

FAQs

Work Requirement

Q. Can I receive the stipend/scholarship and then work for DCS in another State (i.e Utah or New Mexico), in another Division within DES (i.e. Division of Developmental Disabilities) or work for Tribal Social Services doing DCS work (i.e be a child welfare worker with the Navajo Nation or with the Gila River Indian Community)?

A. No, if you receive the stipend/scholarship, you will be contractually obligated to work for the Arizona Department of Child Safety.

Q. After I graduate, I plan on going on an extended vacation, studying abroad in an immersion program, having a baby, getting married, etc.; can I delay my start date with DCS?

A. Maybe. Contractually, you are obligated to be available for interviews 30 days prior to and 60 days after your graduation, respond to any offer of employment within 3 days, and start within 2 weeks of accepting an employment offer. There have been select circumstances where this has been approved, so if you are thinking of planning a trip after graduation, please notify the contract administrator in writing 30-60 days prior to graduation. Please be aware that you must get approval for any contract extension and that your obligated amount of time for employment will not begin until you actually start.

Q. How soon after graduating will I start my position at DCS?

A. Contractually, you are obligated to start within two weeks of hire. Your start date may depend on how soon your diploma is posted (you cannot begin until your official transcript notes that your diploma was awarded), the pay cycle at DCS (you can only start at the beginning of a pay period), and the training schedule (they generally have new workers start at a time that is close to the start of the next training cycle).

Q. Why am I required to have my own vehicle capable of safely transporting at least two people in addition to myself?

A. While every DCS unit has state cars available to the staff, there are often not enough cars for every worker in a unit to have access to one every time they need to travel to appointments or transport people. All DCS staff are, therefore, required to have a car that can safely transport others. How often you use your own car depends on your personal choices (some people prefer the comfort and familiarity of their own cars), the number of cars available to your unit, and the number of other staff needing a car at the same time. When you use your own car, you'll be reimbursed for mileage at the state rate. This rate covers the costs of both gas and wear and tear on your vehicle. All staff are required to carry their own auto insurance because in the event of an auto accident, your personal liability coverage would be used before any state liability coverage would be utilized.

DCS Positions & Advancement

Q. What will my position be when I start at DCS?

A. Most stipend/scholarship students start as DCS Specialist IIs doing either investigations or on-going case management. Investigators respond to reports of child abuse and/or neglect, make assessments about the safety of the children in the home, determine (with supervisor input) whether the children need to be removed, propose whether or not allegations should be substantiated, and coordinate with law enforcement on dual investigations. They refer families to services, write the initial case plan, complete dependency petitions, and occasionally testify in contested dependency cases. Generally, investigations work is fast-paced, requires rapid assessment skills, and involves meeting new families every week. On-going workers provide the case management services to families whose children have been removed or to families whose children are in the home, but at risk of being removed. On-going workers write case plans, refer children and parents to appropriate services, coordinate with other service providers, monitor the children's safety and well-being either in the home or in their placements, ensure that the children's educational, social, emotional, and physical health needs are being met, engage parents in participating in services, make determinations (with supervisor input) about permanency recommendations to the court, write court reports, and testify in court proceedings. On-going work is generally more process oriented, requires in-depth assessment skills, and involves long term relationships with the families on the case load. The rate of pay for both positions is the same. While your preference for the position type for which you think you are most fit will be taken into consideration, you're not guaranteed the position you want. If there are numerous vacancies in investigations, you'll likely be assigned to an investigator position and vice versa. In some of the rural areas, you may do both investigations and on-going work, as well as adoptions.

Q. I'm going to be in the PAC Concentration in the MSW Program. When I begin my work at DCS, can I get a position within the Department of Child Safety administration doing policy analysis or program evaluation?

A. Probably not. The purpose of the Stipend/Scholarship program is to recruit and train students to be DCS Specialists. Specialists are the front-line workers at DCS who work day to day with the families served by DCS. Once you gained work experience at DCS you could apply for administrative positions.

Q. I would really like to work as a DCS Specialist in an Adoptions Unit, Young Adult Program Unit, ICWA Unit, at the After Hours Unit, etc., could I start in one of these units?

A. Generally not. Most specialty units require some AZ DCS experience and generally only allow for lateral transfers into those units. You may apply to transfer into a specialized unit, should a vacancy be available, once you have passed your first year probationary period.

Q. What are the opportunities for advancement at DCS?

A. Most Scholarship/Stipend students are hired as DCS Specialist IIs. After being a Specialist II for one year, you are eligible to promote to a Specialist III. This promotion is a non-competitive promotion,

meaning that as long as you meet the requirements and have positive employee evaluations, you would be able to promote without competing against others for a limited number of positions. Generally, after you are a DCS Specialist III for one or two years, you are eligible to apply for other competitively based promotional opportunities, such as applying for a Program Specialist Position, Team Decision Maker Facilitator position, or Supervisor Position. Beyond the supervisor position, there are positions for advancement within the DCS administration. These administrator positions include the Assistant Program Manager (responsible for a section within the District), Program Manager (responsible for the District), and the Director of DCS (responsible for all of DCS). In addition, there are many other promotional and lateral position types and ways to vary your job duties within DCS. You could work at the hotline, work in a specialty unit (i.e. Young Adult Program, Indian Child Welfare Act Program, After Hours Investigation, or Adoptions), be co-located at a family advocacy office to work directly with law enforcement on dual cases, be a community specialist responsible for engaging and working with the community; work in a District Office doing foster home investigations, matching children with available placements, being a Young Adult Program Specialist or Behavioral Health specialist; or work at Central Office on contracts, special programs, or policy analysis and application. You could also work as a trainer either at the District Level or with the Training Unit.

Benefits/Salary

Q. Upon being hired at DCS, what would my salary be?

A. Please refer to the DCS website at <https://dcs.az.gov/about/child-protective-service-specialist> to review salary information. Most stipend/scholarship students are hired as DCS Specialist IIs.

Q. Can I earn over-time while working at DCS?

A. DCS Specialists are able to earn time and a half for hours worked beyond 40 hours a week when their supervisor approves it.

Q. What benefits would I be eligible for as a DCS worker?

A. All DCS employees are AZ State employees and, as such, entitled to all the benefits of State employment. To review the benefits including health care plans, dental plans, vision plans, life insurance, dependent life insurance, flexible spending, and disability please visit the website at: <http://www.benefitoptions.az.gov>. State workers are also able to participate in wellness programs, receive services from employee assistance programs, and can join the AZ State Credit Union. All workers are automatically enrolled in the state retirement system and contributions to retirement are automatically deducted from every paycheck.

Q. How much vacation/annual leave time and sick time would I have as a DCS Specialist?

A. You would accrue paid vacation/annual leave and sick leave time at a rate commensurate with your number of years of service as a state worker. Workers who have been employed fewer than 3 years accrue 12 days of paid annual leave a year and all workers accrue 12 days of paid sick leave a year. In addition to annual leave, there are 10 paid holidays a year.

Q. If I have a baby or one of my family members becomes sick after I begin my position at DCS, could I take a leave of absence?

A. After you have been employed at DCS for 12 months, and 1250 hours worked, you would be covered under the Family Medical Leave Act. Under this act, you would be able to take time off work, or a leave of absence, due to family emergencies, medical conditions, adoption of a child, or childbirth, without losing your position. Your pay, during your absence, would depend on how many hours of sick and/or annual leave you had accrued. If you exhaust your sick and annual leave while on FMLA, you may be eligible for other state employees to donate their leave to you, or you would be taking leave without pay. If you are out of work and covered by FMLA regardless of if you are paid or taking leave without pay, your contractual work obligation continues as if you were still working with no change to your contract expiration date. If you are out of work, on leave without pay, and not covered by FMLA, there may be additional time added to your contract work obligation as determined by DCS administration.

DCS Work Location

Q. I live in the far East Valley of the Phoenix area and do not want to have a long commute; will I be guaranteed employment at the Gilbert or Tempe office?

A. No. While DCS will make efforts to place you near your home, that is not always possible. The placement of new workers depends not only on the worker's needs, but also on the agency's needs at the time. If for example, there were an opening available at the Gilbert or Tempe office, but the West side offices had a much higher vacancy rate than the East side offices, you may be placed in a West side office. Historically, students who want to work in Maricopa County (DCS District I) or Pima County (DCS District II) have always been able to be placed in an office somewhere in that District, even if it's not the office closest to their home. Generally, after you have worked for DCS for one year, you can apply for lateral transfers to other offices within the state.

Q. I want to work in Flagstaff, Sierra Vista, Lake Havasu City, Nogales, etc., can I be guaranteed a position in that city?

A. No. All areas outside of Maricopa County (DCS District I) and Pima County (DCS District II) are considered rural areas; in the rural areas you apply specifically to the offices with openings. If the office in the city/town where you want to work does not have an opening at the time of your graduation, or if you are not selected for an available opening, you would not be able to be employed there. In that case, you would apply to another office or apply in District I or II.

DCS Work Schedules

Q. How flexible will my job at DCS be? Could I work an alternative schedule?

A. When you first start in your position, especially while you're still in training, your hours will most likely be from 8:00 to 5:00. After you have been in your position for awhile, you may be able to negotiate with your supervisor to telecommute once a week, work an alternate schedule of four 10 hour days, or change up your work hours so that you're working from 10 – 7 or 7 – 4 instead of 8 – 5. These

alternate work schedules are dependent on your supervisor's permission and usually still require that you attend mandatory meetings, conferences, and hearings related to your cases, even if they fall outside of your alternative schedule.

Q. While working as a DCS specialist, can I be assured that I will be able to pick up my kids, elderly parent, or dogs from daycare every day by 6:00?

A. Not really. If you have dependents, you will need to have contingency plans in place in case your work day is unexpectedly extended. For the most part, you will be able to structure and plan your days. However, crises come up on every caseload. Children can be disrupted from their placements at 4:30 on Friday evenings and have to be moved to new placements, you can be delayed at a home visit if the children disclose sexual abuse in the home, court hearings and meetings can run late, or you can be left in a waiting room at a hospital with a client who is a danger to themselves or others. You'll work with your supervisor and unit colleagues to meet the demands of these last minute crises; however, you will not be able to guarantee that you will always be out the door right at 5:00.

Q. Will I be on-call, be required to carry a pager, or be asked to take calls on my personal phone numbers outside of work hours?

A. That depends. If you work in a rural district, you will probably be required to rotate after-hours duties. These duties include responding to communications needing immediate response on open cases and performing after-hours investigations. If you work in an urban district (Maricopa County or Pima County) your supervisor will need to be able to occasionally contact you after hours or on weekends concerning matters that arise on your cases, but you would not necessarily have to personally respond.

Q. What is it like to be in a rural district and be on-call on nights and weekends?

A. Each rural unit and district handles the demands of meeting after-hours calls differently. However, if you are on an after-hours rotation, you would generally be expected to be able to respond, in person, to an emergency within 2 hours of receiving the call. That timeline would include the travel time to the call, which in the rural districts can be more than an hour. For the most part, after-hours calls come from the hotline and pertain either to high priority investigations or to emergencies on current cases. These calls can come in at all hours of the night. If you want to work in a rural district and you have dependents, you would need to have plans in place for the care of those dependents if you were suddenly called out.

Licensure

Q. Can I gain hours toward my clinical licensure while working at DCS?

A. No. All social workers, whether BSW or MSW can take the licensure exam for their degree and become licensed social workers; however, clinical licensure (i.e. LCSW) in AZ requires that the practitioner is working in a mental/behavioral health field. The Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners does not consider DCS work to fall within the realm of mental/behavioral work. Therefore, hours worked at DCS will not count toward the hours necessary to obtain a clinical license. Please note,

though, that the only fields that require a clinical license in AZ are the mental/behavioral health fields. If you want to pursue a career in child welfare whether that be in public child welfare (i.e. DCS) or private child welfare (i.e. working at foster & adoptive licensing agency, being a director of a crisis nursery, etc.) or you wind up in school social work, hospital social work, criminal justice social work, community organizing, policy analysis and research, or in an advocacy/outreach organization, you will probably not be required to have a clinical license. The only social workers in AZ required to have a clinical license are those billing third party providers (i.e. working at a mental health agency and billing insurance for therapy sessions) and those billing Medicaid/Medicare for reimbursable services (i.e. working for Mercy Maricopa Integrated Care as a therapist or at one of the other RBHA providers). General licensure (i.e. taking the test and getting an LMSW or LBSW) is good for the profession in that it provides a tracking system of social workers and allows consumers to make complaints against specific practitioners; however, DCS does not require that their social workers be licensed, nor does it reimburse for the annual costs of membership associated with licensure.