centralized process for collecting and communicating familial connections, improving coordination and access to kinship resources
- Implement the Kin-First Accelerator Program, providing targeted support and system improvements for kin placements
- Establish a Kinship Advisory Council, incorporating caregiver voice in shaping policy and best practices
- Expand wraparound supports for kin placements, ensuring families have access to necessary resources, training, and financial assistance to sustain care



CFS Commitments



Safeguard the most vulnerable, and partner to promote positive, safe, health and well-being outcomes.



Build partnerships that support effective, coordinated early prevention and early intervention supports, services and resources.



Invest in growing and developing present and future leaders.



Foster a spirit of curiosity and strive to be a learning organization.



Stand for diversity, equity and inclusion.



Celebrate success at all levels of the organization.



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