Capacity Building in Community-Based Care:

Summary of Efforts from 2021 to 2023

the center

TEXAS CENTER FOR CHILD AND FAMILY STUDIES

November 2023

Four Single Source Continuum Contractors (SSCCs) in Community-Based Care (CBC) areas[1] – 2INgage (Big Country and Texoma), Belong (South Central and Hill Country), OCOK (Metroplex West), and Saint Francis (Panhandle) – used funding from the 87th Texas Legislature to design and implement a joint capacity building plan to address inadequate placement capacity for children in substitute care. The plan was designed to build quality capacity to strengthen the system and advance the goals of community-based care to promote child safety, permanency, and wellbeing.

Launched in fall 2021 and concluding in August 2023, the SSCC joint plan included six specific projects designed to target different capacity challenges along the continuum of care:

1 Create new capacity for higher needs adolescents

Develop RFPs for new or expanded services for residential treatment, sex offender treatment, and stabilization and assessment programs. Recruit providers to start or expand these programs.

2 Engage top national programs in serving youth with complex needs

Conduct a national search for quality providers to provide specialized care for teens with complex needs. Look for opportunities to contract for existing needs and bring experienced providers to Texas.

3 Specialized consultation and support for providers

Develop supportive services and assistance for providers in SSCC networks to build and maintain capacity and enhance quality. Contract with a consultant to assess provider needs, then develop resources to meet those needs.

4 Recruitment blitz for foster parents in SSCC regions

Partner with the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS) and Daley Solutions to recruit new foster parents through a media and social media campaign recruitment model.

5 Support expansion of kinship and reunification services

Enhance service by contracting with an external consultant with expertise in kinship care. Each SSCC will develop their own plans to expand kinship and reunification services in their catchment.

6 Define the importance of a stable workforce in capacity building

Implement a credentialing process for permanency supervisors to demonstrate essential skills and competencies, with the goal of reducing permanency worker turnover and decreasing time to permanency.

Throughout the implementation of the joint projects, the SSCCs were adaptive in response to child welfare system changes, the shifting needs of their catchment areas, and the lessons learned through process evaluation. Consistent with a continuous quality improvement approach, this flexibility allowed for adjustments to be made to the joint projects as needed.

---

1 Since the initiation of the capacity building efforts reflected in this report, new SSCCs in the state have been launched as CBC implementation has expanded. Since only four catchments were the subject of these efforts, when we refer to "SSCCs," "all SSCCs, or "the SSCCs" in this report, we're referring only to Saint Francis, 2INgage, OCOK, and Belong, and their respective catchments, unless otherwise indicated.

In addition to the joint projects, each SSCC used some of the allocated funding to undertake capacity building efforts in their own catchments.

At the outset of the joint projects, the SSCCs contracted with the Texas Center for Child and Family Studies (the Center), a supporting arm of the Texas Alliance of Child and Family Services (TACFS), to compile and document information related to implementation and outcomes of the SSCC joint capacity building projects. This report was prepared by the Center using data provided by the SSCCs, along with supplementary data where noted. The report summarizes implementation and outcomes associated with each of the joint projects, as well as individual SSCC efforts in their catchments.

THE FOUR SSCCs ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR NEARLY A QUARTER OF CHILDREN IN CARE

At the end of August 2023, there were 18,878 children in the Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) conservatorship statewide.[2] Twenty-four percent were under the responsibility of one of the four SSCCs participating in the capacity building initiatives.[3]

FEWER CHILDREN ARE WITHOUT PLACEMENT IN SSCC CATCHMENTS

This table shows the number of children without placement (CWOP) in each of the four CBC areas from January 2022 through August 2023.

Belong, 4%
2INgage, 6%
Saint Francis, 6%
OCOK, 8%
The rest of the state, 76%
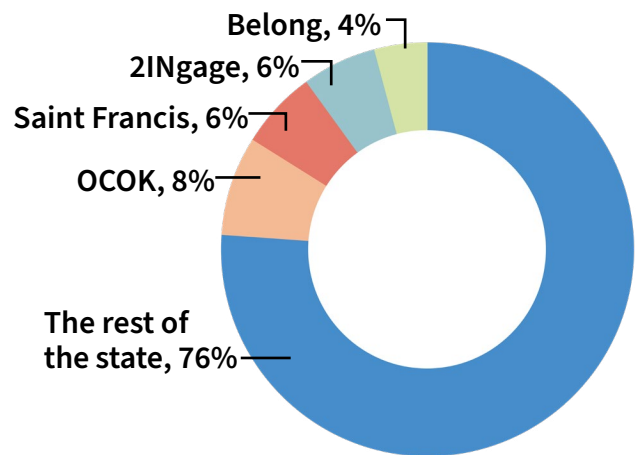
NUMBER OF CHILDREN WITH A CWOP EPISODE DURING THE MONTH																			
2022												**2023**							
Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug
2Ingage																			
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Belong																			
0	0	1	0	0	0	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
OCOK																			
0	0	1	0	6	7	2	2	2	2	0	1	0	2	4	2	4	1	4	7
Saint Francis																			
1	1	0	0	0	1	3	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

In the month with the highest combined number of CWOP episodes among all children in the four SSCC catchments, there were a total of nine unique children with a CWOP episode (July 2022).[4]

---

2 This includes children in conservatorship ages zero to 17.

3 Source: Publicly available DFPS monthly data.

4 Current DFPS data on the number of children in CWOP in legacy areas was not available at the time of this report, but historically the SSCCs have had substantially fewer children in CWOP compared to legacy care during the same measurement points. For example, there were about 200 unique children in legacy care with a CWOP episode in August 2022, compared with 2 children in CBC care with a CWOP episode during the same month.

At the catchment level:

2INgage has not had a child without placement during 2022 or 2023.

The highest number of OCOK children without a placement during any month in the project period was 7.

Belong has not had a child without placement since July 2022.

Saint Francis has not had a child without placement since August 2022.

HIGH QUALITY OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS MEET CRITICAL TREATMENT NEEDS AND REDUCE CWOP

As an immediate step toward reducing children without placement at the outside of the capacity building efforts, the SSCCs prioritized the procurement of 13 new out-of-state contracts by December 2021.

Two-thirds of children in the four SSCC catchments who are placed out of state are placed in kinship homes, and most of these are intended to be permanent.[5] The other third of children placed out-of-state are placed in residential settings. Out-of-state residential placements only occur when youth with complex needs require specialized care that Texas does not have the capacity to provide. All in-state options capable of meeting high acuity needs are exhausted before an out-of-state residential placement is sought.

Out-of-state contracts for needed residential treatment involve close monitoring, collaboration, and communication. Compliance and monitoring teams from the SSCCs make regular visits to treatment centers to assess for quality, safety, and adherence to licensing standards. Permanency specialists conduct regular in-person visits and monitor children's safety and permanency plans. On average, children placed in out-of-state residential treatment stabilize and move back in-state within about six months.

At the catchment level:

OCOK's out-of-state residential placements increased concurrently with the number of CWOP episodes during the summer months in both years of the evaluation.

All SSCCs saw increases in out-of-state residential placements in spring and/or summer 2023.

Combined across all SSCCs, 17 children were placed out-of-state in residential settings in August 2023, down from 26 during the same month the previous year.

OUT-OF-STATE RESIDENTIAL PLACEMENTS

Legend: OCOK, Belong, Saint Francis, 2INgage

---
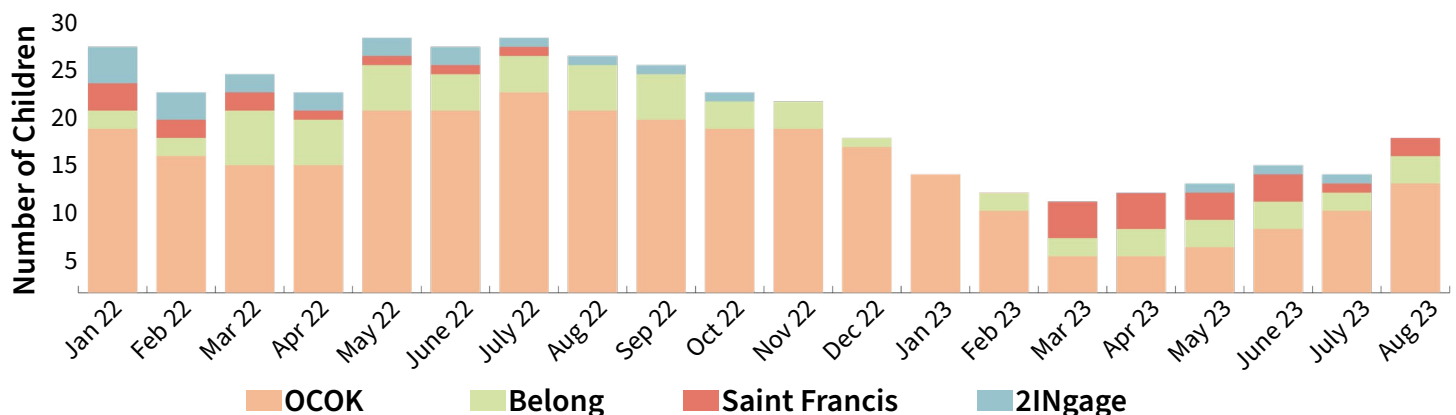
5 In August 2022, the Center analyzed data on all children from the SSCC catchments placed out of state at any point during the first half of 2022. The figures cited in this section come from that report, which can be found here.

EMERGENCY SHELTER PLACEMENTS ARE DECLINING

Emergency shelter placements can be used to keep siblings together or prevent CWOP episodes while longer-term placements are sought. Despite monthly fluctuations that peaked in summer 2022, the number of children in SSCC catchments with an emergency shelter placement has trended down over the project period.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN IN EMERGENCY SHELTER PLACEMENTS ACROSS ALL SSCCS
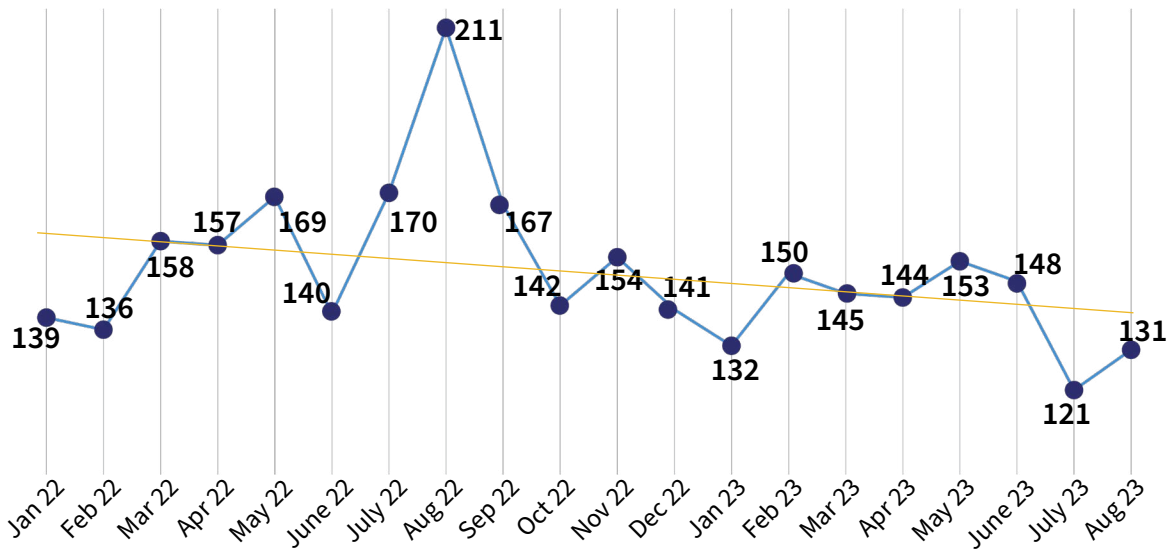

At the catchment level:

Belong has had the highest utilization of emergency shelter placements, peaking at 10 percent of children in August 2022 and since declining to 5-7 percent.

Saint Francis has steadily reduced the percent of children with an emergency shelter placement since August of 2022.

OCOK has not had more than 2 percent of children with an emergency shelter placement at any point during the project period.

2INgage has not had more than 3 percent of children with an emergency shelter placement at any point during the project period.

PERCENT OF CHILDREN WITH AN EMERGENCY SHELTER PLACEMENT

Belong   Saint Francis   OCOK   2INgage
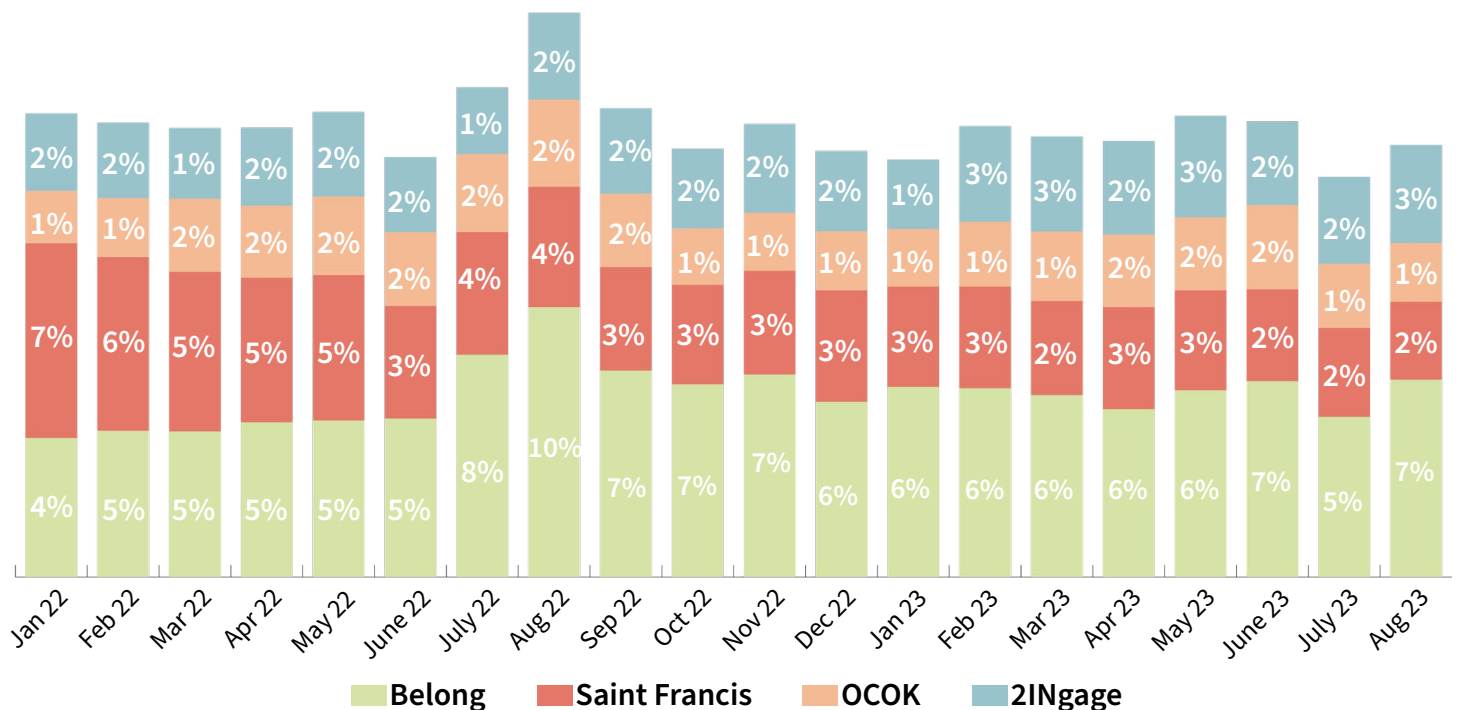
SSCCs ARE STRENGTHENING CAPACITY BY SUPPORTING PROVIDERS

The SSCCs contracted with the Center to conduct an assessment of their provider networks in order to develop supportive strategies to improve service quality and maintain placements. The Center deployed an online survey to all SSCC-contracted providers, facilitated focus groups with providers who volunteered to participate, and conducted in-depth interviews with SSCC leadership. A report detailing the study findings, with recommendations for assisting providers in building and maintaining capacity, was released in a June 2022 report.[6] In response to the findings, the SSCCs redirected some funding from the joint project intended to bring new residential providers to Texas[7] and focused the additional resources toward supporting their network providers through the following actions:

- In collaboration with TACFS and providers, the SSCCS formed a workgroup that developed a **Deep Dive on Investigations training** to help providers understand and respond to investigations and other regulatory processes. The SSCCs are currently working with providers to begin scheduling this training, which will be hosted on the TACFS Online Learning Center.

- The SSCCs partnered with the Center and the consulting group Praesidium to bring a package of **safety-related trainings and resources to providers** to mitigate risk and ensure optimal safety for children in care.

- In June 2023, the SSCCs and TACFS partnered to host an in-person symposium on **Strengthening Therapeutic Care in Texas GROs**. Over 150 participants attended the Houston symposium, which included presentations on providing quality therapeutic care to children and how to be successful in the current regulatory environment, in addition to group discussions on key challenges for providers. To continue the conversation, the SSCCs and TACFS are working together to provide a Strengthening Residential series for providers throughout the state. The first of the series, Pre-Employment Rules with Praesidium, was held virtually in 2023.

- OCOK led an initiative to create an **onsite support team** to offer expert technical support for providers that are on heightened monitoring or are otherwise struggling. While there has been substantial progress on mapping out this process and establishing intended outcomes, this effort will need staffing and funding beyond the evaluation of the joint initiatives discussed in this report.

FOSTER PARENT RECRUITMENT FACED CHALLENGES THAT INFORM RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE EFFORTS

In collaboration with TACFS and the consulting firm Daley Solutions, the SSCCs implemented targeted online foster parent recruitment toward the goal of recruiting and licensing new foster families in each SSCC catchment. The effort utilized social media advertising campaigns and a dedicated recruitment website, FosterTX.

FosterTX reached over 2,200 potential foster parent leads and connected nearly 500 prospective foster parents statewide with valuable information to navigate and start the process of becoming licensed with a local child placing agency (CPA). Recruitment videos provided potential foster families with a realistic view of fostering

---

6 The Voices from Providers report can be found here.

7 This joint project (the first project listed on page 2) was intended to bring new providers to Texas to expand in-state residential capacity for higher-needs youth. Logistical barriers such as inability to find adequate facilities and high insurance costs caused several potential contractors to withdraw their proposals. Further, some experienced out-of-state providers expressed concerns to SSCC leaders about expanding into Texas due to the regulatory environment.

and created positive awareness of foster care. Foster Parent Navigators from each SSCC followed prospective foster parents through the referral process.

While no new homes were licensed as a direct result of these recruitment efforts during the project period, the SSCCs met regularly to exchange lessons learned and develop considerations for future recruitment efforts:

There is not a "one size fits all" approach to recruiting and retaining foster parents.

- Responding to an advertisement or attending an information session does not always mean prospective foster parents are ready to start the licensing process.

- It is important to reach out quickly and consistently and keep in touch with prospective foster parents.

- Multiple methods of contact, such as email, text messages, and phone calls, are needed to respond to the communication preferences of prospective foster parents. Tracking and documenting contacts is critical to avoid losing potential leads.

While SSCCs can help guide and support potential foster parents, strong engagement from the Child Placing Agencies (CPAs) is vital.

- For continuity, limiting the number of CPA staff who contact leads can be helpful.

- The sooner CPAs are in touch with prospective foster parents, the sooner they can begin to build a supportive relationship.

- CPAs that serve rural communities should be actively involved in recruitment to prevent prospective foster parents in these areas from being discouraged by lack of follow-up.

SSCCs ARE PRIORITIZING KINSHIP CARE

To establish common values, goals, and definitions geared towards improving kinship and reunification services, members from each SSCC formed a kinship care workgroup with the support of the consulting group A Second Chance Inc. (ASCI), a national expert in kinship care. This collaboration produced several key outputs:

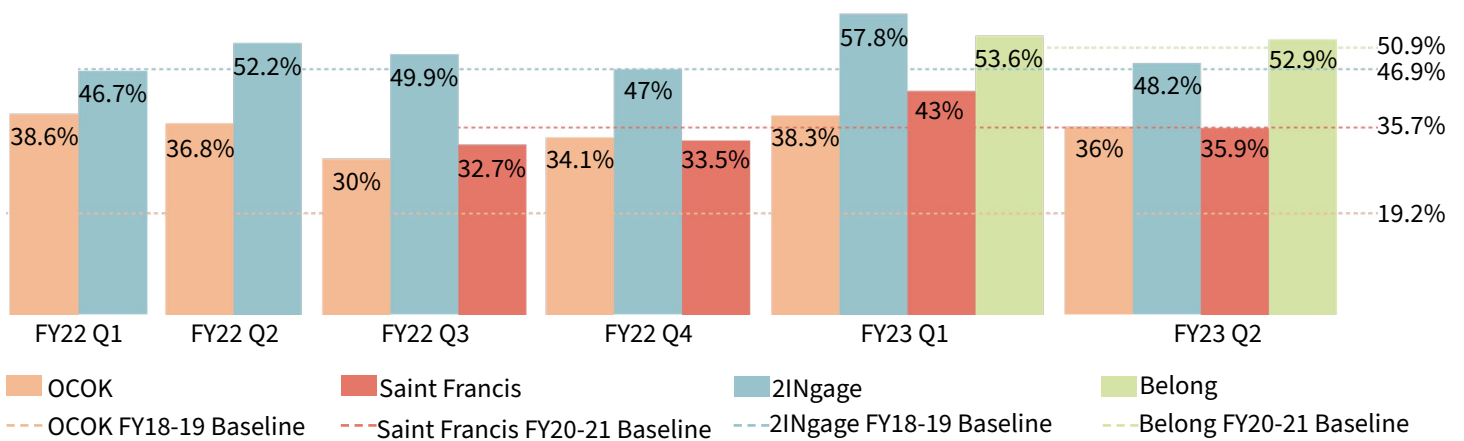| **Foundational training**	**Networking and peer support**	**Problem-solving**	**Knowledge sharing**
The SSCCs participated in values training through ASCI to lay a foundation and provide a level-setting opportunity.	Kinship workers developed relationships with their peers across the state.	Members shared redacted cases to allow the group to discuss and brainstorm solutions and improvements in their work supporting kinship families.	With the SSCCs at different stages of CBC implementation, recurring discussions promoted peer learning and sharing best practices.

The percentage of children in the four catchments placed in a kinship home within 60 days of entering care is shown in the graph below, along with the baseline (average percentage for the prior fiscal years under the legacy system). Since taking over kinship care in CBC Stage 2, **all SSCCs have increased the percentage of children in kinship within 60 days in their catchments.**

PERCENT OF CHILDREN IN KINSHIP PLACEMENTS WITHIN 60 DAYS

FY22 Q1: OCOK 38.6%, 2INgage 46.7%
FY22 Q2: OCOK 36.8%, 2INgage 52.2%
FY22 Q3: OCOK 30%, 2INgage 49.9%, Saint Francis 32.7%
FY22 Q4: OCOK 34.1%, 2INgage 47%, Saint Francis 33.5%
FY23 Q1: OCOK 38.3%, 2INgage 57.8%, Saint Francis 43%, Belong 53.6%
FY23 Q2: OCOK 36%, 2INgage 48.2%, Saint Francis 35.9%, Belong 52.9%

Baselines: 50.9%, 46.9%, 35.7%, 19.2%

Legend:
- OCOK
- Saint Francis
- 2INgage
- Belong
- OCOK FY18-19 Baseline
- Saint Francis FY20-21 Baseline
- 2INgage FY18-19 Baseline
- Belong FY20-21 Baseline

At the catchment level:

2INgage consistently has the highest percent of children in kinship care within 60 days.

OCOK has increased the percent of children in kinship care within 60 days in every quarter since at least the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2020, remaining well above, and at times doubling, the legacy baseline of 19 percent.

While Saint Francis and Belong are relatively new to CBC Stage 2 and are still establishing their kinship programs, both were above the legacy baseline in the last two quarters of data.

TWO SSCCs ARE THE FIRST AGENCIES IN THE NATION TO CREDENTIAL A COHORT OF CHILD WELFARE SUPERVISORS

To create and provide a Certified Child Welfare Supervisor credential for permanency supervisors at OCOK and 2INgage,[8] the Center and TACFS entered into an agreement with the National Certification Board for Child Welfare Professionals (NCBCWP) in 2022. The project team defined Texas-specific core competencies to support a strong and stable frontline workforce, including leadership and coaching styles, strategies to motivate and develop staff, effective professional relationships and communication, and knowledge and understanding of supervision and practice models. Beyond improving supervision quality, the credentialing of permanency supervisors is intended to decrease turnover among their direct reports, and consequently, free up capacity by decreasing the time to permanency.

In spring 2023, 42 supervisors from OCOK and 2INgage (Cohort 1) received the supervisor credential, following nine training sessions, four field observations, one case review, and a final exam. Credentialed supervisors will maintain their certification through 20 hours of continuing education each year and compliance with the National Board's Code of Ethical and Professional Conduct. A second cohort of permanency supervisors from Belong, OCOK, and 2INgage successfully finished training in August 2023 and will take their final exam in January 2024. TACFS has worked with the project team to develop a training calendar for 2024 that will continue monthly cohorts, with new SSCCs invited to participate.

---

8 Saint Francis has their own supervisor credentialing process and did not participate in the joint NCBCWP credentialing initiative; Belong participated in the curriculum planning but did not begin the credentialing process for their supervisors until the second cohort, which is currently underway.

Two sources of data inform the evaluation of the credentialing project at meeting its intended goals: 1) supervisor feedback related to the knowledge and skills they gained during training, and 2) permanency worker perceptions of whether supervision quality improved and intent to leave[9] decreased after their supervisors received the credential.

Supervisor Training Evaluation Feedback

The training curriculum was broken into nine separate training days. The first three days cover foundational education, the middle days cover supportive topics related to relationships and communication, and the final three days dive into administrative supervisory functions.

Day 1: Vision, Mission, and Values

Day 2: Cultural and Linguistic Competence

Day 3: The Supervisor as Teacher and Consultant

Day 4: Establishing and Advancing Supervisory Relationships

Day 5: Managing Relationships

Day 6: Effective Communication

Day 7: Planning Framework

Day 8: Critical Thinking & Problem Solving

Day 9: Teamwork

As shown in this table, high percentages of training participants in both cohorts agreed or strongly agreed with key statements[10] about the training across all training day groupings.[11] More than 4 out of 5 participants agreed with every item, with nearly all participants agreeing on several items. The lowest agreement was found for the foundational topics (days 1-3) on the item "I gained confidence in my ability to put skills I learned into practice," which suggests that some additional focus on the applicability of the topics to supervisory practice could further improve these positive evaluations.

	Days 1-3		Days 4-6		Days 7-9	
	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2	Cohort 1	Cohort 2
I increased my knowledge and understanding of the topic	88%	97%	91%	88%	84%	96%
I gained confidence to put skills into practice	81%	82%	90%	88%	85%	96%
I would recommend this training to others	86%	88%	90%	88%	88%	96%

The evaluation forms also asked supervisor participants to indicate whether the training was better, the same, or worse than similar trainings they had taken in the past. Among all participants in both cohorts who indicated that they had taken a similar training elsewhere, **100 percent said that this training was as good or better than past trainings.**

---

9 "Intent to leave" means that a child welfare worker is considering leaving their job. Prior research has established intent to leave as a valid and reliable predictor of actual turnover in child welfare agencies.

10 There were additional items on the class evaluation forms; the items considered most relevant to the desired outcomes were selected to highlight in this report.

11 Cohort 1 trainees completed an evaluation form for each day of training. Cohort 2 trainees completed one evaluation at the end of each three days of training. To compare responses across cohorts, the daily Cohort 1 evaluation responses were pooled into days 1-3, 4-6, and 7-9. As a result, the Cohort 1 percentages include multiple responses per individual.

Open-ended comments further indicate that, overall, supervisors found this training to be valuable. On average, comments about the least enjoyable parts of training overwhelmingly focused on the length of the sessions (and the breakouts) and the Zoom platform.

Comments about the most enjoyable aspects of training included:

> *"Trainings were very enthusiastic and knowledgeable."*
>
> *"The interactions and time for self-reflection."*
>
> *"It's nice to get feedback from my peers."*
>
> *"Open conversation – keeping it real to the experiences of the field."*
>
> *"The facilitators were fun and engaging, they had creative ways to get the group talking."*
>
> *"I wish I had this training when I started being a supervisor."*
>
> *"Being able to hear from more experienced supervisors and learn what has worked for them."*
>
> *"The videos were very interesting and informational."*
>
> *"I learned a lot about myself and areas of improvement that I felt were very accurate."*
>
> *"Great content, great presenters."*

Permanency Worker Pre-test/Post-test Survey

In September 2022, the Center sent an anonymous online survey to all permanency workers (N=236) at 2INgage and OCOK, prior to the start of the supervisor training. The survey elicited workers' baseline perceptions of their supervisors; each item was mapped directly to one of the competencies targeted by the NCBCWP training curriculum. Examples of survey items included "My supervisor helps me organize and prioritize my work tasks," and "My supervisor gives me positive recognition for a job well done." Additional survey items were sourced from a validated child welfare job satisfaction instrument[12] (e.g., "I feel a sense of pride doing my job") and a validated scale measuring intent to leave (e.g., "How often have you thought about leaving your job in the past year?").[13] After the first cohort of supervisors successful passed their exams and received their credentials, a follow-up survey was sent to the permanency workers at both agencies.[14] There were 104 respondents to the first survey; there were 43 responses to the second survey, 24 of whom had taken the first survey.

Findings comparing the pre-test and post-test responses were mixed. Survey agreement items were assigned a numeric value where 1=strongly disagree and 5=strongly agree, and the means for each item were compared before and after supervisors received training and passed their credentialing exams.

---

12 Li & Huang (2017) Validating the Job Satisfaction Survey in voluntary child welfare. Children and Youth Services Review, 83.

13 Auerbach et al. (2013) Predicting turnover: validating the Intent to Leave child welfare scale. Research on Social Work Practice, 24(3).

14 Only workers of supervisors who received the credential received the follow-up survey. Only workers who completed the pre-test were included in the findings.

Among the competency and job satisfaction items, there was little change from pre- to post-test. Of 28 items:

3 Positive change (mean score went up from pre-test to post-test)	**3** No change	**22** Negative change (mean score went down from pre-test to post-test)

All these changes, however, were very small, with a difference of 0.4 points or smaller between the two surveys. Combined with the small sample size and the lack of a comparison group, this cannot be viewed as evidence that the training was ineffective at enhancing supervision quality. It's possible that it may take longer for positive changes to be perceptible to workers, or that workers with more negative views were more likely to take the follow-up survey.

Findings related to potential turnover were more pronounced:

	Pre-test	Post-test
In the past year, have you considered looking for a new job?	74% yes	62% yes
How often do you think about leaving your current job?	66% often or everyday	42% often or everyday
How often do you talk to your friends and family about leaving your current job?	60% often or everyday	36% often or everyday
How often have you searched online for a new job?	36% weekly or daily	25% weekly or daily

Intent to leave declined from pre-test to post-test. Due to the lack of a comparison group, the small sample size, and the lack of corresponding positive change in workers' perceptions of their supervisors, this cannot be viewed as evidence that the credentialing process is the cause of these changes. It is possible that broader labor market factors have changed the job landscape since the fall of 2022, or that those with the strongest intent to leave in the pre-test already left for other jobs prior to the post-test. The findings nonetheless suggest there is a reduced likelihood of turnover among survey respondents completing both surveys.

ALL FOUR SSCCS SAW ACHEIVEMENTS IN INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY BUILDING EFFORTS IN THEIR CATCHMENTS

Their top achievements, ongoing efforts, and advice for new SSSCs are described below.

SAINT FRANCIS: PANHANDLE

Top three achievements

More residential treatment capacity for higher-needs children and youth

Saint Francis built the state's first Qualified Residential Treatment Program in Lubbock, with 24 beds that opened in fiscal year 2023.

Saint Francis partnered with Fostering Life Youth Ranch to enhance and improve the existing campus and supported the addition of a new campus. This initiative yielded an additional 30 beds in the Texas Panhandle to support children experiencing complex trauma in their communities.

Increased Treatment Foster Care utilization

Saint Francis recruited an out-of-state provider who brings an evidence-based program for Treatment Foster Care.

This initiative represents a significant step towards addressing the needs of the community and ensuring that children in foster care receive the highest quality services.

Another key priority was supporting the four Treatment Foster Care contracts, while continuing to grow this necessary capacity to allow children to remain in their communities, create permanency options, and transition children back to their families.

Improved kinship services

Saint Francis focused on improving kinship services and keeping sibling groups together.

Saint Francis disbursed $260,000 to support kinship families. By providing funding to support licensing, families were able to acquire necessary items that are often challenges in licensing kinship homes. Some examples of these items included window air-conditioners, car repairs, beds, and home repairs.
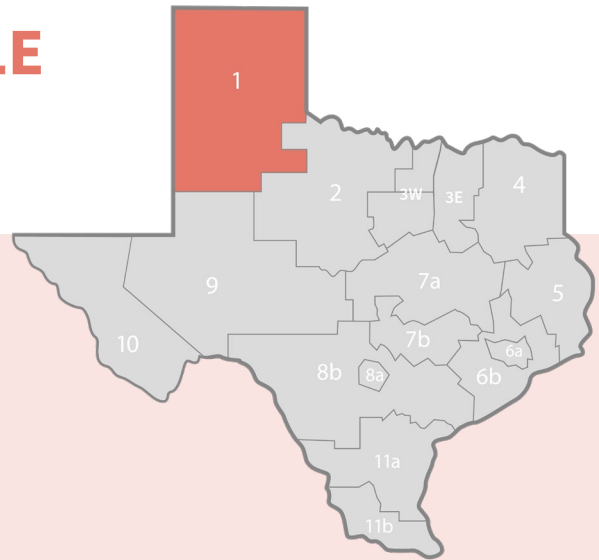
Priorities moving forward

Saint Francis has identified multiple priorities to grow and strengthen capacity, including:

Supporting Treatment Foster Care Providers by providing grants to support enhancement of program services.

Supporting kinship families by continuing funding for licensing support.

Developing the provider network and caregiver supports so that they can provide stability to children and their families.

Advice for new SSCCs working to build capacity

"Capacity doesn't just mean 'beds.' A) Capacity building is a holistic approach that aims to strengthen individuals and systems, enabling them to provide the best care and support for those in need. B) Addressing challenges early in the partnership and having a deep understanding of the population in your catchment are both crucial components for success, and C) Collaboration is key, and support is necessary with the ever-evolving changes in regulation and oversight of providers."

2INGAGE: BIG COUNTRY/TEXOMA

Top three achievements

Eliminating CWOP through increased placement options for youth

2INgage is working with Blue Skies TXFI, a residential facility in Wichita County that is currently licensed for 26 beds and is equipped to serve high-needs youth. Blue Skies has increased placement options for hard-to-place youth within Region 2 and allowed more youth to receive services and support they need in-region. 2INgage has not had a CWOP episode for three consecutive years, and Blue Skies is one facility that supports this success.

Expanding wraparound services for youth to facilitate placements in family settings

Wraparound services and supports integrate treatment with permanency planning, which promotes placement stability and permanency. 2INgage has put intense efforts in providing wraparound services for youth in residential placements to prepare for stepping down to lower levels of care. Forty-three youth stepped down to foster homes, kinship, or returned home in FY23 through this initiative, far exceeding the initial goal of 15 youth step-downs.

Adding new foster homes

2INgage incentivized their network providers to support homes and improve recruitment strategies, which led to 70 new foster homes in the catchment this past fiscal year.
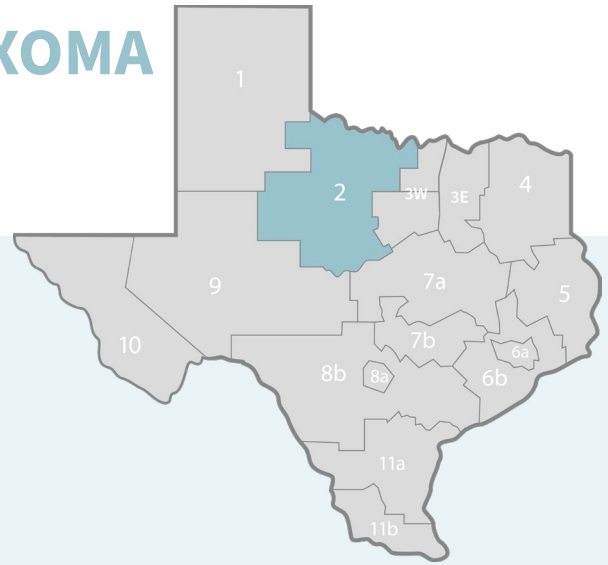
Priorities moving forward

Over the last fiscal year, 2INgage has identified areas of need within Region 2 and will solicit proposals from providers to increase services and capacity in multiple service areas, including:

Building capacity for network providers to serve sibling groups, medically fragile children, children with autism, IDD & youth with developmental disabilities.

Expanding professional foster care.

Advice for new SSCCs working to build capacity

"Building capacity is a collaborative process requiring close communication between the SSCC and providers. Building capacity requires community support and the ability to 'think outside the box' when any barriers may arise. Children and families are counting on us to ensure children can stay in their community, connected to resources, and able to maintain the relationships that are so important to helping the family heal."

OCOK: METROPLEX WEST

Top three achievements

Intensive permanency services

OCOK secured a 3-year contract with Alia, an organization with expertise and experience helping youth with complex trauma achieve permanency, to provide intensive permanency services to youth with complex needs.

This program, Connection Services, will support youth while engaging in an exhaustive search for family and other supportive connections, healing relational trauma, and supporting and integrating those relationships.

Increased rates for new or expanded services

To respond to CWOP, OCOK recruited temporary emergency shelter and foster home beds and utilized targeted rates with providers to support new or expanded services for higher-needs youth.

Additional supports were paid to CPA providers and foster parents to help facilitate and support the placement of youth stepping down from residential treatment into treatment and therapeutic foster homes.

Increased use of kinship placements

Under the legacy system, 19 percent of youth in the region were placed in kinship homes within 60 days of entering care, and OCOK has consistently exceeded that baseline. This was achieved through:

Hiring a dedicated team to do home studies to speed the process.

Creating a team that solely focuses on family finding. With sufficient tools and resources, this unit was able to perform more extensive efforts than previously done.

Prioritizing community engagement opportunities with local CASA, attorneys, and other stakeholders to show the importance of a kin-first culture.
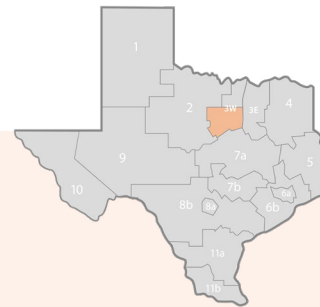
Priorities moving forward

Intensive Permanency Services: OCOK now has the capacity to work with 40 youth per year through the Connection Services program and their work with Alia will continue to be a priority.

Treatment Foster Care: OCOK will expand their Professional Home-Based Care model to include additional providers with experience in treatment foster care. This collaborative approach between OCOK and providers allows children to receive intensive supports within the community in a family home setting rather than a residential setting

Kinship: OCOK will continue to support kinship by utilizing evidence-based practices designed to support kinship families and our youth with behavioral health needs.

In fall 2023, OCOK launched a "Yes, we kin!" campaign to build on the core foundational kinship elements learned through work with ASCI, a national kinship care expert.

Advice for new SSCCs working to build capacity

"It's important to understand that it takes time and effort to build capacity. It doesn't happen quickly. The key ingredients to success are 1) a trusting business relationship between the contractor and the provider, 2) specific identification of needs and clear description of services needed to meet those needs, 3) adequate funding, 4) defined performance expectations, and 5) an ongoing conversation about partnership expectations and performance to support continuous improvement."

BELONG: SOUTH CENTRAL AND HILL COUNTRY

Top three achievements

Elimination of SSCC supervision (CWOP)

Belong has been successful in finding safe and appropriate placements for all youth being removed from their home or needing subsequent placements and has not had a youth in supervision since July 2022.

Using capacity building funding to distribute mini-grants to providers has allowed them to better accept and maintain placements.

Belong staff offered assistance to providers to support youth with specialized behaviors by supporting their direct care staff.

Disruption Mitigation and Exceptional Care placements have recovered countless placements that might have otherwise ended in SSCC supervision.

Support services for adoption, kinship, and foster families

Through partnership with Chosen, 75 families have received services since September 2021, with over 700 parent coaching sessions completed. Over the last two years, Chosen reports that:

92% of families surveyed reported increased resilience and stress management

85% of families reported that children successfully avoided hospital admissions

78% of families reported reduced parental stress and child trauma symptoms

Signs of Safety training for front-line staff

Signs of Safety focuses on child safety by assisting the family in creating a safety net of friends and family they can rely on to ensure safety for their children. Belong has spent the last 12 months implementing Signs of Safety with frontline staff after determining that it is the practice model with the rigor, depth, and flexibility required best serve families.
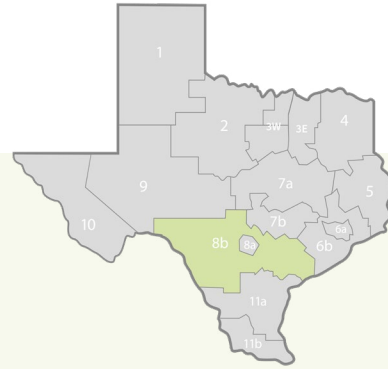
Priorities moving forward

Development of a Treatment Foster Care (TFC) initiative

Repurposing existing beds within the catchment area to accommodate harder-to-place youth by transitioning beds into Temporary Emergency Placement (TEP) beds, increasing the service levels of beds, and/or adding TEP beds in foster homes.

Continuing work with Touchstone, a short-term stabilization and assessment program that focuses on helping youth develop calming strategies.

Hosting subject matter experts in a symposium planned for network providers, with potential topics best practices and navigating regulatory environments.

Advice for new SSCCs working to build capacity

"Provider relationships are the key to your success. Every department and level of your agency should set its sights on strengthening and sustaining our provider community. Be present, transparent, and honest with your providers, and they will rise to the occasion time after time. Work collaboratively with the other SSCCs and support each other. Many of our joint successes are due to the outward appearance that we are a united group of leaders who put providers first. On major issues, we speak with one voice that represents providers, which solidifies the reason why community-based care is not only best practice but a more efficient model."