



**GEORGIA  
THRIVE  
INFANT-TODDLER  
COURT PROGRAM  
STATE ACTION PLAN**

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Georgia THRIVE Infant-Toddler Court Program (ITCP) is a statewide initiative aimed at strengthening and expanding Infant-Toddler Court teams throughout Georgia. The program seeks to improve policies, systems, and support for families with young children (aged 0-3) who are involved in or at risk of involvement with the child welfare system. The Georgia THRIVE State Leadership Team, with support from Mindworks Georgia and the ITCP National Resource Center, developed this state action plan through a collaborative process that included stakeholder meetings, data analysis, and a review of the Family Engagement and Systems Assessment Tool (FESAT).

Using the Results-Based Accountability framework, the process engaged members of the State Advisory Group (SAG) in six sessions, with prework between each meeting. The group focused on identifying and prioritizing growth areas and brainstorming strategies to enhance support for families with young children in the child welfare system.

This document outlines program challenges and barriers, followed by SAG's primary strategies to address these issues. To ensure sustainable impact, performance measures have been established to track progress and promote continuous quality improvement. This state action plan will serve as a living document guiding the ongoing implementation and adaptation of the ITCP. The program's success will be evaluated using key performance measures including families with their needs met and access to services, resource distribution, service provider knowledge, and staff retention rates.

Next steps include beginning implementation of the outlined strategies and monitoring progress while adjusting approaches based on community feedback and data.

For additional information on the state action plan approach and desired outcomes, please contact us at [GeorgiaTHRIVE@gsu.edu](mailto:GeorgiaTHRIVE@gsu.edu). Together we can make a significant impact in the lives of Georgia's families, children, caregivers, and residents.

In service,

***Georgia THRIVE***



# MISSION *and* VISION

**MISSION:** The Georgia THRIVE Infant-Toddler Court Program (ITCP) seeks to improve the well-being of families and young children by strengthening the system of care, transforming courts, and closing the pipelines to child welfare system involvement to achieve a safe, permanent home in which children can grow and thrive.

**VISION:** To establish a well-coordinated child welfare and court system that provides trauma-responsive services to young children and their families, resulting in safe and stable communities where individuals thrive.

**TARGET POPULATION:** The priority population will be children aged 0-3 years and their families who are involved in, or at risk of involvement in, the child welfare system.

## PROJECT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The ITCP has established seven primary goals listed here with corresponding status updates:

**ESTABLISH LEADERSHIP:** Georgia THRIVE has created and trained a state-level ITCP leadership team consisting of state partners, local leaders, and families with lived experience to guide implementation. Strong leadership is in place, supported by Mindworks to ensure statewide collaboration.

**DEVELOP STATE ACTION PLAN:** The Georgia THRIVE leadership team, with support from the National Resource Center and stakeholders, has developed a state action plan to guide program implementation efforts.

**INCREASE CAPACITY:** The Georgia THRIVE program continues to train state and local partners in the Safe Babies approach and developmental health topics, including developmentally attuned and environmentally responsive practices. While progress has been made in training, there is room for growth in application.

**CREATE CONVENING OPPORTUNITIES:** Regular Georgia THRIVE program and workgroup meetings are held to encourage shared learning and contributions, ensuring the project's long-term sustainability. These meetings have good engagement from partners, and feedback opportunities are effectively utilized. Future program plans include holding spaces for cross-site discussions and collaboration and expanding training efforts to include the application of court practices and ITCP foundations.

**ESTABLISH LOCAL CAPACITY:** Georgia THRIVE has launched three local implementation sites through a request for applications process that is supported by the state leadership team. New counties are showing interest in ITCPs, and local coordinators are making strategic progress toward implementation.

**IMPROVE OUTCOMES:** Data collection from local Georgia THRIVE sites tracks youth and family outcomes and post-child welfare/court involvement, with a focus on program implementation barriers, best practices, continuous quality improvement, and baseline measures.

**ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY AND SCALING:** The program uses evaluation data to increase community buy-in and inform future scaling and sustainability plans. Conversations about sustainability have started, though concrete plans are still in development.

**SUMMARY OF PRIMARY  
CHALLENGES RELATED  
to GEORGIA THRIVE'S  
PROJECT GOALS  
and OBJECTIVES**



# STAFF RETENTION

Staff turnover can adversely affect the progress and impact of any ITCP, especially given the level of interdisciplinary cross-collaboration that is involved. The primary strategy to prevent staff loss within Georgia THRIVE is to implement effective communication, knowledge sharing, and relationship building between staff at both the local and state levels across all system agencies.

Additional strategic considerations include increasing compensation for Georgia THRIVE community coordinator positions, seeking sustainable funding sources at both the local and state level, and implementing employee recognition and fellowship initiatives to boost morale. Additionally, reflective supervision for Georgia THRIVE program staff will support retention and professional growth, complemented by professional development opportunities and cross-training initiatives. Key performance measures to support staff continuity include staff retention rates, satisfaction through climate surveys, the number of community coordinators per site, caseload volume, and staff work-life balance reporting.

Primary Performance Measure
Staff retention rates (disaggregated by role/position)

# COMMUNICATION GAPS

ITCPs are rooted in the work of interdisciplinary and cross-collaborative agency efforts. Communication gaps arise from differences in language, background, and experience, as well as the overuse of acronyms among agencies, which hinders partnership engagement. To address this, the State Advisory Group will foster collaboration across systems through multidisciplinary forums to debunk and demystify roles, helping professionals across different systems learn about their responsibilities and build a shared vision that utilizes common language and principles accessible to all. Improved attitudes among professionals, as well as forum attendance and retention rates, will be tracked to assess progress in communication data around the percentage of professionals who can articulate their service approach rationale.

At the family level, Georgia THRIVE has developed a local participant handbook to serve as a central resource for program participants, providing contact information for case managers and service providers, court dates, frequently asked questions, and a glossary of frequently used terms. The addition of materials with core messaging around infant and early childhood mental health will emphasize the importance of early interventions for better long-term outcomes. The participant handbook currently includes a program overview, glossaries, and distinctions between Georgia THRIVE and traditional dependency court processes.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of surveyed professionals working to support families who report improved understanding/clarity of role, language accessibility, and engagement

# LOCALIZATION

Ensuring that national ITCP guidelines are adapted to fit local contexts is critical for the success of Georgia THRIVE. Strategic considerations include grounding program activities in local perspectives by integrating community voices and cocreating programs with input from national, state, and local stakeholders. Collaborative visioning will ensure that programs are tailored to meet the unique needs of Georgia’s communities.

The approach will prioritize coregulation in child welfare, which involves creating supportive environments where families and professionals work together to manage stress and build resilience. Performance measures will track the percentage of local programs that meet both Safe Babies and state implementation standards, recognizing that variations may occur based on the unique needs of different populations.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of local programs that meet national and local implementation standards for safety, permanency, stability, and access

# ACCESS AND USE OF POPULATION DATA

The availability of population and child welfare data in Georgia is currently limited, posing challenges in monitoring key metrics such as preterm birth, low birth weight, and neonatal intensive care unit enrollment. To address this, Georgia THRIVE site implementation teams (SITs) will focus on improving the accessibility and utilization of population data across state agencies. The Center of Excellence for Behavioral Health & Wellbeing, as the statewide implementation lead and evaluator, will facilitate continuous training and technical assistance for SIT members to support the execution of the Safe Babies approach framework. These findings will contribute to sustainability efforts and guide the future scaling of the Georgia THRIVE ITCP model statewide.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage increase in population data access gained through ongoing evaluation of implementation and Safe Babies program impact

# KEY POLICY BARRIERS



# DIFFICULTY QUALIFYING FOR ASSISTANCE

ITCP target families often struggle to qualify for government aid such as the Childcare and Parent Services program, which provides childcare subsidies, due to complicated or confusing application processes. The state team has created the Georgia THRIVE Resource Toolkit, which outlines state-level services and supports for program families in need of additional assistance. The toolkit includes a list of available resources and services for childhood development and wellness, as well as a range of factors affecting family social determinants of health. Additionally, Georgia THRIVE will connect kinship caregivers to the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS) Kinship Navigator for access to local programs and services, potentially involving local churches to provide additional support like meals and respite childcare. Georgia THRIVE data will also be used to leverage support to increase family support, utilize local resources to fill service gaps, address Medicaid eligibility gaps, develop centralized resources, ensure continuity of benefits after permanency, and promote parent advocacy.

## Primary Performance Measure

- Number/percentage of local programs that meet national and local implementation standards for safety, permanency, stability, and access
- Number/percentage of Georgia THRIVE children/families who are satisfied with services

# LOSS OF HEALTH COVERAGE

When parents lose custody of their children, mothers often lose their health coverage. Georgia THRIVE will survey available low-cost health services, explore extending health coverage for six to 12 months, and consider the Planning for Healthy Babies (P4HB) Medicaid Waiver. Georgia THRIVE will also expand health care access through partners like Georgians for Healthy Futures, build capacity for navigators by centralizing resources in family program materials, and highlight Federally Qualified Health Centers as key resources. Using the Safe Babies database, performance measures will track the percentage of families retaining health coverage during custody transfers, monitor coverage status changes, and track children with a medical home.

## Primary Performance Measure

- Number/percentage of families who retain health coverage during custody transfers
- Average time between the loss of coverage and regaining coverage

# LIMITED SUPPORT FOR CAREGIVERS

Working grandparents often earn just enough to be ineligible for assistance, highlighting a lack of policies supporting kinship caregivers. Georgia THRIVE will increase advocacy for kinship caregivers, identify local kinship care programs, utilize relative care spokespersons, and foster relationships between foster care and kinship families.

### Primary Performance Measure

- Number/percentage increase in the number of kinship caregivers receiving expanded benefits and support
- Number of local kinship care programs identified and engaged in advocacy efforts

## UNOFFICIAL POLICIES

Systemic barriers that prevent families from receiving the support they need are often mistaken for official policies. Georgia THRIVE will document team roles to improve transparency in program communication and enhance accuracy through partnerships.

### Primary Performance Measure

- Number/percentage of program teams that demonstrate improved transparency in communication and role documentation, as measured through regular assessments of team collaboration and partnership effectiveness with Georgia THRIVE
- Identify number of long-standing policies and systemic barriers that prevent families from receiving support



# **URGENT *and* IMPACTFUL SYSTEM BARRIERS**



## LACK OF COORDINATION

Poor communication among child welfare staff, clinicians, families, and insurance providers leads to service coordination issues. The proposed strategies aim to create unified systems through education and collaboration, develop resources for a common language, and organize information-sharing workshops to coordinate all systems. The initiatives will also improve resource-sharing processes, enhance availability and awareness for opportunities to collaborate, and promote involving first responders and nontraditional partners.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of child welfare staff, clinicians, families, and insurance providers who participate in collaboration workshops

## INSUFFICIENT TRAINING

Many service providers, such as DFCS staff, are not fully trained or aware of all the services available to families. The work ahead will engage DFCS staff in development and cross-agency staff training. Additional resources will be developed as needed.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of child welfare service providers who report changes in access observed among Georgia THRIVE families

## INEFFECTIVE ADVOCACY

Legal service providers representing families in court often lack awareness of available health support services. Georgia THRIVE will prioritize obtaining health provider lists for legal services, developing a toolkit for program staff to address advocacy and education, providing training for legal service providers, and educating courts about these services to enhance their advocacy for program families.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of legal service providers who receive and utilize the toolkit in their region

## DISCONNECTED SYSTEMS

Different service systems often fail to communicate effectively, making it challenging for families to receive the support they need. Georgia THRIVE aims to enhance cross-agency communication and expand the integration of service information across systems. Performance measures will track the percentage of stakeholders participating in collaboration workshops.

<b>Primary Performance Measure</b>
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Number/percentage of child welfare staff, clinicians, families, and insurance providers who participate in collaboration workshops
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## OVERBURDENED STAFF

Professionals working with infant and early childhood mental health and the child welfare system are often overwhelmed and have limited cross-organizational learning and coordination opportunities. Georgia THRIVE will offer professional development opportunities that focus on continuous quality improvement of staff, knowledge, and overall well-being. Customized training offerings will range from lunch-and-learn lessons on traumatic stress to reflective supervision sessions, all with the intent of creating a more resilient, engaged, and satisfied workforce. Georgia THRIVE will also utilize the learning management system and community of practice forums for learning convenience and knowledge sharing. The team will be intentional about identifying workforce strategies that effectively address burnout, including:

1. Promoting continuous learning and development;
2. Fostering a supportive workforce environment;
3. Implementing flexible work arrangements; and
4. Encouraging work-life balance and well-being.

Performance measures will track staff participation in training offers, retention rates, and percentage of staff who report feeling supported by the organization because of the professional development opportunities provided. The comprehensive training will emphasize both professional development and personal well-being, ensuring staff are well-prepared for rewarding and sustainable careers.

<b>Primary Performance Measure</b>
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Staff retention rates (at all levels of the organization)
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# PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION BARRIERS



# BALANCING WORKLOAD AND UNFAMILIARITY

Attorneys and judges are hesitant about ITCPs due to unfamiliarity with the program and concerns about the potential increase in workload. Georgia THRIVE will increase ITCP familiarity by offering learning opportunities and incentives for child welfare staff. Sessions will be designed to help them understand the value of ITCPs and incorporate perspectives from families with lived experience (e.g., emphasize program impact to garner buy-in, expand group training sessions, and share data on successful reunifications).

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of legal service providers who report familiarity with ITCP and its benefits

# ELEVATED PARENT VOICE

ITCPs emphasize parents' voices more than traditional court programs, but this has not been fully realized. Georgia THRIVE will enhance the integration of parent voices throughout the program by consistently inviting parents with lived experience to the annual state conference, advocating for and supporting sites that choose to hire parent peers to assist program families, and ensuring parent peer representation in committee groups and communications. The desired outcome is that the program expedites family permanency rates and stability, ensuring that families are brought back together more quickly and efficiently than under previous systems.

Primary Performance Measure
Number/percentage of Georgia THRIVE parents who are authentically and meaningfully engaged in elevating "parent voice"



# UNMET NEEDS, CHALLENGES, *and* BARRIERS FACING FAMILIES



# UNMET SOCIAL AND BASIC NEEDS

Housing is a significant issue due to factors such as low wages, prior evictions, criminal record barriers, substance use disorders, and lack of transportation. Georgia THRIVE will advocate for affordable housing and engage community resources to address prevailing social determinants of health that adversely impact children and families. Additionally, Georgia THRIVE will strengthen and establish partnerships with community organizations to exchange insights and effective practices, aiming to increase housing opportunities, reduce transportation barriers, and improve access to health and wellness support.

## Primary Performance Measure

Number/percentage of ITCP families with basic needs met (e.g., housing, livable wages, transportation, etc.)

# FUTURE GEORGIA THRIVE NEEDS

The specific needs of Georgia THRIVE families will become more apparent once they are admitted into the program. Since enrollment in Georgia THRIVE is optional, additional opportunities are available to provide support and foster ongoing improvement for site implementation efforts. Georgia THRIVE will create a community of practice to assist new sites as they emerge, foster cross-site relationship building, and cultivate a space for knowledge sharing across the program.

## Primary Performance Measure

Number/percentage of Georgia THRIVE families that receive the resources they need



# ADDITIONAL UNNAMED CHALLENGES *and* BARRIERS



# LACK OF REPRESENTATION

The current system lacks adequate representation as decision-makers and service providers do not fully reflect the backgrounds of the populations most in need of support. Research shows that having appropriate representation in service delivery increases impact. Georgia THRIVE will implement a tiered approach that includes the following to address misaligned representation:

1. Expand statewide training and engagement efforts to promote trauma-responsive care, and other aspects of the Safe Babies approach, while also soliciting representation.
2. Utilize data to foster dialogue with decision-makers and service providers, raising awareness of barriers and exploring solutions. Conduct listening sessions with families involved in the child welfare system to ensure that their experiences inform future solutions.
3. Adopt the Extension for Community Healthcare Outcomes (ECHO) model to share ITCP best practices and facilitate case discussions, enhancing communication, awareness, brainstorming, and collaboration among ITCP sites and the child welfare system across the state.
4. Help families connect with available resources, including 211 through the United Way, the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities' crisis line, the Find Help Georgia website, and the Georgia Council for Recovery.

<b>Primary Performance Measure</b>
Number/percentage of professionals who have a shared identity/lived experience with those receiving services

# GAPS AND BARRIERS TO CARE

Barriers to care continue to affect all families, highlighting the need to promote health and positive outcomes for the community at large.

To enhance trauma-responsive care across the state, Georgia THRIVE will focus on expanding training initiatives at the state level, ensuring trauma-responsive care is integrated into all services. This effort will include community-centered approaches, such as listening sessions that engage families and stakeholders, allowing us to gather valuable insights directly from those affected by the child welfare system.

Georgia THRIVE will seek to launch an ECHO model presentation series to foster collaborative innovation among program sites and service providers. This will allow us to share best practices, enhance communication, and encourage brainstorming on effective program strategies.

To support these efforts, Georgia THRIVE will identify and partner with organizations that specialize in state-level trauma care and training, leveraging their expertise to strengthen program activities and maximize impact. Together, these strategies will create a robust framework for trauma-informed support in Georgia communities.

### Primary Performance Measure

- Number of parents enrolled in Georgia THRIVE ITCP
- Number of children with a medical home



# STATE CASE MAP



The State Case Map highlights several challenges, barriers, and pain points in the current ITCP process. These include the need to encourage attorney engagement and clarify the role of parent attorneys, explore options for allocating time for ITCP cases on judges’ dockets, and focus on engaging families and communicating program benefits. Additionally, there is a need to support the transition to community coordinator roles, adapt to more frequent review hearings, assess the time needed for monthly THRIVE meetings, and recognize that the current map focuses on screened families and does not yet include pathways for family preservation or prevention efforts.

The primary and secondary goals of Georgia THRIVE are to support family permanency, enhance resource connections for families, and explore adjustments within the court system to align with ITCP best practices. The program objectives also aim to clarify that THRIVE hearings may align with existing review hearings, ensure families understand there are no program sanctions to encourage participation and trust, and showcase how ITCPs can complement Family Treatment Court while outlining the implementation decision-making process.

<b>Challenges, Barriers, and Pain Points</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Encourage attorney engagement (child, parent, and DFCS attorneys) and clarify the role of parent attorneys.</li> <li>● Explore options for allocating time and space for ITCP cases on judges’ dockets.</li> <li>● Focus on engaging families and communicating the benefits of the program.</li> <li>● Support the transition to community coordinator roles.</li> <li>● Assess the time and capacity needed to hold monthly THRIVE meetings.</li> <li>● Recognize that the map currently focuses on processes for screened families and does not yet include pathways for family preservation or prevention efforts.</li> </ul>
<b>Primary and Secondary Goals of the Process</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Support permanency.</li> <li>● Enhance resource connections for families, including health, behavioral health, and therapeutic services.</li> <li>● Explore adjustments within the court system to align with ITCP best practices.</li> <li>● Clarify that THRIVE hearings may align with existing hearings.</li> <li>● Ensure families understand there are no program sanctions to encourage participation and trust.</li> <li>● Highlight how ITCPs can complement Family Treatment Court and outline the implementation decision-making process.</li> </ul>

# **FAMILY ENGAGEMENT** *in* **SYSTEMS** **ASSESSMENT TOOL**



The Family Engagement in Systems Assessment Tool (FESAT) revealed several key strengths and areas for growth in family engagement within the ITCP across several domains:

**COMMITMENT:** The ITCP demonstrates a strong commitment to incorporating the voices of individuals with lived experience, as evidenced by their inclusion in the State Advisory Group and representation in planning sessions. Growth opportunities include broadening the parent-partner role, developing aligned policies, exploring budget needs to support parent leader participation, clearly outlining scope of work, fostering understanding of team contributions, providing clarity around roles and boundaries, utilizing waivers to clarify responsibilities, acknowledging that peer supports bring unique perspectives, and continuing these efforts at future leadership meetings.

**TRANSPARENCY:** The ITCP is taking a collaborative approach by engaging multiple agencies and organizations with a solid foundational infrastructure. Growth opportunities include embracing data sharing, encouraging ongoing family feedback, empowering families and parent leaders to share their perspectives, cultivating a supportive environment for all participants, emphasizing the value of diverse voices, setting a welcoming tone at meetings, and continuing to seek family feedback.

**REPRESENTATION:** The ITCP promotes multidisciplinary and multiagency collaboration in advisory groups and planning sessions. Growth opportunities include integrating peer support into family preservation cases, fostering a genuine sense of belonging, including family experiences in training, highlighting father representation in family preservation initiatives, focusing on father engagement, utilizing specialized training, and acknowledging enthusiasm around these initiatives.

**IMPACT:** The program needs to explore the impact of staff turnover on effectiveness and consider using the Recovery Capital Scale to measure outcomes. Opportunities exist to partner with recovery community organizations, highlight the importance of connection in addressing addiction, collaborate with managed care organizations to broaden access to peer support, engage with Amerigroup leadership to address service gaps, utilize Medicaid codes to support primary care providers in offering assessments and treatment, and provide educational opportunities for care management organizations.

# CLOSING



The Georgia THRIVE Infant-Toddler Court Program is poised to make a significant impact on the lives of infants, toddlers, and their families across the state. By addressing key policy, system, and implementation barriers, the ITCP aims to create a more supportive environment for families involved in the child welfare system. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement, and data-driven decision-making, the program will work to ensure that all families have access to the resources and support they need to thrive.

This state action plan is an evolving guide that will adapt to the changing needs of the communities it serves. By prioritizing family voice, transparency, and representation, the ITCP will continue to build trust and foster meaningful engagement with the families it serves.





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