



# Agency of Human Services, Department for Children and Families **Child Protection In Vermont Report For 2024**

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## Introduction

This report has been prepared in accordance with 33 V.S.A. § 4923.

### **§ 4923. Reporting**

The Commissioner shall publish an annual report regarding reports of child abuse and neglect no later than June 30, for the previous year. The report shall include:

- (1) The number of reports accepted as valid allegations of child abuse or neglect.
- (2) The number of reports that resulted in an investigative response; particularly:
  - (A) the number of investigations that resulted in a substantiation;
  - (B) the types of maltreatment substantiated;
  - (C) the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim, by category; and
  - (D) the gender and age group of the substantiated victims.
- (3) The number of reports that resulted in an assessment response; particularly:
  - (A) the general types of maltreatment alleged in cases that received an assessment response; and
  - (B) the number of assessments that resulted in the recommendation of services.
- (4) Trend information over a five-year period. Beginning with the adoption of the assessment response and continuing over the next five years, the report shall explain the impact of the assessment response on statistical reporting. (Added 2007, No. 168 (Adj. Sess.), § 19.)

### **Key Definitions**

A “report” is a concern about suspected child abuse or neglect that is communicated to Centralized Intake and Emergency Services (CIES). Reports can be made by phone or in writing and may come from professionals or members of the public.

33 V.S.A. § 4912 defines investigations and assessments in the following way:

“Investigation” means a response to a report of child abuse or neglect that begins with the systematic gathering of information to determine whether the abuse or neglect has occurred and, if so, the appropriate response. An investigation shall result in a formal determination as to whether the reported abuse or neglect has occurred.

“Assessment” means a response to a report of child abuse or neglect that focuses on the identification of the strengths and support needs of the child and the family and any services they may require to improve or restore their well-being and to reduce the risk of future harm. The child and family assessment does not result in a formal determination as to whether the reported abuse or neglect has occurred.

## Message From the Department for Children & Families

Over the past five plus years, Vermont’s child protection system has undergone significant stress, transformation, and growth. The compounded impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the closure of Woodside Juvenile Rehabilitation Center, and workforce shortages have challenged the very foundation of our system of care. These events required the Department for Children and Families (DCF), Family Services Division (FSD) to reorient operations, reallocate resources, and confront longstanding systemic issues. Despite these challenges, the division has made measurable progress in both service delivery and organizational culture, improving child protection in Vermont.

## Key Developments and System Improvements

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### Infrastructure and Program Expansion

- Red Clover, a secure residential program emphasizing dignity and healing, has opened to address critical placement gaps for youth with high needs.
- A reserved Vermont Crisis Intervention Network (VCIN) bed for developmental services youth in DCF custody was created to better meet the unique needs of this population.
- Significant progress has been made to reduce the burden on FSD staff associated with placement gaps for youth with complex needs. The use of contracted staffing supports, respite providers, and the creation and deployment of the CATS team has mitigated the strain on the workforce and improved the care for these youths.
- The division successfully completed its Federal Title IV-E audit, demonstrating financial compliance and programmatic integrity.
- Targeted investments have been made to stabilize the FSD workforce, with sustained efforts in recruitment, retention, and staff development across key operational areas.

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## Child Welfare Outcomes

- In fiscal year 2024, 57% of adoption finalizations were completed by kin or fictive kin, reinforcing our commitment to relational permanency and the preservation of family and cultural connections.
- The number of children entering DCF custody is at its lowest level in over a decade, attributable in part to improved implementation of structured decision-making tools and evidence-based assessment practices in the field.
- As of April 2025, 72% of all open conditional custody cases had been open for six months or less, a marked improvement from 52% earlier in the fiscal year. This 20-percentage-point increase reflects deliberate, coordinated efforts across districts to reduce time in care.

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## Equity and Culture Change

The division continues to lead within the department on issues of racial equity and systemic bias. The Statewide Racial Equity Workgroup (SREW) is driving internal efforts to address disparities in child welfare outcomes and to ensure that BIPOC (black, indigenous, and people of color) staff feel safe, respected, and represented in the workplace. This work remains central to addressing the overrepresentation of black and brown children in custody as well — a national and local concern.

These values are deeply embedded in FSD's [5-Year Strategic Plan](#), where racial equity, safety culture, and safety-organized practice are named as core priorities. We recognize that a healthy organizational culture is the foundation for delivering meaningful services and supports to Vermont children, youth, and families. As such, we are intentionally moving toward a culture of learning, transparency, and continuous improvement. This evolution is supported by our deepening engagement with the [National Partnership for Child Safety \(NPCS\)](#) and our investment in Safe Systems Learning Review training — tools that help us reflect, adapt, and grow. Our commitment to fostering environments of trust, accountability, and shared responsibility extends to both our internal teams and our partnerships with families.

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## Staff Experience and Workplace Climate

As part of our engagement with [NPCS](#), a collaborative supported by [Casey Family Programs](#) that applies safety science in child welfare, FSD participates in an annual Safety Culture Survey designed to assess and improve organizational climate, psychological safety, and staff well-being. Vermont is the only NPCS jurisdiction to have completed the survey for six consecutive years, allowing us to track meaningful progress over time.

In 2025, 246 FSD staff participated (a 59% response rate), and the results show continued improvement across several key indicators of a strong safety culture:

- +6 percentage points in workplace connectedness
- +4 percentage points in mindful organizing
- +7 percentage points in psychological safety

When compared to national averages from other jurisdictions participating in the survey, Vermont's 2025 results are particularly strong:

- Workplace connectedness: 5–7 percentage points above average
- Mindful organizing: 8–10 percentage points above average
- Psychological safety: 8–10 percentage points above average
- Stress recognition: 10–15 percentage points above average
- Intent to remain in child welfare and safety climate: On par with national averages

Notably, Vermont's early survey results from 2020 were typical of other jurisdictions just beginning their safety culture work. Over the past five years, we have seen steady, measurable gains — demonstrating the effectiveness of our ongoing investment in culture change, staff support, and organizational learning. These trends reflect FSD's ongoing efforts to create an environment where teams are empowered, supported, and positioned to deliver high-quality services to children and families.

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## Looking Ahead

FSD is committed not only to responding to current needs but also to proactively designing a more resilient and responsive system of care. Initiatives underway include:

Workgroup activity and stakeholder engagement to support implementation of reforms prompted by [Act 154 of 2024](#), aimed at modernizing child abuse and neglect investigation and substantiation standards and promulgating updated rules governing the [Child Protection Registry](#);

A new restorative justice partnership with Paul Nixon (Paul Nixon Consultancy) and [Marc Wennberg of Community Reentry](#), including focused efforts related specifically to Woodside;

Interdepartmental collaboration with [Department of Mental Health \(DMH\)](#), Department of [Disabilities, Aging & Independent Living \(DAIL\)](#), and [Laraway Youth and Family Services](#) to reinforce caregiver supports and ensure placement stability;

Planning for a joint caregiver conference in September 2025 to center the voices of foster parents, shared living providers, and individuals with lived experience;

Planning for [FSD's Annual Child Welfare Summit in September 2025](#) focused on continuing our important work implementing the [Structured Decision Making® \(SDM\) Court Hearing Guide](#) in juvenile court proceedings.

## Conclusion

While challenges remain, the division's trajectory is one of progress—hard-won, ongoing, and rooted in collective resilience. FSD remains dedicated to delivering a child welfare and juvenile justice system that is safe, equitable, and effective for Vermont's most vulnerable children and families.

Chris Winters, DCF Commissioner

Aryka Radke, FSD Deputy Commissioner

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## Data Summary

This report provides child protection data for calendar year 2024 in Vermont. Here are the highlights:

- 19,410 reports were made to the Child Protection Line in 2024 — 770 less than in 2023, which is a 3.8% decrease.
- At least 79% of the reports made were from mandated reporters and 16% from nonmandated reporters.
- Of the 19,410 reports received in 2024, 3,617 were accepted (a 10% drop from 2023). The percentage of reports accepted was 19%. Of these reports accepted, 56% were accepted as investigations, and 44% were accepted as assessments.
  - 2,037 investigations
  - 1,580 assessments
    - 993 child abuse assessments
    - 587 family assessments
- Out of the 3,617<sup>1</sup> reports accepted, 493 cases (14%) were opened for ongoing services.

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<sup>1</sup> As of May 19, 2025, there were 131 pending reports.



- Out of the 2,037 investigations accepted, 483 (24%) of these investigations were substantiated.
- Based on the 483 substantiated reports, there were 578<sup>2</sup> child victims.
- During the last quarter of 2024, there were:
  - 861 children in DCF custody
  - 290 children in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the child and family
  - 151 families getting ongoing services after an investigation or assessment determined there was a high to very high-risk of future maltreatment

## Reports of Suspected Child Abuse & Neglect

We encourage all Vermonters to call our Child Protection Line at 1-800-649-5285 (24 hours a day / 7 days a week) when they have concerns about a child's safety and well-being— whether or not they are mandated by law to do so.

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<sup>2</sup> Reports are made at the family level and may involve multiple children. Substantiations are determined at the individual child level and may include more than one type of maltreatment per child. As a result, the number of victims often exceeds the number of reports received.

## Reports to the Child Protection Line

**19,410** reports were made to the Child Protection Line in 2024.

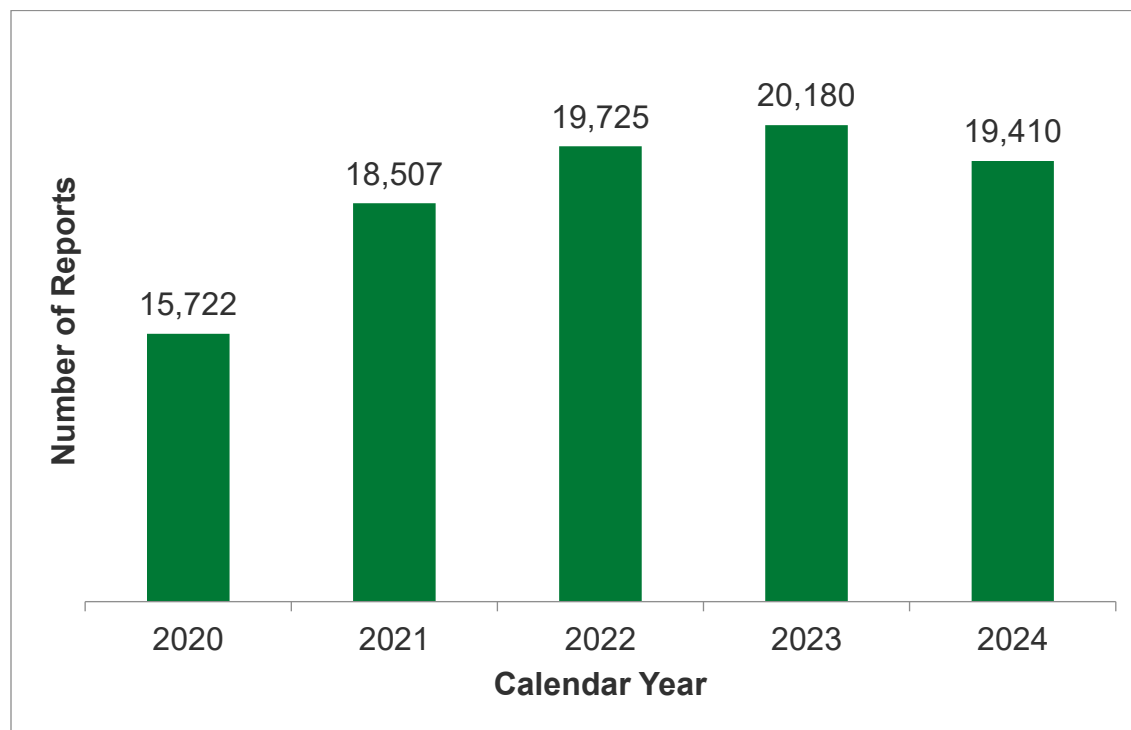


Figure 1: Shows the number of reports made to the Child Protection Line from 2020-2024. In 2024, there were 19,410 reports made; this is a slight decrease from the 20,180 reports made in 2023 and the 19,725 reports made in 2022. There were 18,507 reports made in 2021, and 15,722 reports made in 2020.

## Reports Alleging Child Abuse & Neglect, by Reporter Type

At least 79% of reports in calendar year 2024 came from mandated reporters and 16% from non-mandated reporters.

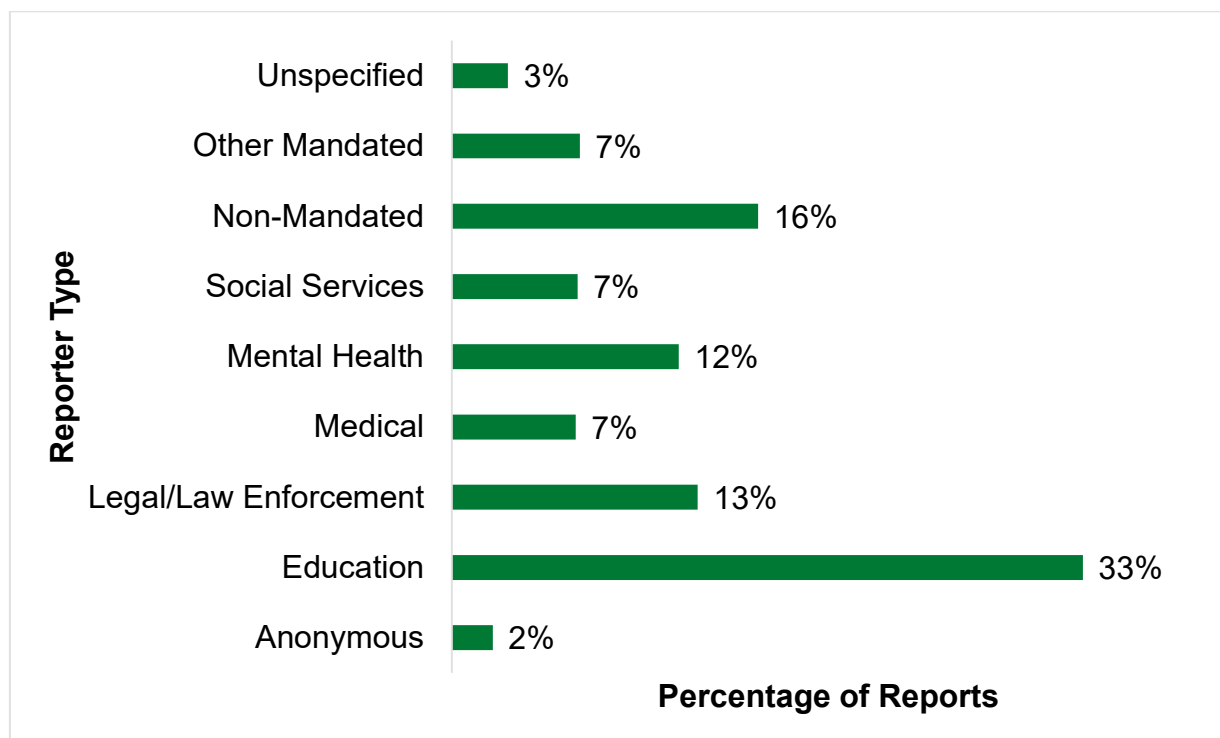


Figure 2: Details the percentage of overall reports made to the Child Protection Line in calendar year 2024 based on reporter type. At least 79% of reports in 2024 came from mandated reporters (33% of reports were made by education staff, 13% from legal/law enforcement, 7% from medical providers, 12% from mental health providers, 7% from social services, and 7% from other mandated reporters). 16% of reports came from non-mandated sources, 3% came from unspecified sources, and 2% were made anonymously.

## Reports Accepted for Intervention

There were **3,617**<sup>3</sup> child safety interventions in calendar year 2024.

Vermont law authorizes two types of intervention:

1. Assessments
2. Investigations

While the preferred intervention is usually an assessment, an investigation is legally required in certain situations. To learn more, read [FSD Policy 52 - Child Safety Interventions: Investigations & Assessments](#).

Type	2020 <sup>4</sup>	2021	2022	2023	2024
Total calls to Vermont's Child Protection Line	15,722	18,507	19,725	20,180	19,410
Total reports accepted for intervention	3,620 (23%)	4,423 (24%)	4,526 (23%)	4,040 (20%)	3,617 (19%)
Total Investigations	1,604	1,966	2,386	2,272	2,037
Total Assessments	2,016	2,457	2,140	1,768	1,580
Child abuse assessments	1,167	1,515	1,307	1,103	993
Family assessments	849	942	833	665	587
Outcomes of interventions: Investigations substantiated <sup>5</sup>	527	609	593	547	483
Outcomes of interventions: Cases opened for services <sup>6</sup>	794	876	623	499	493

<sup>3</sup> As of May 19, 2025, there were 131 pending reports.

<sup>4</sup> The years in the table are calendar years (January – December).

<sup>5</sup> **Investigations Substantiated:** A report is substantiated if the evidence found during the investigation is based upon accurate and reliable information where there is a preponderance of the evidence necessary to support the allegation that the child has been abused or neglected.

<sup>6</sup> **Cases Opened for Services:** A case is opened for ongoing services if, during any type of intervention, the assessed risk of future maltreatment is determined to be high or very high.

## Victims of Child Abuse & Neglect

The data in Figure 3 is based on substantiated reports<sup>7</sup> of child abuse and neglect. The number of unique child victims listed is an unduplicated count. This means that each child victim is counted only once, regardless of the number of times they were found to be victimized during the reporting year.

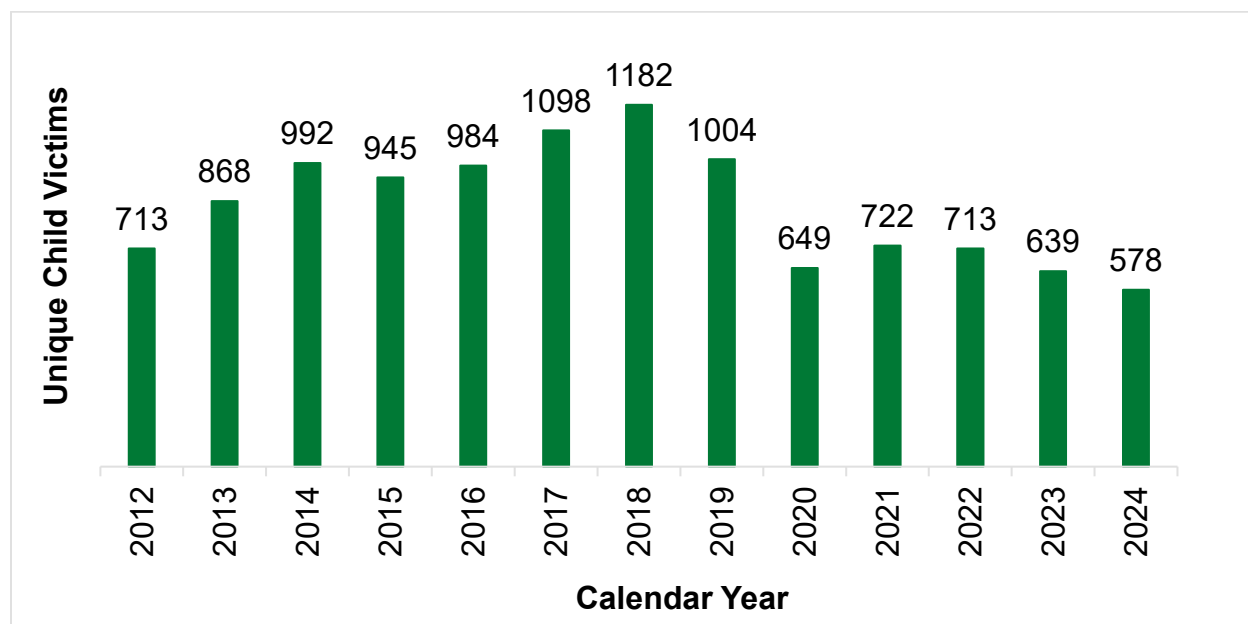


Figure 34: Shows the number of unique child victims in Vermont each year, from calendar years 2012-2024. In 2024, there were 578 unique child victims; this is a decrease from 639 in 2023, 713 in 2022, 722 in 2021, and 649 in 2020. There were 713 unique child victims in 2012, 868 in 2013, 992 in 2014, 945 in 2015, 984 in 2016. The next few years saw the highest number of unique child victims with 1,098 in 2017, 1,182 in 2018, and 1,004 in 2019.

## Ongoing Family Services Caseload

Our ongoing caseload includes the following types of cases:

<sup>7</sup> When DCF investigates a report of child abuse or neglect, we must decide whether a preponderance of the evidence supports the allegation that the child has been abused or neglected. If the answer is yes, the report is substantiated and the person's name is added to the Child Protection Registry - a database of all substantiated reports of child abuse and neglect dating back to January 1, 1992.

- **Children/youth in DCF custody:** When a family court judge places a child in the temporary custody of the Department for Children and Families because of concerns about a child's safety and well-being.
- **Children/youth in conditional custody:** When a family court judge places a child in the conditional custody of a parent, relative or other person known to the family and orders DCF to stay involved — to supervise, provide services, and ensure the child's safety.
- **Families getting ongoing support:** When an investigation or assessment determines there's a high to very high risk of future maltreatment and a voluntary case is opened for ongoing services.

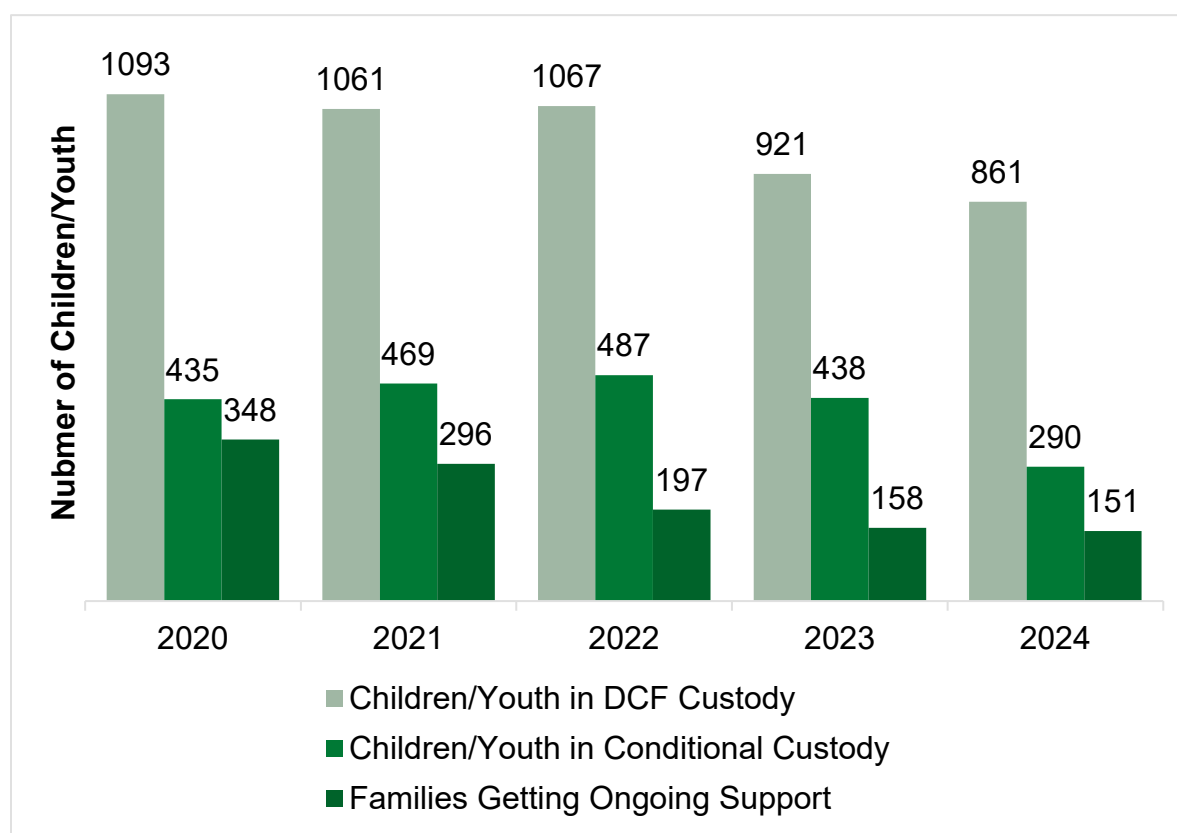


Figure 45: Shows the Family Services Ongoing Caseload from calendar years 2020 - 2024 focusing on 3 categories: children/youth in DCF custody, children/youth in conditional custody; and families getting ongoing support. The number of children/youth in DCF custody mostly decreased over the 5-year period (except for a very slight increase from 2021 to 2022) with 1,093 children/youth in custody in 2020, 1,061 in 2021, 1,067 in 2022, 921 in 2023, and 861 in 2024. The number of children/youth in conditional custody was largely consistent from 2020 to 2023 with 435 children/youth in conditional custody in 2020, 469 in 2021, 487 in 2022, and 438 in 2023. There was a significant decrease to 290 children/youth in conditional custody in 2024. The number of

families receiving ongoing support has decreased over this same five-year period, with 348 families in 2020, 296 in 2021, 197 in 2022, 158 in 2023, and 151 in 2024.

## Additional Child Protection Data

Visit the [FSD Data page](#) on the DCF website for additional child protection data, including:

- Annual child protection reports dating back to 2006
- Profiles of interventions & outcomes by district, for 2019 to 2023
- 2024 data on:
  - Reports substantiated by abuser-child relationship
  - Reports substantiated by age of abuser
  - Reports substantiated by gender of abuser & type of abuse
  - Reports substantiated by gender of victim & type of abuse
  - Reports substantiated by type of abuse
  - Reports substantiated by victim's age and type of abuse

## Vermont Juvenile Court Data

Read the annual statistical reports on the [Vermont Judiciary's website](#) to get data on juvenile court cases. This includes fiscal year (FY) 2024 data on:

- CHINS cases
- Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)
- Delinquency
- Youthful Offenders