

# Devereux

COMMUNITY BASED CARE OF OKEECHOBEE & THE TREASURE COAST

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## News & Media

### New Funding May Mean Lower Caseloads Locally

2015 was a banner legislative year for Community Based Care, which saw a \$16 million increase to core funding of child-welfare programs throughout the state.

"This was probably the best session we've had since the beginning of Community Based Care," Florida Coalition for Children CEO Kurt Kelly said during a conference of child-welfare professionals earlier this month.

This year's funding increase will go toward increasing the number of dependency case managers and decreasing caseloads.

Local caseload ratios are as high as 24 or 25 children for every dependency case manager in some counties, said Christina Kaiser, Devereux CBC director of community relations. They should be between 12 and 15, she said.

"We can't overestimate the importance of this issue," said Cheri Sheffer, DCBC Chief Operating Officer. "Our contract with the Department of Children and Families requires us to provide services to any child who needs them - there's no waiting list in child welfare."

That means that any increase in children entering care can easily upset already stretched budgets. Like all Community Based Care agencies throughout the state, Devereux CBC is experiencing such an increase, which in turn contributes to case-manager turnover. And that's no good for anyone.

Research has shown that high case-manager turnover contributes to children staying in the system for longer periods of time and has a negative impact on health and well-being outcomes for children waiting to be reunified or adopted, Sheffer said.

Children with long stays in the dependency system are more likely to have poor physical and mental health outcomes and are less likely to be academically successful, she said.

Locally, additional funding for reduced caseloads means resources can be freed up to expand prevention, intervention and diversion services designed to prevent child welfare involvement in the first place.

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