

# Florida's State Plan for the **Prevention of Child Abuse, Abandonment, and Neglect:**

July 2005 through June 2010

**Progress Report**



*Together, we have the power to prevent child abuse.*

Developed by The Florida Interprogram Task Force

June 2006

**Florida's State Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Abandonment, and Neglect: July 2005 through June 2010** (June 2005), referred to as "The Plan," has reached the end of the second year of planning. This Progress Report provides information on the implementation strategies developed and the actions taken at both the state and local levels. This report highlights notable accomplishments and most significant challenges encountered during fiscal year 2005-2006. The details supporting this progress report, including specific strategies and action plans for all objectives and information on coordination with local planning activities, can be found at [www.teamfla.org/taskforce.html](http://www.teamfla.org/taskforce.html). The Florida Interprogram Task Force is committed to the principle that the best way to prevent child abuse, abandonment, and neglect is to ensure that all Florida's children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families. Therefore, The Plan's goals and objectives focus on enhancing protective factors, conditions ordinarily associated with low levels of abuse, and reducing risk factors, conditions which, when present, are associated with increased likelihood of abuse. Reducing child abuse and neglect rates will be an incremental process. Initially, Florida's prevention efforts will improve the health, education, and well-being of our children before we see a dramatic impact on abuse and re-abuse rates.

During fiscal year 2005-2006, the Task Force's major accomplishments included:

- Development of detailed implementation plans by subject matter experts at the state and local levels.
- Evaluation of the implementation efforts both on a statewide and a local level.
- Enhancement of collaboration among statewide agencies and organizations and with local planning and implementation teams.

## The Implementation Context

Florida is currently concentrating on the prevention of child abuse and neglect in response to several factors:

- Planning for prevention of child abuse and neglect is required both by state law (sections 39.001(7) and (8), Florida Statutes) and by federal regulations (45CFR 1357.15).
- Florida's child abuse and re-abuse rates are rising. Communities and service providers need to use proven and innovative strategies to intervene and have an impact on these rates.
- The short-term effects of child abuse and neglect include the physical and emotional harm abuse causes for the child; the disruption to family life and cohesion; and the strain on scarce community resources resulting from the response to reports of abuse.
- Long-term consequences are the most costly in both human and monetary terms. Children who are abused are more likely to abuse their own children; experience lifelong chronic health and medical problems (e.g. obesity, drug abuse, heart disease); form broken and dysfunctional families; and draw on community resources for law enforcement, unemployment, social services, and health care.

**Initially, Florida's prevention efforts will improve the health, education, and well-being of our children.**



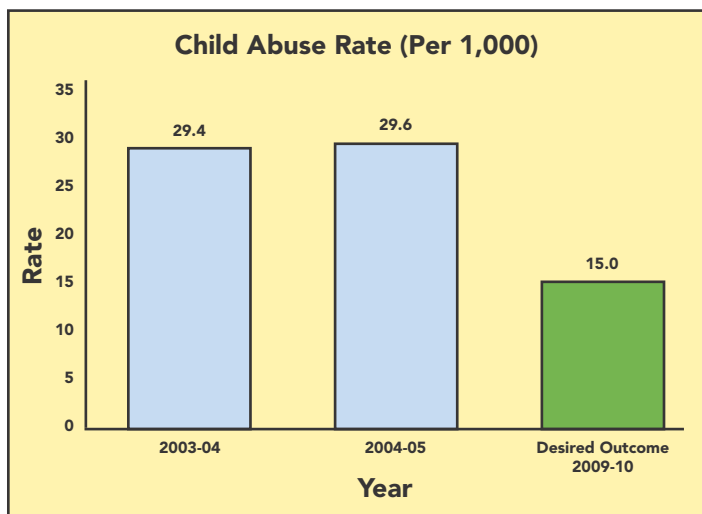
It is far less expensive to empower families to provide healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing environments for all of Florida's children than to bear the expense of the consequences of abuse and neglect.

In fiscal year 2004-2005, the Department of Children and Families established the Florida Interprogram Task Force to satisfy statutory mandates but, more importantly, to create the kind of collaborations that will make a difference for Florida's children.

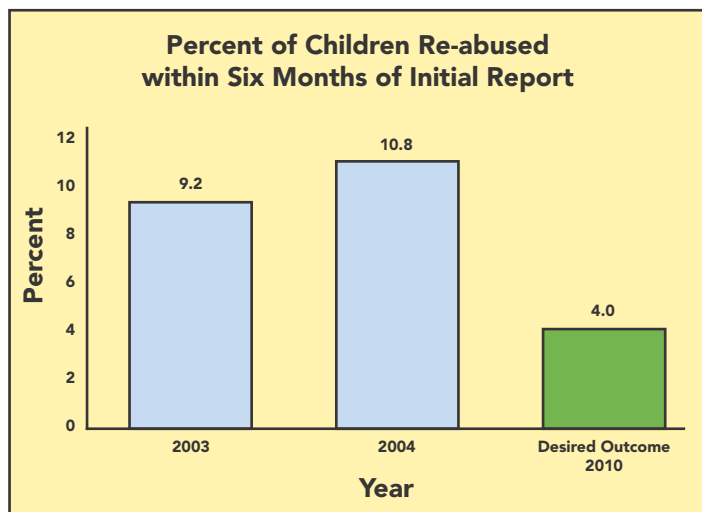
Data reported in the *Kids Count Data Book: 2005* show Florida losing ground again with respect to other states on 10 measures of child well-being. Our national rank slipped from 34 in 2004 to 35 in 2005 (based on 2003 fifty-state data).

The rates of child abuse, abandonment, and neglect have remained high, and re-abuse rates have increased in recent years. Conditions for Florida's children are far from ideal, and action is needed to reverse these trends.

## Child Abuse and Re-Abuse Rates



Source: Department of Children and Families, Child Abuse Annual Statistical Tables



Source: Department of Children and Families, Child Abuse Annual Statistical Tables

Note: The Child Abuse Rate reported here for 2003-2004 differs from that reported in *The Plan*. The difference results from a shift from using duplicated counts (which count children per occurrence of abuse) to unduplicated counts (which count each child once). Likewise, the re-abuse rate for 2003 reported here differs from the one reported in *The Plan*. The difference reflects a change in the time period for which the Department of Children and Families tracks re-abuse. Now children with initial reports of abuse during the second half of the calendar year are tracked for re-abuse for the following six months.



# Goals and Objectives

---

## Desired Outcomes

By June 30, 2010,

- The child abuse rate will be reduced from the fiscal year 2003-2004 statewide rate of 29.4 to 15.0 per 1,000 children.
- The re-abuse rate within six months of initial abuse will be reduced from the 2003 statewide rate of 9.2% to 4.0%.

*Note: Again, base rates are different than those reported in the prevention plan for the reasons noted.*

## Goals

Four goals have been established to achieve the desired outcomes:

1. All families and communities ensure that children are safe and nurtured and live in stable environments that promote well-being.
2. State, local, and community resources comprise a collaborative, responsive, family-centered service delivery system that promotes the well-being and safety of children, families, and communities.
3. The prevention continuum has the capacity to ensure the needs of children and families will be addressed competently, collaboratively, and effectively.
4. The prevention continuum's accountability system ensures the evidence-based effectiveness of planning and resource utilization.

## Objectives

During the initial planning phase, objectives were developed to address each goal. As implementation became the focus of planning, the Florida Interprogram Task Force developed subcommittees, one focusing on each of seven functional domains. Subcommittees consist of subject-matter experts, Task Force members, and local planning team members. The subcommittees developed action plans for assigned objectives, reviewed progress in that domain on a statewide and local level, and provided technical assistance to local planning teams. The domains are:

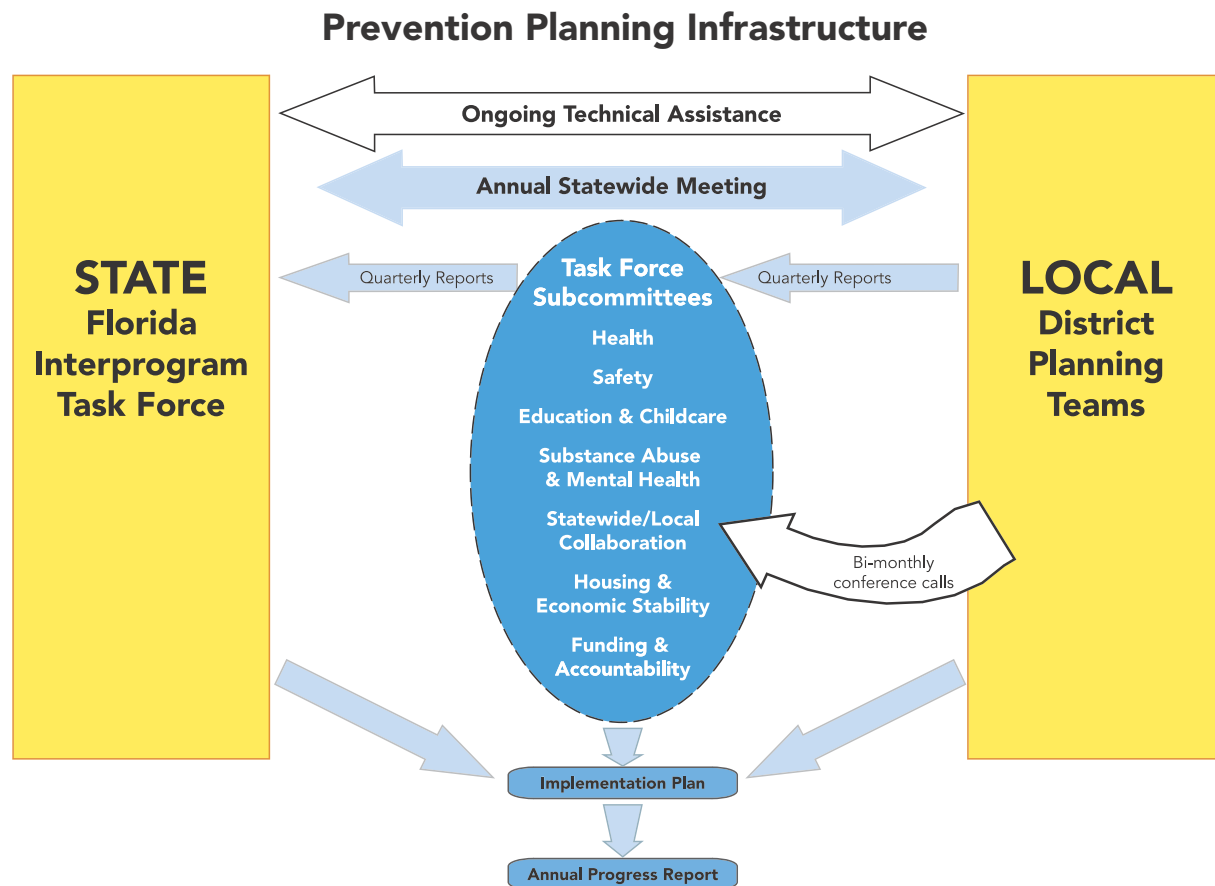
- Child and maternal health
- Community and family safety
- Education and child care
- Substance abuse and mental health
- Housing and economic stability
- Collaboration among state agencies and local communities
- Prevention funding and accountability

To reshape Florida's approach to children and their experiences, detailed action plans examining and modifying strategies were developed for objectives in each domain. These action plans are published in **Florida's State Plan for the Prevention of Child Abuse, Abandonment, and Neglect: July 2005 through June 2010: Implementation Plan** (February 2006), which is available at [www.teamfla.org/taskforce.html](http://www.teamfla.org/taskforce.html).



# Plan Implementation

The Plan is seeking better outcomes on a statewide level; however, the Task Force recognizes that statewide changes are founded on parallel changes at the local level. To support the interdisciplinary state and local collaborative aspects of planning and implementation, the Florida Interprogram Task Force has developed the infrastructure summarized in the figure below to ensure effective plan implementation.



Task Force members include representatives of state agencies mandated by section 39.001, Florida Statutes, and other state agencies whose efforts are essential in creating healthy environments for our children. Other non-governmental statewide organizations involved in ensuring child well-being also have representatives on the Florida Interprogram Task Force. During fiscal year 2005-2006, the full Task Force met four times.

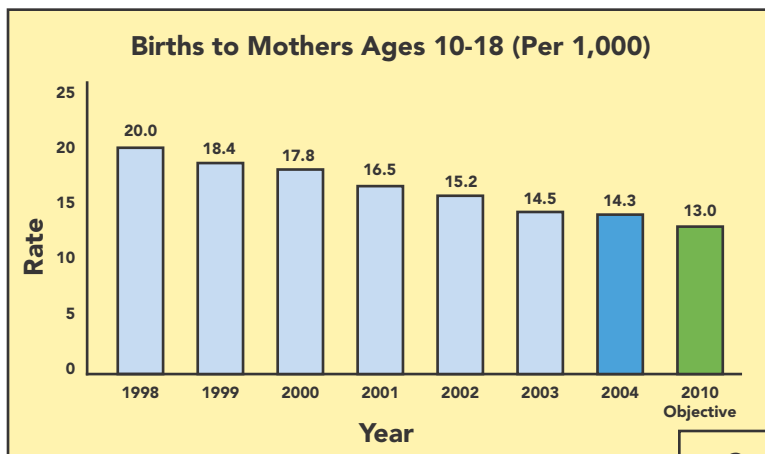
Local planning teams consist of members from local organizations that are comparable to the members of the statewide Task Force. In addition, some include news media, advocacy groups, courts, faith-based organizations, funding organizations, and Children's Services Councils. Many local teams also have formed subcommittees to address objectives in particular domains.

Implementation activities include actions at the state and local levels:

- The Task Force offers technical assistance to local planning teams and subcommittees.
- Local planning groups report their progress quarterly to the Task Force.
- The Task Force, through subcommittee quarterly reports, a quarterly report summary, and a detailed annual progress report, regularly reviews progress in actions taken to implement The Plan. The Task Force evaluates both the process of implementation and the values of indicators for major outcomes and for each objective.
- A statewide meeting of local planning team members and Task Force members addressed: statewide/local collaboration; a review of best practices in planning, implementation, and prevention; and development of strategies to overcome challenges faced by local planning teams.
- Bimonthly conference calls between Task Force subcommittee members and local planning team members address a variety of issues and concerns that help improve both statewide and local efforts.

# Milestones

- This year saw an increase in legislative interest in prevention of child abuse:
  - SB 156 and HB 249, supporting implementation of the 2-1-1 system statewide (Objectives 2.4, 2.14, 3.3, and 3.5), came very close to passage. The 2-1-1 system provides telephone and on-line access to Florida’s citizens about services available to families in a given region of the state.
  - HB 7173 passed, requiring all schools to report cases of suspected abuse to the Department of Children and Families central abuse hotline even if the suspected perpetrator is a school employee (Objective 2.16).
  - The Future of Florida’s Families Committee of the House of Representatives completed an interim project on child abuse prevention. Its report emphasized the importance of preventing abuse and neglect before they occur and encouraged the type of collaboration incorporated in The Plan. The interim project culminated in the passage of HB 7173 establishing the Office of Child Abuse Prevention under the Governor’s Office.
- The Task Force expanded documentation of the types of prevention programs that exist regionally.
- Plan objectives and indicators were reviewed, and modifications, additions, or deletions were made that bring The Plan objectives into alignment with agency strategic plans. Notable additions include objectives addressing:
  - Infant mental health.
  - Recognizing family/child needs when meeting parent’s mental health or substance abuse needs.
  - Improvements in transportation availability.
  - Children’s access to health and mental health services in the community and schools.
- As a result of participation in implementation of The Plan, participating state agencies have an increased commitment to and awareness of how their programs contribute to child well-being.
- The Task Force and local planning teams developed a reporting and feedback system that promotes increased congruence between statewide and local plans.
- While Florida’s overall child abuse rates have remained high and re-abuse rates have increased, early prevention efforts have yielded success on other indicators of child well being.

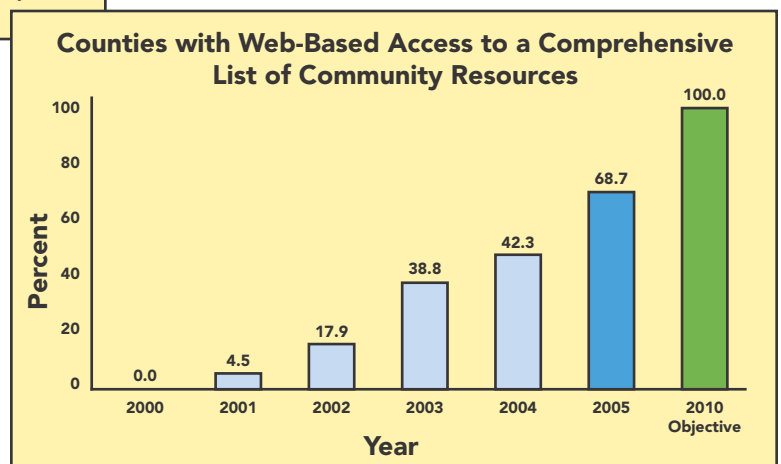


For instance, births to teenage girls have been declining steadily since 1998. At this pace, Florida will attain its objective by 2010.

Source: Florida Department of Health, Community Health Assessment Resource Tool Set (CHARTS)

The percent of counties with web-based access to a comprehensive list of community resources increased more than 50% from 2004 to 2005.

Source: Florida Alliance of Information Referral Services



## Local District Accomplishments

---

- Local planning teams serve as a forum to help individuals in the community understand the roles they can play in ensuring that Florida's children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families.
- Local planning teams involve businesses, civic groups, schools, local government, and news media as well as traditional service providers and agencies.
- All districts have a local Child Abuse, Abandonment and Neglect Prevention Plan. As of April 21, 2006, objectives in local plans are related to 86% of the objectives in the statewide plan.
- Local planning teams serve as a forum to help individuals in the community understand the roles they can play in ensuring that Florida's children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families.
- The Department of Children and Families continues to implement the Road to Independence Act. The department has promulgated revised rules for the Independent Living program and will be working to further implement statutory changes passed in the 2006 legislative session.
- The percentage of children living in poverty has decreased in Florida since 2004.
- The high school graduation rate has increased.
- Local funding is being utilized in some areas of the state to place health professionals in public schools.
- The Family Team Conferencing model is used to strengthen families and meet their needs before they enter the child welfare system.
- Child Protection Teams (Department of Health, Children's Medical Services) provide medical, psychological, and psychosocial assessments that assist investigators in plans for safety, and in the identification of long term risk factors and the development of case plans.
- Programs like drop-out prevention programs, tutoring, and after school education programs in targeted neighborhoods meet needs of students facing academic challenges.
- Local methamphetamine task forces, among other activities, train community social service professionals.
- The needs of Children with Severe Emotional Disturbances are being addressed using an integrated care system that provides wraparound services involving the Department of Children and Families, Mental Health Services, and SEDNET.
- Life skills programs are offered in some communities.



## Remaining Challenges

---

- The multidisciplinary, interagency nature of effective child abuse prevention efforts, presents an ongoing challenge to maintain the balance between the primary purpose of some programs — for instance, economic self-sufficiency, health promotion, provision of high quality education for our children, law enforcement — and the impact such programs can have in ensuring that all Florida’s children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families. To meet this challenge the Task Force has made sustained efforts to actively engage all players in the prevention effort.
- Florida’s communities are at different points in embracing child well-being/child abuse prevention efforts. The Task Force will continue to use the knowledge and skills of high achieving communities to provide assistance to communities that are experiencing challenges or are just getting started.
- One challenge identified by several subcommittees is a perceived (or real) lack of qualified providers in Florida in such areas as psychology, mental health evaluation, and nursing. If these gaps are real, strategies must be enacted that will encourage Florida’s youth to seek training in these areas and create incentives for people to enter and remain employed in these disciplines.
- One consequence of increased awareness of child abuse and neglect may be a temporary increase in the abuse and neglect rate and in rates of reoccurrence due to increased reporting of suspected cases. Of more concern than the temporary increases in the child abuse and neglect and re-occurrence rates are negative trends for some indicators of child well-being. For instance:
  - Although children and family poverty rates are declining, the rate of children who are homeless increased in 2004 from 4.67 per thousand to 5.2 per thousand;
  - Although the overall death rate for children under five is declining, the death rates for children under 18 due to violence and accidental injuries is increasing. These results are an early indication that Florida needs to increase its efforts to address family homelessness and the causes of child deaths before our children’s environment deteriorates further.

## Looking Ahead

---

- Next year will be a year of changes to infrastructure that will lay the foundation for ensuring that all Florida’s children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families. We will begin to see implementation of new strategies on a local level — strategies that will be encouraged and supported by state agencies.
- The Task Force will continue to measure system outcomes, so there will be an enhancement of accountability and there will be more public awareness of what Florida’s priorities need to be to ensure that all Florida’s children are raised in healthy, safe, stable, and nurturing families.
- Because the Task Force is systematically identifying funding gaps for evidence-based services, Florida will be in a position to better allocate resources to support prevention activities.
- New legislative priorities will be developed based on needs identified by local planners and subject-matter experts participating as Task Force subcommittee members.
- As a result of these efforts, more of the child well-being indicators will begin to improve, and Florida will see the impact on rates of child abuse and neglect and re-abuse.

