

# **Tioga County Department of Social Services**

## **Legislative 2022 Annual Report**

### **Children and Adult Services**

#### **Child Protective/Preventive Services**

- 1168 hotline reports received: 793 investigative, 375 Family Assessment Response (FAR)
  - 201 alleging drug use
  - 160 alleging domestic violence
- 441 investigations determined: 123 indicated and closed, 21 indicated and opened for preventive services
- 45 families served, involving 116 children
- 19 families discharged from Preventive Services
- 15 Neglect petitions filed on behalf of 21 children
- 2 Abuse petitions filed on behalf of 5 children

#### **Foster Care/Adoption/Home Finding**

- 17 Foster Care Admissions: 12 abuse/neglect, 5 Juvenile Delinquents
- 24 Foster Care Discharges: 13 reunited with parent, 4 “aged out,” 1 was placed in OCFS custody and 6 children were adopted
- 6 Tioga County youth were in detention for a total of 151 days
- 4 children freed for adoption
- 2 children placed in a pre-adoptive home with an early 2022 adoption planned
- Kinship Foster Home Care placements were at 31.6% of all placements at the end of 2022. This is a 5% increase since 2021.

#### **Child Advocacy Center (CAC) and Safe Harbor**

- The CAC serviced 115 children and their families. This is an increase from the 92 children served in 2021, an increase of 20%.
- The Tioga CAC applied for and was awarded a grant totaling over \$300,000 for a period of three years; the grant allowed for the acquisition of a second full-time advocate, the purchase of a portable interviewing system and future purchase of medical equipment for sexual assault exams to occur on site.
- 44 youth served by the Safe Harbor program
- January is recognized as Human Trafficking Awareness Month, per legislative proclamation. Over 300 “Shed Light on Human Trafficking” bags were distributed throughout the County to raise awareness.

## **Adult Protective Services**

- Received 422 Adult Services referrals
- Received 195 Adult Protective referrals
- Conducted 103 Adult Protective investigations
- 3 active Guardianship cases
- Representative Payee for 50 individuals

## **PINS Diversion**

110 Referrals resulting in 13 cases being opened for DSS Diversion Services. The remaining cases were informational or referred out for community-based services.

## **Staff Development**

- 695 participants attended 181 state-sponsored virtual trainings, totaling 2,773 hours
- 727 participants attended 71 local-sponsored trainings, totaling 1068 hours
- 21 new hires completed New Employee Orientation totaling 60.5 hours of training
- 9 new Caseworkers received 1150 hours of training through modeling and hands-on practical experience

## **Successes:**

- 6 Adoption finalizations
- The average length of time spent in foster care for the children discharged in 2022 was 1 year and 7 months.

## **Challenges:**

- Staffing turnover – operated at an average of 68% trained casework staff throughout the year
- Lost parent education with Cornell Cooperative Extension
- Many programs still providing their services remotely

## **Goals for 2023**

Fully implement the Blind Removal Process and the Kinship Firewall process:

- Blind Removals – a process where an identified team meets to discuss whether a child needs to be removed from their home. All identifying information is protected to prohibit bias in decision making.
- Kinship Firewall – This is a process by which a review is conducted, and approval is required at any time a child is removed or moved from placement to placement to ensure that there are no family members or fictive kin that would be suitable for placement rather than a non-familial setting.

## **Accounting/Systems/Fraud Activities**

*The Accounting Department is responsible for:*

- Monitoring and processing all cash receipts and disbursements of the department.
- Accurate recording and reporting of all agency expenditures and revenues to the County Treasurer's Office. This includes all program and administrative expenditures.
- Preparing and submitting monthly and quarterly claims in a timely manner to state agencies to receive maximum reimbursements of federal and state aid.
- Other functions include bank reconciliations, financial management case reconciliations, budget preparations, audits, and maintaining the agencies Rep-payee accounts
- Issues temporary benefit cards

*The Systems Department is responsible for:*

- Maintaining and providing user support for both hardware and software
- Managing a variety of hardware from Apple iPad devices to computers
- Maintaining security access to a variety of state-owned software such as the Welfare Management System, I/EDR (Imaging and Enterprise Document Repository), MyWorkspace, Connections and other applications
- Providing agency-wide services such as data entry, processing state reports – both electronic and printed, and creating custom databases for departments across the agency
- Providing staff with remote access as needed

**Successes:**

- The Accounting Department participated in the Annual State Single Audit. The programs tested were HEAP (40 records) and SNAP. They also audited 40 administrative disbursements. There were no significant findings.
- Accounting and Systems continue to integrate work functions to support to each other's units. Accounting has assumed daily BICS processing
- Accounting processed 644 EBT cards for expedited benefits and replacements.
- Accounting has overcome many challenges this year including turnover, limited staffing, and hiring and training new staff.
- Accounting worked with Adult Protective Services and maintained a total of 50+ rep payee accounts. Accounting did an estimated 6,000 transactions including taking in their incomes and processing payments totaling \$570,290 on their behalf. Accounting has also provided APS with monthly ledgers, and other needed reports.

- Accounting submitted claims for approximately \$11,850,000 in state and Federal reimbursements.
- In 2022, we continued the transition employee's desktop computers from the New York State Network to the County Network. We plan to have all employees on the County Network by the end of 2023.
- Systems is responsible for metering mail for almost all county departments including offices at the HHS Complex, Sheriff's Office, Treasurer's Office, DMV, and other departments. The mail department metered over 115,000 pieces of mail in 2022
- Local revenues and recoveries totaled \$946,224 in 2022. Local recoveries are collections from or on behalf of a client or their estate effected by any legal processes authorized by the Social Services Law

### **Fraud and FEDS**

The Fraud and Front-End Detection Systems (FEDS) Unit's primary function is to ensure that the expenditure of public funds is only for those who are legally entitled to receive these benefits. Through a variety of mandated programs and local initiatives, DSS investigators save taxpayer dollars by uncovering fraud of unreported assets, income, household composition, dual assistance, fraudulent vendor billing, misuse of funds, and the filing of false applications. Referrals to the fraud unit can be generated from within the agency or from external sources.

- In 2022, our Fraud Unit was instrumental in the arrest and prosecution of one of the largest fraud cases in New York State. The diligent efforts of our Fraud Investigator uncovered fraud due to identity theft that spanned many years across multiple states and counties. The case included \$249,811 in Supplemental Security Income benefits and \$588,645 in state benefits. The case was investigated by The Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General, the Tioga County Sheriff's Office, and the New York State Police, with assistance provided by the U.S. Marshalls Service. The case was prosecuted by the U.S. Attorney's Office, Northern District of New York.

#### **Fraud Referrals:**

**152 Received (In agency 56, Electronic 78, Support Collection 7, Public 11)**

**124 Unfounded**

**1 Arrest**

**27 Agency Repayments (Fraud referral and Overpayment referrals that had fraud involvement)**

**\$ 5,267.04 in Public Assistance monies**

**\$ 51,028.80 in SNAP monies**

**\$ 558,880.52 in Medicaid monies**

**\$ 3,676.15 in HEAP monies**

**\$ 618,852.51 Total monies referred for collections**

**Overpayment Referrals:**

52 Received

01 Pending

43 No overpayments

08 Agency errors (MA \$426.67, SNAP \$13505.00)

**\$13,931.67 Total of monies referred for collections**

**Front End Detection (FEDS):**

149 Received

45 Unfounded

104 Founded

\$ 37,951.00 Total Monthly Local Share Savings

\$ 103,154.00 Total Monthly Savings

\$ 227,707.00 6 Month Projected Local Share Savings

**\$618,924.00 6 Month Projected Savings**

**Eligibility Verification Review (EVR):**

1 Received

0 Unfounded

1 Founded

\$ 266.00 Monthly Savings

**\$ 1,596.00 6 Month Projected Savings**

## **Employment and Transitional Supports**

### **Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP)**

- The Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP) is a vital program that helps low-income people pay the cost of heating and heating/cooling repair costs in their homes. The 2021-2022 HEAP Season ran from October 1, 2021, through September 30, 2022. The HEAP Unit processed 6869 benefits resulting in allocations of \$4,849,799 or an average of \$706 per benefit. This includes a one-time Regular Arrears Supplement that many households received.
- HEAP also assisted 97 homeowners with the repair or replacement of their primary heating equipment, for a total of \$129,001.30.

### **Temporary Assistance and Intake/Employment Unit:**

- DSS started as a VITA site in 2004. Assistance is provided to working individuals to have their tax returns e-filed at no cost. In 2022, for tax year 2021, 225 returns were processed resulting in Federal refunds of \$375,812.00 and State refunds of \$68,876.00 totaling \$444,688.00, of which \$101,964.00 was EITC monies, all returning to, and being reinvested in, the local economy. Since 2006, we have completed 2,269 returns with a combined total in tax refunds of \$5,053,912.00.
- Employment Specialists closely monitored 11 employable work experience participants who completed work projects for 4 different not-for-profit agencies throughout the community; 1 had a positive job placement, 5 were closed/denied for non-compliance with work experience, 2

are now on medical and 3 are currently in compliance and working their mandated work experience.

- In 2022, the Tioga Career Center's reception signed in 4,101 walk-in customers. This number is up from 2021 when 3,036 walk-in customers were signed in.
- In 2022, the Tioga Career Center's reception answered and assisted 9,029 incoming phone calls. This number is up from 2021 when 7,838 incoming phone calls were reported.
- Staff meets weekly with employable persons applying for and/or in receipt of Safety Net and TANF, reviews their job search logs. 313 duplicated Temporary Assistance Customers were assigned to JOBS; of those 313, 33 unduplicated had actual job placements.
- The total number of averaged Cash Assistance cases decreased from 245 in 2021 to 210 in 2022.
- The number of families in the Family Assistance (TANF) caseload average decreased from 152 in 2021 to 132 in 2022.
- The Safety Net caseload (single individuals and couples as well as families that have reached the 60-month time limit) average was 78 in 2022, an increase from 59 in 2021.
- The Daycare unit is co-located in the Career Center. In 2022, the Daycare caseload was comprised of an average of 119 cases serving an average of 208 children and 151 adults. In 2021, the Daycare caseload was comprised of an average of 98 cases serving an average of 167 children and 125 adults.
- The Social Security Disability Case Manager received 12 new SN referrals and 7 new TANF referrals. Due to the receipt of SSI 1 TANF case closed, 1 TANF case reduced, and 11 SN cases closed.

#### **SNAP/Medicaid Unit**

- Using the "Task-Based" Process Management Model, this Unit processed applications, re-certifications and undercare maintenance for a total of 16,596 completed tasks in 2022.
- The average monthly number of individuals receiving SNAP (Food Stamps) benefits in 2022 was 5,051 (approximately 1,698 of these were children).
- The monthly average of the total number of Tioga County individuals on Medicaid in 2022 was 12,851. 3,136 of these cases continued to be managed by FSMA staff, the remainder are on the State Exchange. Average number of SSI individuals was 1,057 (184 were children).
- The average number of Chronic Care (nursing home, assisted living and waiver programs) Medicaid cases was 230 per month for 2022.

#### **Successes:**

- Maintained a high level of customer service despite staffing challenges, meaning citizens of Tioga County were provided with housing, food, health insurance, and heat

#### **Goals:**

- To become fully staffed and retain the staff we have.
- To work with the State as they "unwind" policies that were put in place during the COVID public health emergency.
- Continue succession planning, as several knowledgeable employees prepare for retirement.

### **Child Support Enforcement Unit (CSEU)**

- The Child Support Enforcement Unit collected \$5,226,583 in 2022.
- Average monthly caseload 1,965.
- Reimbursements to DSS in 2022 totaled \$493,878 compared to \$530,725 in 2021.
- The Child Support Enforcement Unit filed a total of 673 petitions in 2022, up 20% from 557 in 2021.

### **Youth Bureau**

- Allocations of \$46,600 were distributed to ten Community Organizations and Municipal Recreational Programs.
- Newly established Youth Sports & Education Opportunity funds of \$6,653 distributed to one organization

### **Tioga Career Center**

- Provides a variety of seamless customer-driven employment services to both businesses and individual job seekers in the greater Tioga County area.
- One-stop for many employment-related services:
  - Unemployment Assistance and mandated appointments
  - BOCES GED class
  - Resumes, job search assistance, on-line application
  - Computer skills, tutoring
  - Funding opportunities for classroom and on-the-job- training opportunities
- Services for the community provided by Workforce staff, Literacy Volunteers, GST BOCES, WIOA Youth Program – Cornell Cooperative Extension Tioga, Access-VR, and other Tioga County agencies.
- Collaborating with Tioga County School Districts with transitional and supportive services for students
- Services for employers:
  - Job postings, hiring events, on-the-job training opportunities
  - Job Fairs with free advertising on radio, newspaper, and social media
- Unemployment Services
  - Developed Department of Labor Unemployment contacts to more readily resolve issues
  - Assisted and resolved many customers with unemployment benefit barriers