



## **Residential Group Care Accountability System ANNUAL REPORT**

Florida Department of Children and Families  
Office of Quality and Innovation  
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Secretary

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## Purpose

The Florida Department of Children and Families (Department) engaged the Florida Institute for Child Welfare (Institute) to develop and validate an assessment tool to measure, document, and facilitate quality services in Department-licensed child-caring agencies, known as group care. The Group Care Quality Standards for Accountability (GCQSA) were established to set core quality standards to ensure that each program is consistently providing high-quality services to the children in its care.

Requirements outlined in section 409.996(25), Florida Statutes, require the Department, in collaboration with the Institute, to develop a statewide accountability system for group care providers based on measurable quality standards. The accountability system is required to include the following:

1. Promote high quality services and accommodations, differentiating between shift and family-style models and programs and services for children with specialized or extraordinary needs, such as pregnant teens and children with Department of Juvenile Justice involvement.
2. Include a quality measurement system with domains and clearly defined levels of quality. The system must measure the level of quality for each domain, using criteria that group care providers must meet to achieve each level of quality. Domains may include but are not limited to admissions, service planning, treatment planning, living environment, and program and service requirements. The system may also consider outcomes 6 months and 12 months after a child leaves the provider's care. However, the system may not assign a single summary rating to group care providers.
3. Consider the level of availability of trauma-informed care and mental health and physical health services, providers' engagement with the schools that children in their care attend, and opportunities for children's involvement in extracurricular activities.

## Background

The Group Care Quality Standards Workgroup was established in 2015 by the Department and the Florida Coalition for Children (FCC) to develop core quality standards for licensed residential child-caring agencies. In addition, the Group Care Quality Standards Workgroup created the Quality Standards for Group Care to aid in ensuring children are receiving high-quality services that surpass the minimum thresholds currently assessed through licensing. The workgroup was comprised of stakeholders, including the Florida Institute for Child Welfare, group care providers, child advocates, academic researchers, and Community-Based Care Lead Agency (Lead Agency) staff. From the workgroup, a draft set of standards was developed and approved by the Department.

The approved quality standards are captured within the following eight domains:

### Quality Practice in Group Care – Eight Domains

- Assessment, Admission, and Service/Treatment Planning
- Positive, Safe Living Environment
- Monitor & Report Problems
- Family, Culture, and Spirituality
- Professional & Competent Staff
- Program Elements
- Education, Skills, and Positive Outcomes
- Pre-Discharge/Post-Discharge Processes

## Quality Standards Assessment Tool

The assessment tool is designed to measure group care providers within the eight domains. The GCQSA is comprised of four separate forms, which includes: 1) Service Provider Form A, 2) Service Provider Form B, 3) Youth Form, and 4) Licensing Specialist Form. The assessment tool consists of three types of questions: structural, process, and experiential. Structural items measure the infrastructure of the group care setting (e.g., staffing, policies, resources), process items measure the extent to which providers consistently provide services that follow recommended guidelines, and experiential items measure experiences of consumers and providers within the group care setting.

The Director for group care, Direct Care Staff, and Licensing Specialist, at a minimum, must complete the GCQSA as part of re-licensure. This ensures that the individuals completing the assessment tool on behalf of a residential program have sufficient experience or familiarity with the program to provide an informed and valid assessment. Other forms are strongly recommended, but not required, to be completed by the Lead Agency and youth.

## Oversight Activities

### Accountability System

2019-2020 Report Year: The Department and the Institute initiated the statewide validation study and the inter-rater reliability and agreement study. These components represented major steps toward fully validating the GCQSA. Due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, data collection was delayed for both components as licensing teams adhered to mandated social distancing guidelines and responded to the rapid licensing needs to address the placement shortages resulting from the reduction of available foster home placements. Data collection for the inter-rater reliability study was extended from the initial end date of June 30, 2020, to August 30, 2020.

2020-2021 Report Year: The Department and the Institute completed the statewide validation study and the inter-rater reliability and agreement (IRRA) study. To accommodate the unforeseen delays, the data collection period for the statewide validation study was extended from a deadline of January 1, 2021, to February 26, 2021, and data collection for the statewide validation study was completed in March 2021.

2021-2022 Report Year: The Department continued working with the Institute for the next two-year transition period of the project. A live webinar training on generating and interpreting GCQSA provider reports was created to assist the licensing specialists. Additionally, a prerecorded training was created during for new hires, and boosters and ongoing technical assistance was provided to support the licensing teams across the state. A review of the statewide validation study and the IRRA study completed in 2021 evaluated whether the GCQSA provided a consistent representation of quality.

2022-2023 Report Year: The Department and the Institute completed ongoing research aimed at validating the GCQSA, examined associations between the Quality Standards and program performance and outcomes, and completed efforts to finalize the GCQSA, Statewide Accountability System, and sustainability plans. Data collection for the IRRA was completed in July 2022, and data collection for the statewide validation study was completed in January 2023.

2023-2024 Report Year: The Department and the Institute completed the statewide validation study and the IRRA study. Data collection for the IRRA was completed in July 2023, and data collection for the statewide validation study was completed on June 30, 2024. The research team monitored data collection and provided quarterly

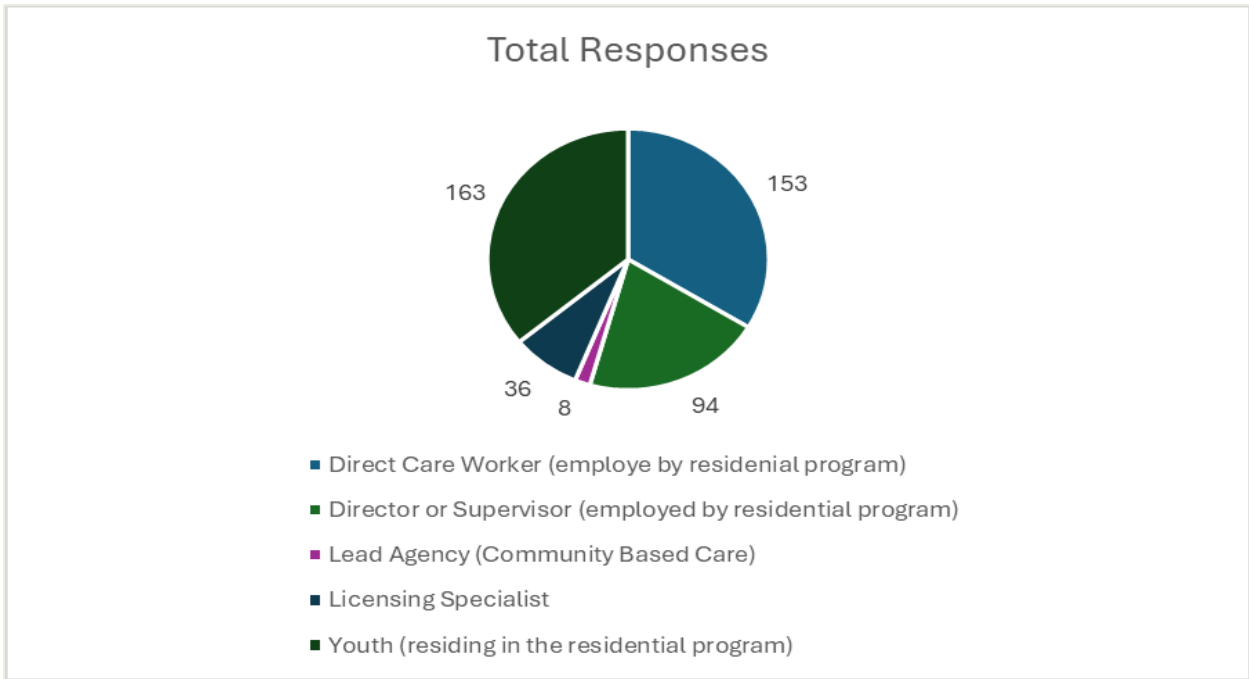
technical assistance to support timely data collection and completion of the GCQSA. The team continued to build GCQSA reports for the Department. Data analyses conducted included comparisons of trends in performance from year 1 (baseline) to year 2 and examined performance by different types of licensed residential facilities. The Institute successfully met all requirements to develop, validate, and implement the GCQSA. By September 11, 2024, the Institute transitioned the GCQSA to the Department’s Quality and Innovation Team and the data captured in the Institute’s Qualtrics system was transferred to the Department’s Survey Data and Analysis System.

2024-2025 Report Year: The Department continues to administer the GCQSA with ongoing survey results collected by the Office of Quality and Innovation. There was a total of 454 surveys completed during State Fiscal Year 2024-2025. Surveys are completed on child-caring agencies that are renewing its license. Items are rated on a five-point scale (1 = Not at all, 2 = A little, 3 = Somewhat, 4 = Mostly, 5 = Completely). Ratings indicate how true or representative a statement is of practices or conditions in the residential program being assessed. For example, a rating of ‘1’ would indicate that a practice is not at all consistent with how things are done in the program.

[GCQSA Survey Results for July 1, 2024, to June 30, 2025.](#)

For the review period of 2024-2025, all eligible participants completed the GCQSA for providers in all six regions, totaling 454 GCQSA’s.

Table 1: GCQSA Participation



Source: GCQSA, Department of Children and Families Qualtrics

The mean scores for participant responses to each of the eight GCQSA domains ranged from 4.21 by the Lead Agency for Assessment, Admission and Service Planning domain, to 4.88 by Residential Program Directors for the

Monitor and Report Problems domain and the Family, Culture, and Spirituality domain. Across respondents, the average mean was ranked in the “mostly” score range. Some notable consistencies in domain rankings emerged across respondents. The Professional, Competent Staff domain was the highest-rated domain suggesting a consistently strong area of practice. The Assessment, Admission, and Service Planning domain was rated the lowest, suggesting room for qualitative enhancements. The results highlight the importance of multiple perspectives and the relevance of attending to small numeric differences in ratings, which may have greater significance than the relatively minor differences the numbers may suggest.

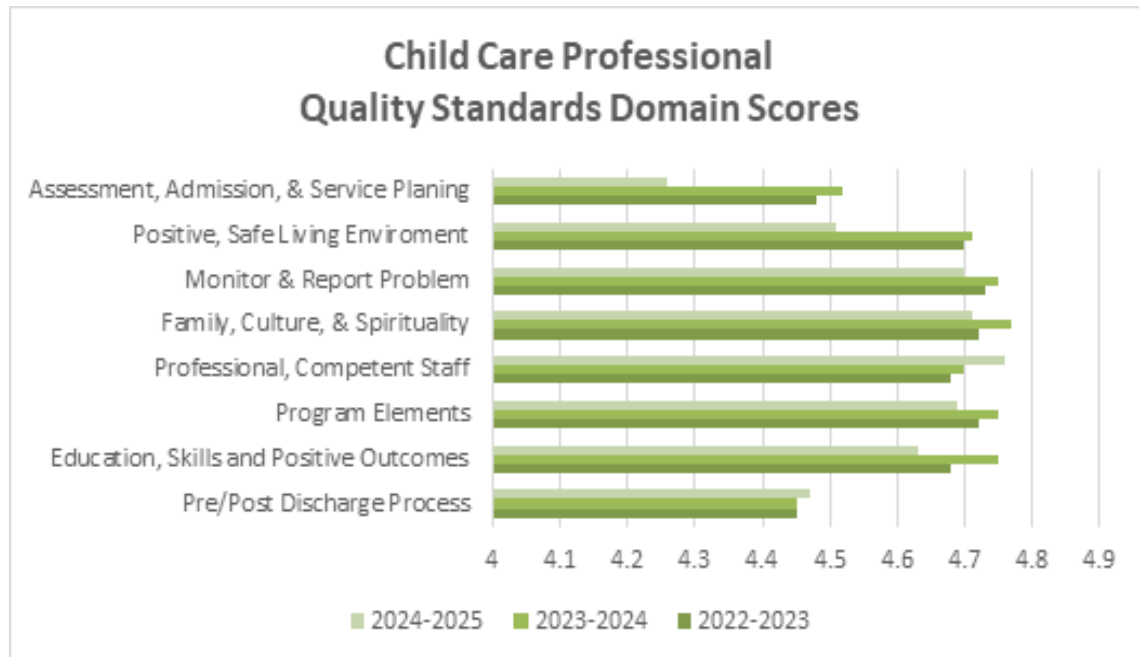
Table 2: Average Mean for Domains

	Youth	Lead Agency	Direct Care Staff	Director of Group Care	Licensing Specialist	Total
<b>Assessment, Admission &amp; Service Planning</b>	4.26	4.21	4.58	4.66	4.5	4.26
<b>Safe Living Environment</b>	4.24	4.85	4.77	4.84	4.64	4.51
<b>Monitor &amp; Report Problems</b>	4.49	4.5	4.79	4.88	4.59	4.70
<b>Family, Culture, &amp; Spirituality</b>	4.55	4.63	4.81	4.88	4.68	4.71
<b>Professional, Competent Staff</b>	NA	4.23	4.74	4.85	4.73	4.76
<b>Program Elements</b>	4.58	4.59	4.74	4.84	4.64	4.69
<b>Education, Skills, &amp; Positive Outcomes</b>	4.44	4.84	4.74	4.85	4.59	4.63
<b>Pre/Post Discharge Planning Processes</b>	4.31	4.34	4.54	4.57	4.26	4.47

Source: GCQSA, Department of Children and Families Qualtrics

GCQSA outcomes reflect a consistent ranking over the past three years across domains with ratings falling largely within the “mostly” met standards (score of 4) range.

Table 3: Three Year Comparison of Domain Scores



## Conclusion

The Department continues to advance toward completion of the statutory requirements and goals associated with the Quality Standards for Group Homes contained in section 409.996, Florida Statutes.

The Department has integrated the Qualtrics system to collect GCQSA data and is finalizing the development of a regional licensing dashboard that will enable continuous quality analysis throughout the year. Additionally, the Department is in the planning phase to develop dedicated dashboards for group homes and shelters to further enhance data-driven oversight and decision-making.