

Children and Family Services 2023–2026 Strategic Plan

We are collaborating with families and partners to eliminate disparities, reduce the impact of trauma, and promote the safety and well-being of all children in Hennepin County.

Background and who we are

In November 2022, Hennepin County Children and Family Services (CFS) implemented a new leadership structure and realignment of programs. The restructure brought increased capacity to our service area leadership to support the entire team and the work they do each day. Now, we are using that capacity to think strategically about how to propel CFS into a more equitable, collaborative future.

With this strategic plan, CFS demonstrates our commitment to ongoing systems transformation. Our strategic plan creates a path for the future, and how we are going to show up — for families and the community, and as a service area — for the next three years. CFS is becoming more planful and proactive. The workforce is supported, and our practice is becoming more culturally responsive and increasingly trauma informed. CFS is building trusting relationships and authentic partnerships, with a commitment to reducing racial disparities.

Children and Family Services continuum



CFS currently employs over 500 staff, providing a continuum of care for thousands of families each year. This continuum of care includes preventive services such as the Parenting Support Outreach Program (PSOP), child maltreatment investigations and child protection services, child care and foster care licensing, and vital services that provide long-term support to children and youth. Many of these services are governed by federal and state statutes, with non-negotiable mandates that workers must follow.

At the same time, CFS is listening and responding to the children and families we serve, and the partners who help meet their needs. Our innovative community engagement team members are intentionally strengthening community relationships, centering the lived experience of those most impacted by the system, to help enact much-needed systemic and policy changes.

We recognize that racial disparities affect our residents' quality of life and their experience in the child welfare system. Our vision for child and family well-being means reducing those disparities so Hennepin County families can thrive. In the strategic directions and success indicators we have developed, we repeatedly emphasize that our actions are intended to benefit "all families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system." This means that reducing disparities is continually at the front of our minds. We will track the results of our actions over time to ensure that our impact matches our intention.

This strategic plan will help focus CFS' efforts, prioritizing activities that will eliminate disparities, reduce the impact of trauma, and promote the safety and well-being of children in Hennepin County.

Strategic plan development

Mission, vision, values

As part of the strategic planning process, we reviewed and recommitted ourselves to the Children and Family Services mission, vision, and values.



Mission

To promote safety, stability, healthy development, and well-being of children and youth by supporting and partnering with children, youth, and families.

Vision

Children and youth are thriving in safe, stable families.

Values

- Child and youth safety
- Child, youth and family well-being
- Respectful partnership
- Cultural humility
- Data informed decision-making

The mission, vision, and values formed the basis for the rest of the strategic planning process.

Strategic plan development

Core principles

Six core principles guided this strategic planning process and will continue to influence our actions going forward. Below are the six principles along with descriptions naming how we intend to embody each principle.

Family focused

“Family” is broadly defined to include individuals identified by each family as part of their family system (e.g., extended family, kin, friends).



Families are welcomed as active, empowered participants in developing plans and making decisions.

Trauma informed

CFS recognizes current and historical trauma caused by the child protection system, including trauma specific to cultures and races.



CFS treats families with empathy and understanding, ensuring that systems work for families, rather than asking families to work for systems.

Forward thinking

CFS creates adaptable, data informed plans.



CFS intentionally prioritizes plans that incorporate cultural responsiveness, disparity reduction, and trauma informed practices.

Disparity reduction

All CFS staff are responsible for considering changes across CFS programs that will more equitably meet the needs of families.



CFS continually monitors data and information on CFS programs to identify disparities and opportunities to reduce them.

Customer service with compassion

CFS treats families, community members, service providers, and partners with dignity, respect, kindness, and empathy.



CFS is honest, consistent, transparent, and accountable.

Culturally responsive

CFS staff recognize their own implicit biases and understand their own cultural constructs.



CFS regularly connects with families to determine if their experiences match staff intention.

Phases of work

Phase 1: Discovery

Children and Family Services began the strategic planning process by listening to stakeholders who have an interest in the success of the organization. Each has a unique perspective about what it will take for the organization to succeed.

From March through May 2023, we held a total of 16 input sessions with 78 participants. Stakeholder groups included CFS staff at all levels, African American community agencies, African American parents with lived experience of the child protection system, American Indian community members, internal partners, and service providers. We gathered youth input through a survey of current extended foster care and legacy youth. We also incorporated input from several previous focus groups conducted with youth and parents in 2022.

Input sessions were conducted as semi-structured focus groups lasting 60–90 minutes, during which interviewers aimed to ask a primary list of questions but could ask additional questions as needed. Session questions were the same for each specific stakeholder group, with slight differences across groups.

Stakeholders provided rich insight and perspective during the input sessions. They were candid and willing to share key insights about how CFS could improve operations and strengthen relationships. Throughout the discussions, key themes began to emerge and influence the strategic planning process.

The leadership project team (described below) reviewed the stakeholder input and reflected on what was said. The team began to form a vision for the future of CFS, grounded in the needs named by stakeholders.

Four visionary categories emerged from stakeholder feedback: prevention, culturally responsive and trauma aware support, collaborative partnerships, and workforce well-being. These categories, together with the core principles, created the framework for the strategic directions.

The table below identifies examples of the content shared in the stakeholder sessions that led to the development of the visionary categories. These are some of the most common themes that emerged but are not meant to reflect the total breadth and depth of all input received, nor are they listed in order of importance.

Visionary categories — themes from stakeholder feedback

Prevention

- Lack of understanding of the rules, obligations, and child protection process
- Need for culturally responsive practices
- Knowledge: need and desire to better understand processes and policies
- Trauma: lack of resources to support healing, resulting in harmful cycles
- Racial disparities: can begin at intake in the amount and types of maltreatment reports that are received by CFS
- Relationships: the importance of the social worker relationship with children and families as well as internal and external partners

Workforce well-being

- Staff burnout and turnover
- Need for culturally responsive practices training
- Care: staff need to feel cared about and valued
- Consistency: need for consistent messaging from all levels of CFS on policies and procedures
- Knowledge: need and desire to better understand processes and policies
- Racial disparities: workforce representation as well as cultural awareness and responsiveness
- Support: staff need to feel supported by all levels of CFS
- Training: need for all staff to have continuous training opportunities
- Trauma: need to recognize secondary trauma

Collaborative partnerships

- Collaboration: need and desire to collaborate more effectively and more often with CFS
- Consistency: need consistent and accurate communication and practices from all CFS staff
- Knowledge: need and desire to better understand CFS processes, policies, and limitations
- Resources: requests for more access and knowledge of necessary resources
- Racial disparities: need to increase culturally responsive providers
- Staff turnover: the amount of staff turnover in CFS affects partners and the overall ability to support children and families

Culturally responsive and trauma aware support

- Fear of the system itself and fear of losing children
- Need for trauma informed services
- Need culturally responsive practices that respects each individual family's needs
- Care: Children and families can tell when social workers care, and it makes a difference
- Communication: the need for better/improved communication with families and children
- Consistency: children and families need consistent communication about policies and practices
- Hope: positive changes happening in CFS
- Racial disparities: African American and Native American children are disproportionately represented in CFS
- Relationships: the importance of social workers' relationships with children and families, as well as relationships between CFS and their internal and external partners
- Support: the need to provide quality support to both children and families

Phase 2: Strategic planning

CFS convened a leadership project team in February 2023. This dedicated team included a cross-section of CFS program managers, a racial equity champion and a data translator. The team met ten times between February and June 2023, including an in-person strategic planning session on June 9.

The process began with a review of the department's mission, vision, and values. Over the next few months, the team also discussed the core principles, conducted an environmental scan, completed an analysis of strengths, opportunities, aspirations and results (SOAR analysis), and devoted significant time to absorbing and integrating the input from stakeholders.

Ultimately, the team developed the following strategic directions and success indicators to serve as an aspirational road map for CFS.

We want everyone to understand our commitment to collaborating with families and partners to eliminate disparities, reduce the impact of trauma, and promote the safety and well-being of all children in Hennepin County.

Leadership Project Team members

Allison Boynes

Joey Glassman

Vickie Goulette

Kristen Huffman

Loretta Huffman

Suzanne Kpowulu

Morgan Larson

Michelle Lefebvre

Karen Marion

Tricia Morgan

Liz Scudder

Cathy Spann

Josh Stillwell

Bao Vang

Rochelle Wright

Project Managers: Megan Waldsmayate and Nancy Seger

Phase 3: Implementation

CFS will establish concrete action steps and metrics related to each goal for each of the next three years.

Through implementation planning, CFS is committed to prioritizing work that directly aligns with our Strategic Directions and is focused on taking the necessary steps to achieve our goals.

Strategic directions and success indicators

The strategic directions are high-level visionary goals showing the future that CFS is striving toward. These goals are grounded in the themes that emerged from our stakeholders and reflect our work priorities for the next three years. The success indicators describe what

it will look like and feel like when we achieve the goals named in the strategic directions. CFS is committed to taking concrete action to help this plan become a reality.

Strategic direction

Uplift community efforts to prevent system involvement by eliminating family risk factors and racial disparities.

Success indicators

- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, are recognized as experts of their own lives.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, have the skills, resources, and knowledge they need to support the safe and healthy development of their children.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, have access to a wide range of equitable, sustainable, and culturally responsive community-based prevention services.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, are safe accessing services and advocating for their needs without fear of repercussions.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, have a voice in critical decision making through family centered meetings (such as critical family response meetings and family group conferences) that bring together wider family groups and community providers to identify strengths and needs using a collaborative and culturally appropriate approach.

Strategic direction

Create and sustain a robust, competent, and inclusive workforce.

Success indicators

- Staff are equipped with knowledge and skills to do their job consistently and effectively.
- Workloads allow for relationship building, creativity, and innovation.
- The CFS workforce both reflects and understands the norms and values of the diverse backgrounds in the community we serve.
- Staff are valued and supported by all levels of CFS.
- Staff practice cultural humility and respect cultural differences to eliminate racial disparities.
- Institutional knowledge is preserved in a way that is accessible.

Strategic direction

Be an attentive, honorable, forthright and considerate partner in eliminating racial disparities and increasing positive outcomes for families.

Success indicators

- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, and our partners experience authentic relationships with CFS grounded in trust and respect.
- Community support resources are widely available to all families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, as well as to our partners.
- CFS informs, consults, involves, collaborates, and empowers all families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, along with our partners.
- CFS provides clear, consistent information on our limitations and legal requirements.

Strategic direction

Partner with children and their families to design personalized plans that eliminate racial disparities and reduce the impact of trauma.

Success indicators

- Race does not determine outcomes in CFS.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, consistently receive innovative, culturally responsive, trauma informed services.
- CFS recognizes all families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, as full partners to develop solutions together.
- All families, particularly those disproportionately represented in our system, and our partners are confident that CFS is providing high quality services.



Hennepin County

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