

# **Tioga County Department of Social Services**

## **2024 Annual Report**

### **Children and Adult Services**

#### **Staff Development**

- 762 participants attended 409 state-sponsored virtual trainings, totaling 3867.4 hours
- 456 participants attended 53 local-sponsored trainings, totaling 657.25 hours
- 21 new hires completed New Employee Orientation totaling 84 hours of training
- 6 new Caseworkers received 1328 hours of training through modeling and hands-on practical experience

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

- 1072 hotline reports received: 805 investigative, 267 Family Assessment Response (FAR)
- 283 investigations determined: 137 indicated and closed, 31 indicated and opened for preventive services
- 37 families served, involving 64 children
- 12 families discharged from Preventive Services

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

- 27 Foster Care Admissions: 23 abuse/neglect, 4 Juvenile Delinquents
- 15 Foster Care Discharges: 8 reunited with parent, 1 adoption, 2 to private custody with a relative, 3 to Kinship Guardianship, and 2 to custody of OCFS
- 10 freed for adoption and 9 children placed in a pre-adoptive home with an early 2025 adoption planned
- Kinship Foster Home Care placements were at 25.5% of all placements at the end of 2024. This is an 11% decrease since 2023.

#### **Child Advocacy Center and Safe Harbor**

- The CAC serviced 95 children and their families.
- 62 youth served by the Safe Harbor program

#### **Adult Protective Services**

- Received 371 Adult Services referrals
- Completed Adult Protective 148 Intakes
- Completed 61 Assessments
- 46.9 average ongoing cases each month
- Conducted 93 Adult Protective investigations
- 5.2 average active Guardianship cases each month
- Representative Payee for 42 individuals

## **PINS Diversion**

- Received 45 PINS Diversion Services Referrals
- Closed 13 PINS Diversion Services cases
- 18 Active cases at the end of 2024

## **Successes:**

- 4 children achieved permanency through KinGap or Adoption; 2 of these children had been in foster care for over 3 years
- 6 children were discharged within 1 year of their placement
- Continued and expanded use of the Liberty Resources CPS/BH contract to provide families with in-home mental health/substance abuse assessments and brief interventions
- A foster child earned her learner's permit in June AND she is excelling in the BOCES Cosmetology Program at present. She has recently been offered a position at Weis Markets and is presently freed for adoption. Her current foster parents are moving forward with adoption proceedings, and we expect permanency for her in the coming months!
- A foster child earned "Timberwolf" status at the facility in which she is placed in July which means she now resides in her own apartment on campus with a roommate (out of the pods!)
- The growth of our FAR process and procedure. We took part in a multi-day coaching session with the Office of Children and Family Services. As a result of this, we are seeing higher success with Family Lead Assessment Guides (FLAGs) in identifying families' strengths and areas of need. We have had an increase in participation from not only immediate household family members, but parents (our caregivers) who live outside of the home.
- We were able to secure a larger space (double in size) for the CAC to better serve youth and families.

## **Challenges:**

- Staffing turnover – and loss of institutional knowledge.
  - Ensuring new staff are supported and trained

## **Goals for 2025**

- **Increase collaboration with community partners to better assess and serve those with mental health and substance abuse concerns.**
- **Increase the utilization of Protective/Preventive Day Care to support parents who need to engage in services to address child welfare concerns.**
- **Increase the number of foster homes available to children in our community in order to keep them in their home communities.**
- **Educate the community regarding the role of Adult Protective Services (APS) and the services that APS can and cannot provide.**

## **Accounting/Systems/Resource and Recovery/Fraud Activities for 2024**

- The Accounting Department participated in the Annual State Single Audit. The programs tested were Medicaid, and HEAP programs. They audited 43 Medicaid cases, 40 HEAP cases. There were no significant findings.
- Accounting continued to face the challenge of turnover in 2024, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge, familiarity with specific accounting processes, software, and organizational nuances, there was an increased workload on remaining staff, and difficulty finding qualified and experienced candidates.
- Accounting submitted claims for approximately \$11,200,000 in state and Federal reimbursements.
- 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 113,023 pieces of mail in 2024.
- Systems successfully upgraded 40 new iPads and iPhones for our Services unit. This allowed them to access their email, input case notes while in the field, and allowed clients to electronically sign forms.
- Systems maintain all Foster Care Medicaid cases, including ICAMA cases. In 2024 the case load increased to 110.

### **Resource and Recovery**

- In 2024, \$227,545.70 was collected against estates and \$3,803.46 was recovered against accidents for a total of \$231,349.16.
- 750 repayment statements were mailed. \$22,556.22 payments were collected.

### **Fraud and FEDS**

#### **Fraud Referrals:**

- 188 Received (In Agency 77, Electronic 97, Support Collection 4, Public 10)
- 46 Unfounded
- 75 Founded (No Financial Loss)
- 8 Pending
- 59 Agency Repayments / IHE (Fraud Referral and Overpayment Referral)
  - SN \$820.23
  - SNAP \$61,747.00
  - CC \$1,545.10
  - **Total referred for collections \$64,112.33**

#### **Overpayment Referral**

- 159 Received
- 1 Pending
- 83 No Overpayments
- 75 Agency Errors

- SN \$1,793.00
- FA \$600.00
- SNAP \$32,273.00
- CC \$3,096.50
- **Total referred for collections \$37,762.50**

**Front End Detection (FEDS):**

- 135 Received
- 63 Unfounded
- 72 Founded
  - 3,672.00 Total Monthly Local Share Savings
  - 45,867.00 Total Monthly Savings
  - 22,032.00 6 Month Projected Local Share Savings
  - \$ 275,202.00 6 Month Projected Savings

## **Employment and Transitional Supports**

### **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 2023-2024 HEAP Season ran from October 1, 2023, through September 30, 2024. The HEAP Unit processed 3487 benefits resulting in allocations of \$2,248,248 or an average of \$644.75 per benefit.
- HEAP also assisted 95 homeowners with the repair or replacement of their primary heating equipment, for a total of \$206,132.

### **Temporary Assistance and 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 2024, for tax year 2024, 225 returns were processed resulting in Federal refunds of \$365,625.00 and State refunds of \$84,813.00 totaling \$450,438.00, all returning to, and being reinvested in, the local economy. Since 2006, we have completed 2,729 returns with a combined total in tax refunds of \$5,944,117.00.
- Employment Specialists closely monitored 9 employable work experience participants who completed work projects for 2 different not-for-profit agencies throughout the community; 3 had a positive job placement, 3 were closed/denied for non-compliance with work experience, 3 are now on medical.
- In 2024, the Tioga Career Center’s reception signed in 5,095 walk-in customers. This number is up from 2023 when 4,544 walk-in customers were signed in.
- In 2024, the Tioga Career Center’s reception answered and assisted 8,979 incoming phone calls. This number is up from 2023 when 4,544 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. 206 duplicated Temporary Assistance Customers were assigned to JOBS; of those 206, 30 unduplicated had actual job placements.
- The total number of average Cash Assistance cases decreased from 200 in 2023 to 198 in 2024.
- The number of families in the Family Assistance (TANF) caseload average decreased from 114 in 2023 to 106 in 2024.
- The Safety Net caseload (single individuals and couples as well as families that have reached the 60-month time limit) average was 93 in 2024, an increase from 86 in 2023.
- The Daycare unit is co-located in the Career Center. In 2024, the Daycare caseload was comprised of an average of 185 cases serving an average of 353 children and 276 adults. In 2023, the Daycare caseload was comprised of an average of 170 cases serving an average of 315 children and 235 adults.
- The Social Security Disability Case Manager received 26 new Safety Net referrals and 8 new TANF referrals. 18 Safety Net cases were closed due to the receipt of SSI.

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

- Using the “Task-Based” Process Management Model, this Unit processed applications, re-certifications and undercare maintenance for a total of 15,514 completed tasks in 2024.
- This unit received 18,570 incoming phone calls and conducted 488 face-to-face interviews in 2024.
- The average monthly number of individuals receiving SNAP (Food Stamps) benefits in 2024 was 5,054 (approximately 1,586 of these were children).
- The monthly average of the total number of Tioga County individuals on Medicaid in 2024 was 11,377. 3,061 of these cases continued to be managed by FSMA staff, the remainder are on the State Exchange.
- The average number of SSI individuals was 1,089 (170 were children).
- The average number of Chronic Care (nursing home, assisted living and waiver programs) Medicaid cases was 223 per month for 2024.

#### **Successes:**

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

#### **Goals:**

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

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

- The Child Support Enforcement Unit collected \$5,337,886 in 2024
- Average monthly caseload 1,844 in 2024, 1877 in 2023
- Reimbursements to DSS in 2024 totaled \$352,985.76, 2023 DSS reimbursement total was \$411,261
- The Child Support Enforcement Unit filed a total of 533 petitions in 2024 compared to 527 in 2023

### **Youth Bureau**

- Youth Development Program allocations of \$46,600 were distributed to 10 Community Organizations and Municipal Recreational Programs for the program year of 10/1/2023 – 9/30/2024
- Youth Sports & Education Opportunity funds of \$20,293 were distributed to four organizations
- Youth Sports Infrastructure funds of \$11,500 were distributed to one organization
- Youth Team Sports funds of \$22,827 were distributed to three organizations

### **Tioga Career Center**

The Tioga Career Center provides a wide range of customer-driven employment services to both businesses and individual job seekers in the greater Tioga County area. These services serve as a one-stop hub for numerous employment-related needs and resources.

#### **Comprehensive Employment Services:**

- Unemployment Assistance and mandated appointments
- BOCES GED classes
- Resume creation, job search assistance, online application support
- Funding opportunities for classroom and on-the-job training
- Collaboration with Workforce staff, GST BOCES, WIOA Youth Program – Cornell Cooperative Extension Tioga, Access-VR, and other local Tioga County agencies.
- Transitional and supportive services for students in collaboration with Tioga County School Districts.

#### **Employer Services:**

- Job postings, hiring events, and on-the-job training opportunities
- Job fairs with free advertising via radio, newspaper, and social media

#### **Unemployment Services:**

- ID.Me identity verification
- Developed contacts with the Department of Labor to resolve unemployment-related issues more efficiently
- Assisted over 800 customers in their unemployment needs

**Challenges:** Budget Cuts: Significant reductions in funding have impacted the center’s ability to support Tioga County residents and businesses. Notably, the loss of the Literacy Program, the elimination of funding for classroom training, and limited resources for on-the-job training have hindered the center’s ability to fully support workforce development.