

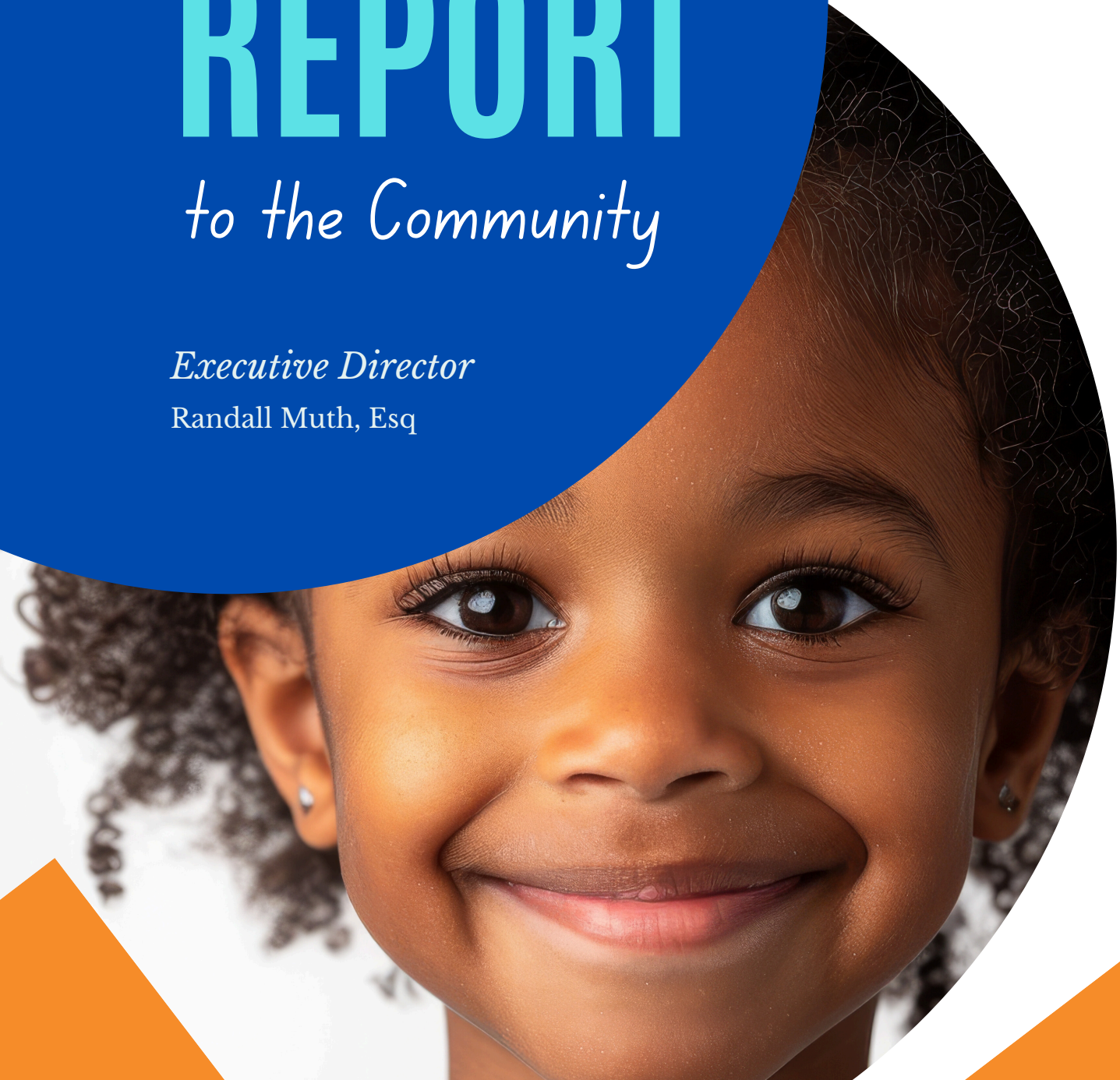


2025 ANNUAL REPORT

to the Community

Executive Director

Randall Muth, Esq



Letter from the Director

It is my pleasure to present Lucas County Children Services' Annual Report to the Community for 2025.

As was the case for most of Ohio's public children services agencies (PCSAs), the costs associated with providing care for children placed in LCCS custody continued to rise dramatically in 2025. In the four years since the passage of the federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA), the average annual cost of providing care for these children has increased from approximately \$12 million to \$24.4 million—more than double the historical average for LCCS. We continue to work with other county PCSAs and our partners at the state and federal levels to address this challenge.

Throughout 2025, LCCS continued to advance a family-centered approach that prioritizes keeping children safely connected to their families and communities. We focused on increasing the use of in-home services to support parents and caregivers in addressing challenges before court intervention - when it is safe to do so. By delivering services where families live, we reduce disruption and strengthen protective factors in a familiar environment.

When the Lucas County Juvenile Court determines that children cannot safely remain at home, we place greater emphasis on kinship care, ensuring they are cared for by relatives or trusted adults whenever appropriate. These placements help preserve important relationships, cultural identity, and a sense of belonging.

This dual focus—serving families in their homes and expanding kinship placements—reflects our commitment to achieving better outcomes for children. By minimizing trauma and maintaining connections, we are working toward a system that is both responsive and compassionate, while ensuring child safety remains our highest priority.

We saw continued success in these areas over the course of 2025. The number of children entering agency or relative custody in the fourth quarter of the year decreased by 26 percent compared to the third quarter of 2025, and 57 percent of children placed in our custody by the court were placed with relatives.

We are also looking for creative ways to fund our family-centered goals. In late 2024, LCCS was awarded \$463,000 from the One Ohio Recovery Foundation, a nonprofit established to distribute 55 percent of Ohio's opioid settlement funds from the pharmaceutical industry to address the impacts of the opioid epidemic. We began receiving these funds in 2025 and used them to strengthen key initiatives that keep children connected to family and address the effects of the opioid epidemic.

Specifically, we're using this funding to support an expansion of our family-finding efforts, allowing us to proactively identify and engage relatives who could be assessed as potential caregivers for children in need of placement. We're also using this grant to fund a partnership with the Area Office on Aging, helping to reduce financial and practical barriers so relatives can welcome children into their homes. Together, these efforts decrease reliance on foster care while promoting stability and family connections.

Over the last year, we have also strengthened community collaboration through our work with Mercy Health System by utilizing its mobile health clinic to benefit children with additional healthcare needs. In addition, we supported several emancipated youth in securing stable housing by facilitating leases for them in the new Park Apartments in Toledo's Old South End.

One of our most significant priorities last year (and continuing in 2026) has been to increase transparency in our operations and decision-making while strengthening our connections with the community. We put this into action by launching a series of monthly "Community Conversations"—open forums where residents can ask questions, share feedback, and engage directly with agency leadership.

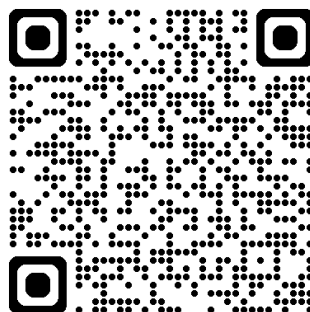
We also introduced a monthly email newsletter, Caring for Kids, to provide regular updates on our work and initiatives. You can sign up for that newsletter by using the QR code below. In addition, LCCS partnered with government and civic leaders to help lead a community-wide task force focused on examining and improving child protection efforts across Lucas County.

Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to keeping children connected to family, improving access to essential services, and supporting successful transitions to independence.

We remain grateful to the LCCS Board of Trustees and the Lucas County Commissioners for their continued leadership and support. Together, we are working in partnership with all segments of the community to promote transparency, build trust, and ensure the safety and well-being of children.



Randall Muth, Esq
Executive Director





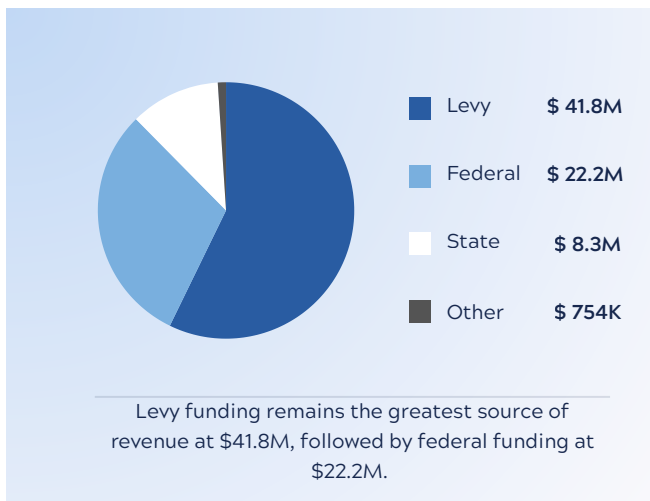
2025 Annual Report to the Community

FINANCIAL SNAPSHOT

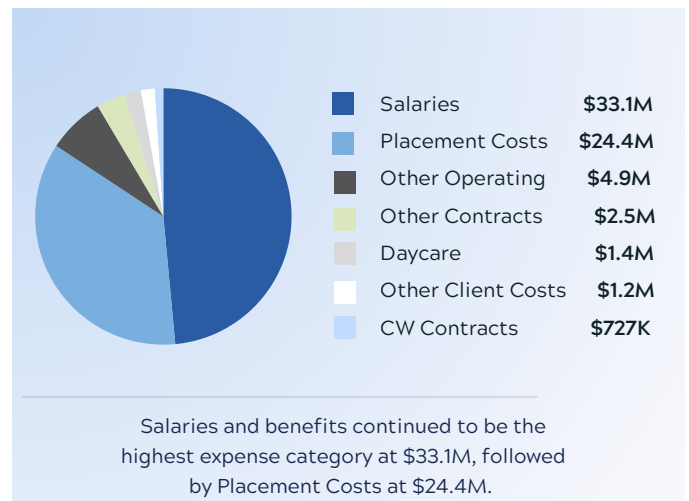
In 2025, agency revenue totaled \$72.9 million, representing a 31% increase over 2024, largely driven by the passage of a new levy in November 2024. Total expenditures were \$68.1 million, a 7% increase from the prior year. Placement costs grew by more than \$3 million, reflecting a 16% increase, and salary expenses rose by over \$1 million. Revenues exceeded expenditures by \$4.9 million, resulting in an agency fund balance of \$9.5 million at the conclusion of 2025.



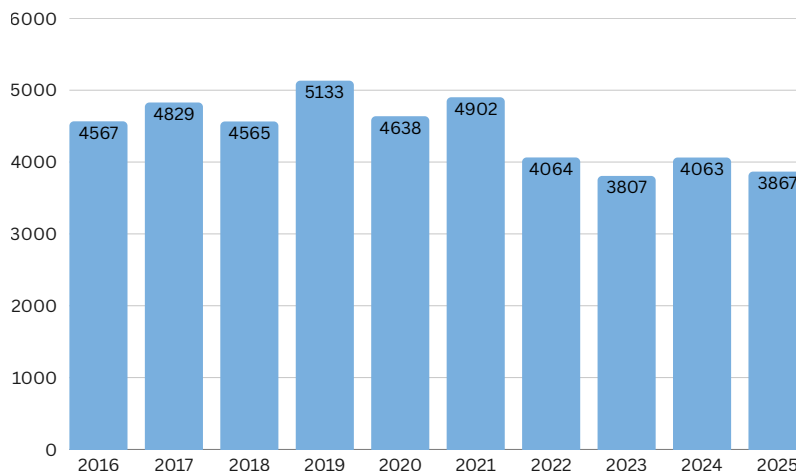
REVENUE BREAKDOWN



EXPENSES BREAKDOWN



CHILD WELFARE INVESTIGATIONS



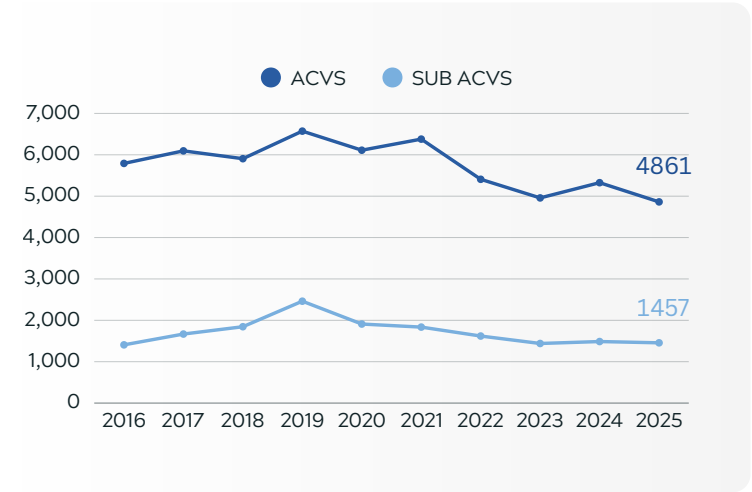
Thirty-five percent of calls to the agency (3,867) met the criteria to be screened in for investigation. Child abuse and neglect (CA/N) investigations decreased 5% from 2024, marking the second-lowest number of investigations in the last 10 years. Additionally, there were 444 Family in Need of Services (FINS) intakes screened in, an increase of 6% from 2024.

Note: Includes CA/N and Dependency investigations

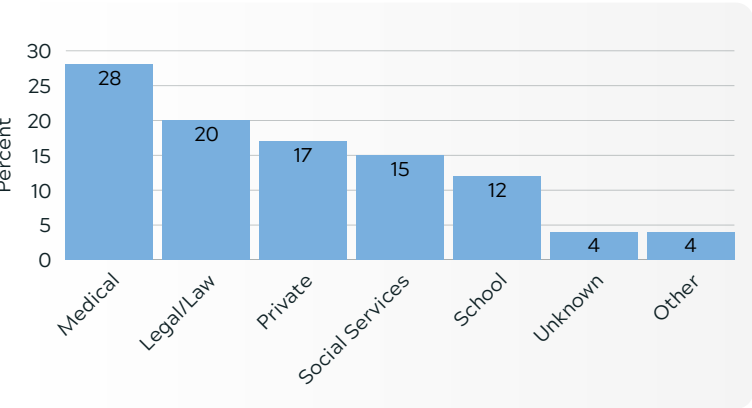
REFERRALS AND CASES

Alleged and substantiated victims both declined in 2025, decreasing by 9% and 2%, respectively. Physical abuse remained the most prevalent category, accounting for 59% of all abuse types, with contributing factors including substance use and domestic violence. Forty-six percent of all abuse allegations were substantiated, representing a 7% increase from 2024 in the substantiation rate.

ALLEGED AND SUBSTANTIATED ACVS



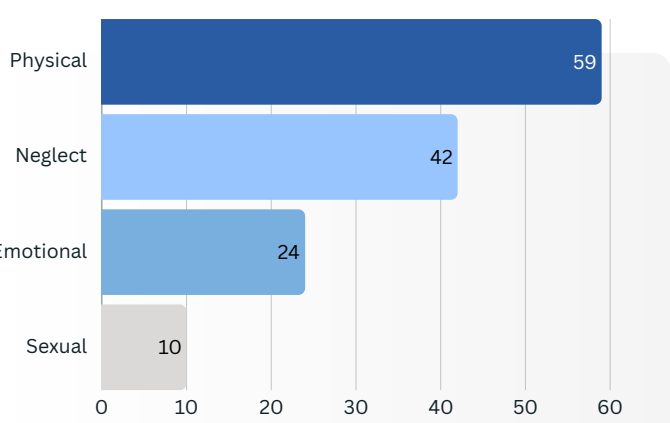
REFERRAL SOURCES



REASONS FOR CASE OPENING

Reason	% of Cases
Substance Abuse	39%
Domestic Violence	27%
Parenting/Neglect	23%
Mental Health	18%
Child Behavior	12%
Physical Abuse	11%
Housing	6%

TYPE OF ABUSE



SUBSTANTIATION RATE

Overall	46%
Physical	46%
Neglect	45%
Emotional	46%
Sexual	43%

CASES OPENED

Eleven percent of referrals investigated resulted in a case being opened for ongoing services.

CASES OPENED
359 ▼6%

Fifty-one percent of cases opened in 2025 involved custody, while 42% were non-custody cases and 8% involved protective supervision. Cases that involved substance use concerns were more likely to result in custody. Among those cases, 57% were custody cases, 34% were non-custody cases, and 9% involved protective supervision. Cocaine (47%) and marijuana (45%) were the most commonly identified substances being used, followed by heroin and other opiates (35%). Marijuana use was frequently identified as a co-occurring factor in case openings rather than a sole reason for opening a case. In 45% of cases, multiple substances were involved.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHTS

Building a Better Future/Reunification Readiness

Building a Better Future and Reunification Readiness are key parental support groups offered through Lucas County Children Services. These groups blend the guidance of a Permanency Support Team with the lived experience of a Parent Partner to help families navigate the children services system and work toward reunification. Co-facilitation ensures parents receive both professional insight into case plans, court processes, and advocacy, as well as relatable support from someone who has personally overcome similar challenges and successfully reunified with their own children.

The Parent Partner's involvement reduces fear, mistrust, and uncertainty by normalizing parents' feelings and offering empathy, encouragement, and hope. Building a Better Future provides foundational education about system navigation, while Reunification Readiness supports parents as they actively work toward returning their children home. Parents receive practical strategies, emotional support, and real-life insight that helps them stay engaged, maintain progress, and feel prepared for reunification.

This balanced partnership empowers parents to understand expectations, build confidence, and achieve lasting change. In 2025, 19 parents completed Building a Better Future, and 20 completed Reunification Readiness, both reflecting increases from 2024.

Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program

The Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KGAP) is designed to support children who cannot return to their parents and for whom adoption is not an option. This program is available to kinship caregivers who are caring for children while parents are working their case plan services and who become legal custodians or guardians after caring for children for at least six consecutive months as foster parents. Families receive initial support when they are licensed in the form of a foster care per diem. In addition, families receive a monthly subsidy for the children until they are 18 if they are given legal custody, working to provide support to keep children within their own natural support network.

Since its implementation in 2022, a total of 109 KGAP families have been licensed by LCCS. In 2025 alone, LCCS licensed 29 families providing a path to long-term support in the event it is needed.

Ohio Start

Ohio START is a child welfare-led intervention designed to provide intensive, family-centered support to parents struggling with substance use disorders. Since launching in Lucas County in 2019, Ohio START has served 68 families and 126 children, consistently demonstrating strong outcomes. Today, the team is actively supporting 24 families, with only five children placed in foster care. All remaining children are safely cared for within their family network, either at home with parents or with kinship caregivers, preserving critical family bonds.

Lucas County continues to be a statewide leader in the number of families served through Ohio START. In December 2025, the program successfully completed its annual certification review, confirming that fidelity to the model remains strong. Looking ahead, the Ohio START team will expand in April 2026 with the addition of a third Caseworker/Peer Mentor dyad. Lucas County Children Services remains dedicated to strengthening families, fostering community partnerships, and building a healthier future for children and parents.

One Ohio Recovery Foundation Grant

The OneOhio Grant awarded to Lucas County Children Services in 2025 funded the creation of a dedicated Family Search and Engagement worker responsible for completing home studies and conducting family-finding efforts for children and families affected by the opioid epidemic. Through this role, LCCS strengthens relationships with relatives and kinship supports, helping children remain safely within their family networks whenever possible.

LCCS partners with Kinnect to Family for coaching and guidance to enhance family-finding practices, and with the Area Office on Aging (AOA), which now facilitates Guiding Good Choices groups for kinship caregivers. This collaboration also led to the production of two podcasts, including Roots of Resilience: Empowering Kinship Families Amid Opioid Recovery, featuring LCCS staff.

In 2025, the program served 110 individuals impacted by substance use disorder through family-finding and kinship support. This included 23 children placed with relatives to prevent foster care entry, nine caregivers who completed Guiding Good Choices groups, and 46 individuals referred to AOA for additional services. Kinnect to Family provided more than 100 coaching sessions, and staff completed Youth-Centered Permanency Roundtable training.



CUSTODY AND PLACEMENT

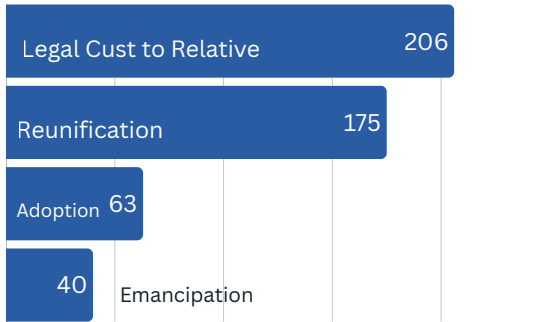
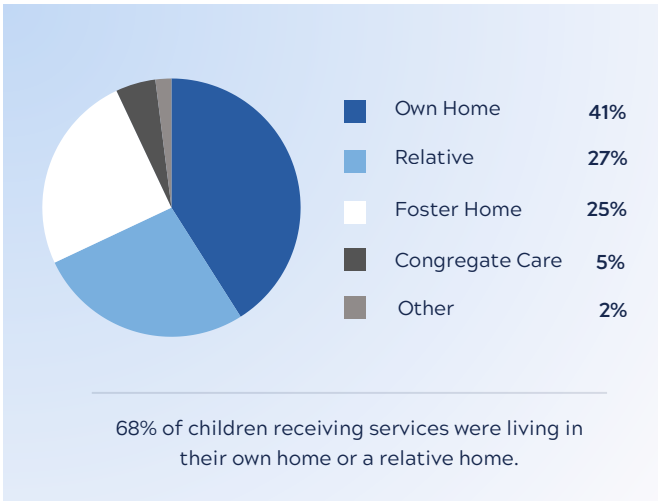
Forty-one percent of children receiving services in 2025 were able to remain safely in their own homes, allowing them to stay in a familiar and stable environment. An additional 27% were placed with relatives who could provide appropriate care and support. Altogether, this means that 68% of children (on average) were able to remain either in their own home or in the home of a relative while receiving services throughout the year.

During this same period, 535 children entered either agency or relative custody, reflecting a 3% decrease from the previous year and indicating a modest downward trend in new custody entries. On average, 854 children were in custody each month, representing a 2% increase over the prior year’s monthly average. Over the course of the year, 484 children exited custody, and 79% of those children were either reunified with a parent or transitioned into the legal custody of a relative.



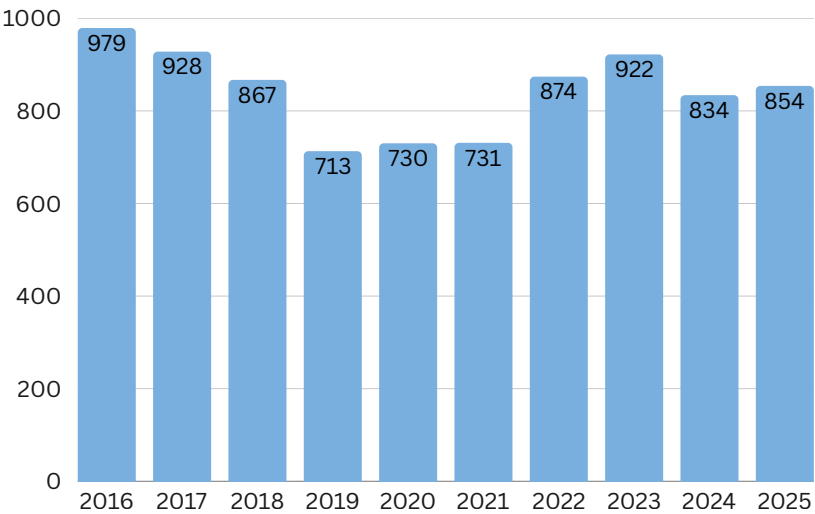
PLACEMENT SETTINGS - CHILDREN IN SERVICES

CUSTODY TERMINATIONS



Legal custody to a relative and reunification were the primary drivers of custody terminations, followed by adoptions and emancipations.

CUSTODY TRENDS



In 2025, there were 854 children in agency or relative custody on average per month, reflecting a 2% increase compared to 2024 and continuing the gradual upward trend that has persisted since the sharp decline observed in 2019.

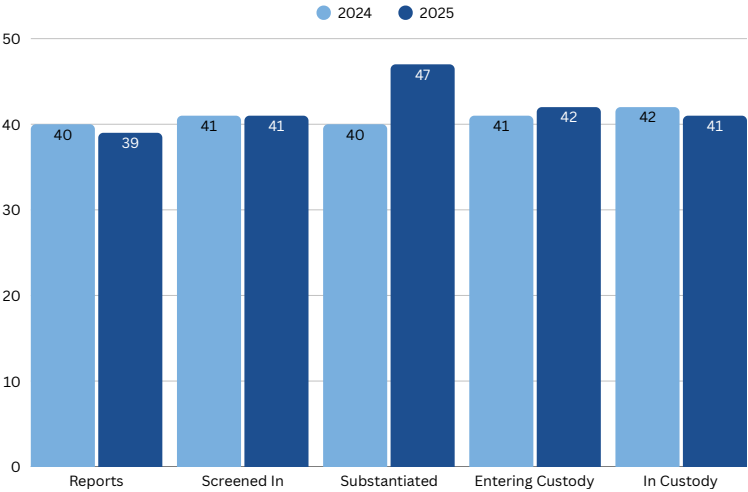
Throughout the year, 45% of children in custody were placed with relatives, a proportion that remained consistent with the previous year and illustrates the agency’s ongoing emphasis on utilizing family-based placements whenever appropriate.

SPOTLIGHT ON DISPROPORTIONALITY

Lucas County Children Services (LCCS) continues to face significant challenges in reducing disproportionality of African American children within the child welfare system. This issue is not unique to our community; it reflects broader state and national trends observed in 2025. In Lucas County, African American children make up approximately 22% of the overall child population, yet they remain disproportionately represented at several key decision points in the LCCS system.

African American children are more likely than white children to be the subject of a referral accepted by LCCS, accounting for 41% of all accepted referrals. They also represent the largest racial group among children in agency custody across every age group. These patterns underscore the ongoing need for intentional, data-driven strategies and sustained, community-centered efforts to reduce disparities and advance equity throughout our system.

AFRICAN AMERICAN DISTRIBUTION IN LCCS SYSTEM



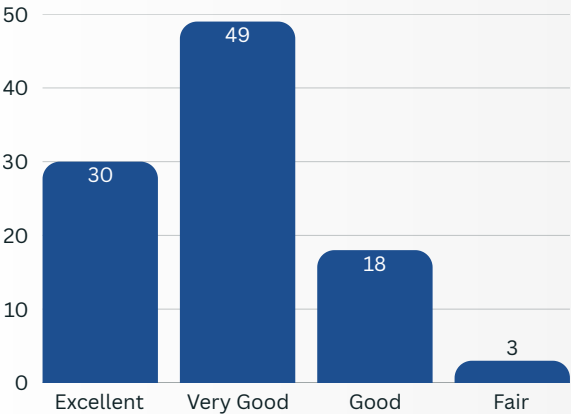
In response, LCCS continues to invest in partnerships and strategies that support meaningful change. The agency has worked closely with Joyce James Consulting (JCC) to provide staff training focused on understanding systemic barriers to racial equity. Leadership training under this partnership has been especially impactful in strengthening awareness and accountability across the organization.

The agency’s Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Strategy (DEIS) Division also provides a range of training and learning opportunities to build staff cultural responsiveness, strengthen practice, and support equitable outcomes for children and families.

LCCS is also collaborating with Casey Family Programs, a national leader in child welfare reform, to enhance its efforts to reduce disproportionality and build prevention-focused, community-centered strategies. In addition, the agency is expanding opportunities to engage individuals with lived experience, ensuring their perspectives inform policy and decision-making. Their insight is essential to developing practices that are more responsive, equitable, and grounded in real community needs.

Beginning in 2024, the DEIS team prioritized strengthening community partnerships and rebuilding trust through monthly “Community Conversations”, which continued throughout 2025. These sessions provided a safe space for residents to share experiences, identify needs, and offer feedback on how LCCS can improve its services and accountability. Across all sessions in 2025, 129 unique individuals participated. Feedback obtained from the sessions was strongly positive: 79 percent rated the sessions as Excellent or Very Good, and 84 percent reported that they found the events helpful.

Community Conversation Event Ratings



The feedback gathered has directly informed improvements in family engagement, transparency, and cultural responsiveness. These sessions will continue in 2026, and the insights gained will guide ongoing enhancements to LCCS practice.

NEXT STEPS...

LCCS continues to expand opportunities for individuals with lived experience to participate in decision-making, ensuring their perspectives shape more responsive and community-grounded policies and practices.



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