

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

**CALIFORNIA OUTCOMES AND
ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM**

PEER QUALITY CASE REVIEW FINAL REPORT



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Onsite Review Dates: January 25-29, 2010

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Peer County Representatives

Marin County

Paula Robertson
Program Manager

My Huynh
Social Worker IV

Stanislaus County

Julian Wren
Social Work Supervisor

Cynthia L. Hujdic
Social Worker IV

Santa Clara County

Bernadette Castillo
Deputy Probation Officer II

Ventura County

Karin Castro
Deputy Probation Officer

Los Angeles County

John Villa
Probation Supervisor

Merced County

Nicole Butts
Social Worker

Phillip Cuaresma
Social Worker

Sacramento County

Melinda Shull
Senior Probation Officer

Santa Cruz County

Deborah Bresnick
Senior Social Worker

Sandra Neveras-Clickard
Senior Social Worker

Melinda Sutter
Probation Officer Supervisor

Teri Noto
Senior Social Worker

Monterey County

Alice White
Staff Development

Vicki Isles
Social Worker

Emily Nicholl
Social Work Supervisor

Irene Garcia
Probation Officer

2010 PQCR Tri-County Planning Committee

San Benito County

Maria Corona- Lead
Deputy Director – CWS

Yolanda Leon
Probation

Rita Campbell
Probation

Santa Cruz County

Mark Holguin- Lead
Program Manger – CWS

Kathy Martinez
Asst. Division Director- Probation

Kelli Kopeck
Senior Analyst – CWS

Monterey County

Margaret Huffman- Lead
Program Manager – CWS

Christabelle Oropeza
Management Analyst- CWS

Norma Aceves
Office Assistant III

Greg Glazzard
Services Manager -Probation

Alice White
CWS Trainer-Supervisor

California Department of Social Services

Mary Sheppard - Monterey County
Rami Chand - San Benito County
Henry Franklin - Santa Cruz County

Bay Area Academy

Erin Twomey-Training Specialist
Mickaela Good-Training Assistant

Clinical Consulting Services

Maryanne Rehberg,LCSW-consultant
Margie Albers,LCSW-consultant

**California Outcomes and Accountability System
Peer Quality Case Review**

County:	Santa Cruz
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County Contact Person for the Peer Quality Case Review

Name:	Mark Holguin
Title:	Program Manager, FCS Santa Cruz County Human Services Department
Address:	P.O. Box 1320 Santa Cruz CA 95061
Phone/E-mail:	(831) 763-8668 Mark.Holguin@hsd.co.santa-cruz.ca.us

Submitted By The Agency for the Children Under Its Care

Name:	Cecilia Espinola
Title:	Director Santa Cruz County Human Services Department
Signature:	

Submitted By The Agency for the Children Under Its Care

Name:	Scott MacDonald
Title:	Chief Probation Officer
Signature:	

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	1
Child Welfare Focus Area	1
Probation Focus Area.....	2
Methodology	3
Planning	3
Interview Teams	3
Interviewer Training.....	3
Interview and Case Selection Process.....	4
Tool Development	6
Unique County Issues	7
Child Welfare Department Personnel.....	7
Probation Department Personnel	8
Summary of Practice: Child Welfare	9
Case Documentation.....	9
Strengths and Promising Practices	9
Barriers and Challenges.....	11
Training Needs	12
State Technical Assistance	13
Policy and Systemic Issues.....	13
Resource Issues.....	14
Interview Team Recommendations.....	14
Focus Group Observations and Recommendations	16
Focus Group: Court.....	16
Focus Group: Supervisors.....	19
Focus Group: Social Workers	22
Focus Group: Parents Center Staff	25
Surveys	29
Survey: Youth.....	29
Survey: Substitute-Care Providers.....	30

Survey: Biological Parents.....	32
Summary of Practice: Probation	34
Case Documentation.....	34
Strengths and Promising Practices	34
Barriers and Challenges.....	35
Training Needs	36
Policy and System Changes	37
Resource Issues.....	37
State Technical Assistance	38
Interview Team Recommendations	38
Focus Group Observations and Recommendations	40
Focus Group: Youth	40
Focus Group: Parents	41
Conclusion.....	43
Appendices.....	44
Appendix A: Interview Tool	
Appendix B: Focus Group Tool: Court	
Appendix C: Focus Group Tool: Supervisors	
Appendix D: Focus Group Tool: Social Workers	
Appendix E: Survey Tool: Youth	
Appendix F: Survey Tool: Sub-Care Providers	
Appendix G: Survey Tool: Biological Parents	
Appendix H: Focus Group: Youth	
Appendix I: Focus Group: Parents	

Introduction

The C-CFSR prescribes ***four integrated processes*** to guide system improvement in a county over the course of a three-year review cycle.

The first process is a “practice-specific” Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR), which is a partnership between the County Probation Department and the County Child Protection Department. The purpose of the PQCR is to learn, through intensive examination of county practice, how to improve child welfare and probation services in a specific focus area. To do so, the PQCR focuses on one specific outcome, analyzes specific practice areas and identifies key patterns of agency strengths and concerns. The process uses peers from other counties to promote the exchange of best practice ideas between the host county and peer reviewers. Peer county involvement and the exchange of promising practices also help to illuminate specific practice changes that may advance performance.

The second process is the County Self-Assessment (CSA) which is a focused analysis of child welfare data. This process also incorporates input from various child welfare constituents and reviews the full scope of child welfare and probation services provided within the county. The CSA is developed every three years by the lead agencies in coordination with their local community and prevention partners. Along with the qualitative information gleaned from the PQCR and the quantitative information contained in the quarterly data reports, the CSA provides the foundation and context for the development of the county three year SIP.

The third component is the System Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is a culmination of the other processes and serves as the operational agreement between the county and the state. It outlines how the county will remodel its system to improve outcomes for children, youth and families. The SIP is developed every three years by the lead agencies in collaboration with their local community and prevention partners. The SIP includes specific measurable improvements in performance outcomes that the county will achieve within a defined timeframe including prevention strategies. Counties, in partnership with the state, utilize the aforementioned quarterly data reports to track progress.

The last component in the C-CFSR integrated processes are quarterly data reports issued by CDSS, which include key safety, permanency and well-being outcomes for each county. These quarterly reports provide summary level federal and state program measures that serve as the basis for the C-CFSR and are used to track state and

county performance over time. Data is used to inform and guide both the assessment and planning processes, and is used to analyze policies and procedures. Information obtained can be used by program managers to make decisions about future program goals, strategies, and options.

These processes are designed to comprise a continuous cycle of quality improvement that help facilitate counties' attempts to systematically improve outcomes.

Focus Area: Child Welfare

Following a review of Safe Measures and quarterly CMS/CWS data reports, Santa Cruz County, in collaboration with their CDSS state consultant, selected Measure C1.4, Re-entry Following Reunification, as the Child Welfare Services PQCR focus area:

Measure C1.4: of all children discharged from foster care to reunification during the year, what percent reentered foster case in less than 12 months from the date of discharge?

The focus area was chosen because Santa Cruz County's rate of foster care re-entry has been on an upward trend since July of 2006. While from July of 2004 to June of 2006 Santa Cruz County's average annual re-entry rate was 8.4% and exceeded the Federal Standard of 9.9%, since July of 2006 Santa Cruz re-entry rates have risen steadily from 10.2% for the time period 7/06 to 6/07 to the most recent reported rate of 17.6% for the period 7/08 to 6/09.

Probation Focus Area

The Probation Department selected transitional services with concurrent planning as its focus area. The department wanted to examine case management practices and service delivery for youth that facilitate a return to a positive and supportive environment and lay a stronger foundation for successful transition to adulthood. Current State data suggests that Santa Cruz County is performing well in the area of transitional services. However local data from the County's contracted Independent Living Skills provider suggests that a lower percentage of probation youth in Santa Cruz County are receiving Independent Living Skills program services.

Methodology

Planning

Santa Cruz County's Family and Children Services and Juvenile Probation Department participated in a tri-county PQCR process along with the Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation departments from San Benito and Monterey counties during the week of January 25-29, 2010.

The Planning Committee included county representatives from each county's child welfare and probation departments, three representatives from the California Department of Social Services, consultants from Clinical Consulting Services, and staff from the Bay Area Training Academy (see Acknowledgement section above). This committee was responsible for development of the structure of the PQCR process, logistical coordination, oversight, technical assistance and support.

The planning committee began meeting in May 2009 and then met twice monthly starting in November 2009. Each department also had an internal planning group that met one to four times per month depending on what was needed to adhere to the timelines outlined in the planning matrix. Santa Cruz' internal planning group worked closely with CDSS consultant Henry Franklin to identify their area of focus and case selection criteria. The PQCR process included three distinct avenues for qualitative data collection: 1) Case Review interviews, 2) Focus Groups, and 3) Surveys. Development and ensuing procedures of all three are discussed below,

Interview Teams

Five interview teams, three child welfare, and two probation, were assembled to conduct the tri-county PQCR interviews. Interview teams were four-member teams generally consisting of either two child welfare or juvenile probation representatives from non tri-county counties and two from tri-county peer representatives. While the non tri-county team members remained consistent, team composition did vary according to the day. The team member from the county whose interviews were being conducted that day was given the day off so that when conducting the actual interviews, teams were represented by three members.

Interviewer Training

All members of the interview teams participated in a full day training/orientation session conducted by Clinical Consulting Services on Monday January 25, 2010 to better prepare them for the PQCR process.

The training/orientation session conducted by the consultants on the first day of the PQCR process included members of the interview teams, members of the tri-county PQCR planning committee, interviewees, the County Managers and Directors and other participants in the PQCR process.

This training addressed the following objectives:

- develop a common understanding among participants of the purpose and desired outcomes of the PQCR process;
- develop well functioning interview teams by providing opportunities for team building and for team practice of needed skills;
- familiarize interviewers with the interview tools;
- Review strategies for creating an interview environment that promotes information sharing.

To reach these training objectives, each team conducted a mock interview with opportunities for observations and feedback from consultants. In addition, the consultants facilitated a practice debrief session following the mock interview in order to facilitate team members with the debrief process.

Interview and Case Selection Process

Interviews were conducted for Santa Cruz County Family and Children's Services (FCS) on Tuesday, January 26th. Each of three teams conducted three interviews for a total of 9 interviews.

Child Welfare

Using reports from Safe Measures, the FCS planning committee selected a total of 10 cases to review (the 10th case was used for the mock interview). Of the 10 (one case was chosen for the mock interview) cases selected, 5 cases had a re-entry to foster care within 12 months of reunification and 5 cases did not have a subsequent re-entry within the same time frame. The re-entry and non re-entry cases were matched by social worker, meaning that each Social Worker who had a re-entry case randomly selected had a non-reentry case selected from the same review period. All cases selected were open within the past two years. The case carrying Dependency Investigations or Family Reunification social worker was interviewed about their case that did not have a re-entry first, then subsequently about their case that did have a re-entry. It was believed that contrasting the cases that did not have a re-entry with the

cases that did have a re-entry would elicit the most detailed information about specific factors and practices that are associated with re-entry in Santa Cruz County.

Probation

Similar to the structure of the child welfare interview process, the number of interviews for juvenile probation cases also varied per county. For Santa Cruz County Probation, there were two Probation teams that both conducted three interviews for a total of six interviews.

Probation initially chose approximately thirty cases that met the criteria for the PQCR focus area. These were cases where youth were old enough to receive transitional independent living services and had exited placement. The cases were then put into two categories: cases that had a successful transition and cases that had an unsuccessful transition. After this categorization, cases that had the most information available for case review were then selected.

Overall

Interviews were conducted for Santa Cruz on Tuesday, January 26th. All five teams conducted structured 60 minute interviews utilizing each county's unique interview tool to gather information related to each department's particular focus area. Fifteen minutes prior to each interview, team members reviewed a case summary form completed by case-carrying social workers as well as supporting case documents provided by each county. At the conclusion of each interview, the review team completed and reviewed notes from the interview.

Once a county's interviews were completed, each team met to discuss emerging themes and trends among their cases and completed the CDSS debrief outline. Afterwards, Clinical Consulting conducted separate 1 to 1 1/2 hour child welfare and juvenile probation debrief sessions, where overarching themes and patterns of practice gleaned from the day's interviews were identified and categorized. Themes emerging from this process were grouped into categories outlined in CDSS' *Peer Quality Case Review Process Guide Version 2.0*. These include: Promising Practices, Barriers and Challenges, Training Needs, Systemic and Policy Changes, Resource Issues, Documentation Trends/CMS/CWS, Areas Needing State Technical Assistance, and Recommendations.

Since one goal of the interview process is to capture the views and perceptions of staff and/or focus group participants as presented, this information was noted without judgment as to the accuracy of the interviewees' statements (i.e. whether certain services were or were not available) or the extent to which a strength or need for change exists. Interview team members were advised to record the interviewees' input without interpretation or amplification and to identify themes based solely on the input of the interviewees.

Tool Development

Child Welfare Worker Interview

The interview tool was designed to gather information about social work practice practices associated with re-entries to foster care within 12 months of reunification. The same tool was utilized for all of Santa Cruz County's child welfare interviews.

The internal PQCR workgroup developed the interview tool (see Appendix) using samples of other county tools which also focused on foster care re-entry and with input from Henry Franklin from CDSS. The tool was tested prior to the PQCR week via a mock interview and based on the feedback gathered from the mock interview, changes and refinements were made. To allow sufficient time to prepare for their PQCR case interviews, county interviewees were then provided with the finalized version of the tool two weeks in advance of the PQCR..

Focus Groups

Focus group tools were developed by the county's internal PQCR planning group utilizing sample tools from other counties. Focus groups were conducted with supervisors, social workers and Parents Center staff.

Surveys

Clinical Consulting Services, working closely with the county's internal workgroup, developed three survey tools (See Appendix) mailed out to substitute care providers, foster youth and birth parents who were given approximately two weeks to return it. The surveys contained Likert scale, multiple choice and narrative questions and were written in English and Spanish.

Unique County Issues

General

- Small to medium-sized county (2008): 254,538 people (34th of 58 counties in population)
 - Population has decreased 1% since 2000 (California: +8.5%)
- Median Household income (2007): \$62,849 (California: \$59,928)
- Poverty rate (2007): 10.6% (California: 12.4%)
- Predominantly white, but changing (2009)
 - White 56.6% (California: 42.3%) -12% since 2000
 - Latino 34.8% (California: 36.6%) +9.9 % since 2000
- Expensive place to live (11/2009)
 - Median home sales price: \$555,000 and climbing
 - Average rent: \$1535/month (highest in State)

Child Welfare

Budgeted positions for Santa Cruz Family and Children's Services include 54 Senior Social Workers and four Social Worker I/II's. There are 11 supervisors, 3 Program Managers, 2 Analysts, an Assistant Division Director and a Division Director. This represents a reduction of 8.5 social worker positions since the 2007 PQCR. The County is divided into a North County and a South County office and provides a full range of direct family services: emergency response, dependency investigations (court unit), and ongoing services from each office. The screening unit, teen unit and licensing unit are primarily located in the North County office, but staff from these units cover all areas of the county. The adoptions unit is located in the South County office, but covers all areas of the County. There are two Public Health Nurses that serve child welfare clients and serve a variety of child welfare programs as needed.

Juvenile Probation

Placements:

In 2009, Santa Cruz Probation had 43 unique youth placed in residential foster care, with 8 youth placed out of the state of California. The charts below indicate our foster care youth trends by ethnicity and their average length of stay over the past three years.

Average Length of Stay of Youth in Programs In and Out of State			
	2007	2008	2009
Average LOS	94 Days	90 Days	86 Days
Average LOS for Out of State Youth	128 Days	254 Days	175 Days

Ethnicity of Probation Foster Care Youth			
	2007	2008	2009
Latino Youth	35, 63%	37, 79%	30, 70%
Anglo Youth	16, 28%	7, 15%	8, 19%
African American Youth	3, 5%	3, 6%	5, 11%
Other	2, 4%	0, 0%	0, 0%

Agency Structure:

The probation placement unit consists of a probation supervisor and two deputy probation officers. The placement probation officers each carry a caseload of 10-12 youth, including both in and out of state foster care placements as well as secure placements.

Summary of Practice: Child Welfare

This section is the heart of the PQCR report that considers both promising practices and practices needing improvement as discovered throughout the PQCR process.

The items listed below are the perceptions of those interviewed. Data is presented for (1) peer interview teams, (2) focus groups and (3) survey (child welfare only).

In order to ensure that themes (rather than isolated information) were captured from the interviews, information offered by the interview teams was only noted if the same or similar information was cited by at least two of the three child welfare teams or in the case of Probation, cited by both teams.

Case Documentation

Notes about the visits that Parents Center staff supervises are entered into the CWS/CMS system.

CWS/CMS

Social workers feel the CWS/CMS drop menu of options for services for children is too limited.

Strengths and Promising Practices

Interviewers noted a significant number of strengths and promising practices. The themes that emerged in this arena were organized by sub-headings as listed below.

Family Engagement

- Social workers included children, relatives and NREFMS in finding placements and making placement decisions.
- Social Workers make efforts to see their families in their locale to ease the burden on clients.
- Social workers value letting parents have a “voice and choice” in services.

- Inception of Roots and Wings program (Santa Cruz's implementation of Family to Family) has had positive impacts on practice by involving more CWS staff, family members and community partners in the decision-making process
- The county has begun using TDMs prior to reunification. TDMs are being utilized to ensure that when children return home, there is a planned transition with a safety plan and supports in place for the family.
- Good collaboration with other partners such as community based organizations, and Victim Witness services and especially with probation and law enforcement to minimize duplication of services.
- Good partnership with schools (social workers check-in with teachers), gang intervention programs and other partners.
- Social workers make good use of public health nurses and their assessments.
- Social workers seek to prioritize services so that the family is not overwhelmed and utilize SDM tools to help with this.

Additional Examples of Successful Practices

- Social workers attend to after-care services and try to ensure the family leaves CWS with support.
- Heightened awareness of parental ambivalence. Social workers recognized it and talked to the parent about it, which strengthened their assessments and work with the family.
- Family Preservation Court (FPC) has strong support, facilitates teaming and enhances better outcomes for families.
- FPC social workers complete Ages and Stages questionnaire, a tool that assists social workers with assessment of the child's developmental status and needs.
- The Parents Center supervises most visits. They use a therapeutic visitation model, with many visits supervised by mental health counselors. Families are matched with services quickly.
- Direct services, beyond typical case management services are being provided to families by social workers. If a certain service is not available the social worker helps fill the gap until it is available.

- Some social workers monitor their own visits to observe the parent/child interaction and use these observations to shape interventions.
- Priority for placement is with a relative or NREFM.
- Agency has a fund available which gives social workers the ability to offer creative financial help for things such as car repairs, utility bills and appliance purchases.
- Social workers have a strong commitment to reunification-social workers consider reunification from the beginning.

Barriers and Challenges

Social Worker Morale

- Social worker interviewees stated that they feel disempowered because it seems to them that others' (service providers, children, attorney, judge) input is weighed more heavily than theirs, their opinions/ assessments/recommendations aren't respected by the court, and other professionals involved in the case have more decision-making power than social workers.
- Social worker interviewees stated that they experience an "us against them" professional climate. They stated that they are advised by supervisors to "defer" to substance abuse counselors, for example, and most especially to attorneys (examples of social worker's comments: "decisions are made for me rather than by me" and "why argue it's not worth it").

Assessment Issues

- Reunification sometimes happens too hastily.
- The emphasis on family reunification sometimes results in children being returned home quickly (under 6 months) and not always with family maintenance services.
- Underlying issues are not always resolved before children are returned home.
- SDM is described as a tool that at best "validates our thinking" and is not consistently being used to guide decisions.
- Assessments are not routinely done on all children (unclear if this may be a resource issue).

- Completion of more thorough assessments initially (which include consideration of past history, mental health, substance abuse) and at the time of reunification, might have resulted in child not being returned home as quickly.

Other Practice Issues

- Families go from family reunification to family maintenance with little transition time.
- More transition services are provided for younger kids but older kids seem to be overlooked (e.g. older youth sometimes go home with no weekend or overnight visits beforehand).
- Decisions are being made by a limited number of people involved in the case rather than the involvement of all involved; parents are not routinely invited to difficult case meetings.
- There is a lack of formal processes for making the decision to return a child home.
- Many relative placement care providers are out of county; this affects visits, Medi-Cal eligibility, and makes transitions harder.
- Concurrent planning is not being brought up early and routinely.
- The emphasis on reunification may take away from concurrent planning efforts; some social workers have a tendency to over-focus on the parent receiving reunification services to the exclusion of caregivers who could possibly offer the child a safety net if reunification fails.
- Parents Center staff sometimes not providing their notes about visits at all or until well after the fact (up to 3 month lag); Parents Center staff could be communicating more with FCS social workers.
- Service providers align themselves with clients which render them unable to be neutral.

Training Needs

- Training for supervisors and social workers to increase “buy-in”: the “what’s in it for me” of SDM. Such training could include information about Children’s Research Center’s studies on SDM’s impact on disproportionality and bias and

highlight the known value and benefits of SDM and how case work is enhanced by the use of SDM

- Advanced SDM for supervisors with focus on integration of SDM into case supervision practices
- Helping workers better understanding and make distinctions between safety and risk throughout the life of a case
- Training for court partners on what social workers do, family dynamics, re-entry issues, concurrent planning, etc.
- Determining when a child is ready to return home
- Developing and valuing transition plans
- How to utilize and participate in team/group meetings

Areas Needing State Technical Assistance:

- Address the out-of-county Medi-Cal problem (portable Medi-Cal is needed).
- Help facilitate county going to visit counties that have had most success with TDMs.
- Setting up training by Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) to train court staff as noted in fourth bullet above

Policy and Systemic Issues

- Transitions from social worker to social worker are problematic (takes too long, information dropped) especially from the Dependency Investigations unit to Ongoing Units.
- Social workers are accepting recommendations from previous social worker without understanding the previous worker's rationale and without attempting to find out more; social workers don't change assessment even if they think it's inaccurate.
- Consider voluntary placement prior to court intervention.

- Not enough of a transition plan when child is returned home
- Utilize team decision making before taking kids out of the home; a group should make the decision about an outcome for a family.
- Parents not being invited to meetings where their case is being discussed
- Social workers feel disempowered.

Resource Issues

- There are no culturally relevant services for African American families; there are no community based organizations that have specialized expertise working with African American families
- Lack of attachment therapy for toddlers and parents
- Lack of parenting classes for parents of teens
- There are not enough CASAs available to meet the need: there are more children that need CASAs than there are CASAs available
- Parenting classes are cyclical and too infrequent which results in parents having to wait too long to be able to start their parenting classes
- Some Social workers are not aware of the full extent of services available in the county and therefore there may be clients that are not being referred to resources or programs that could benefit them

Interview Team Recommendations

This section consists of a prioritized list of the specific recommendations made by the three child welfare interview teams. There were several recommendations from the teams that mirrored one another so in those instances the recommendations were combined.

1. Use TDMs to make key decisions in all cases

Most notably, these key decisions include placements and decisions to return a child home. Interviewers felt that the current process leading up to

these decisions is not always inclusive or as comprehensive as it could be. The use of TDMS for these decisions will ensure that a systematic and collaborative approach is employed and all key parties will have an opportunity to participate in a shared process. (Note: All three interview teams made this recommendation).

2. Develop carefully considered transition and after care plans for every child, well in advance of a child's return home and implement these plans when a child reunifies

Interviewers recommend implementing a standardized process whereby all children that are reunified have a child specific transition plan developed at the TDM that includes details about timeframes, a graduated visit schedule, safety plan and the like.

3. Forge stronger more collaborative connections between court personnel and social workers

Interviewers suggest that strategies for addressing social worker's feelings of being marginalized in the court process be explored and changes be implemented. Interviewers felt that if these parties are given opportunities and approaches for working together more effectively and are better able to find common ground, the re-entry numbers in Santa Cruz County will improve.

4. Offer additional training and supervision to allow for more in-depth assessment of family needs at time of removal and prior to return of child

Interviewers found indications that in some cases when a child re-entered into foster care, comprehensive assessments hadn't been completed prior to completing the case plan nor were comprehensive reassessments done prior to return and doing so could have improved the outcome.

5. Better and effective utilization of SDM

This entails moving workers from perfunctorily using SDM to “verify what I already know” to using it to help guide decisions. This will require staff training and increased supervisory buy-in to ensure SDM is being discussed in supervision.

6. Ensure that reunification cases have viable concurrent plans in place and that those plans are attended to on an ongoing basis

Given that permanence is the overarching consideration for children it is essential to give attention to both reunification efforts and concurrent plan efforts. This includes continuing to engage the other family members (including any parent that may not be receiving FR services) and NREFMs regardless of the prognosis for the parent receiving reunification services.

Focus Group Observations and Recommendations

To allow for a more thorough examination of the focus area and to increase the amount of input received overall, Santa Cruz county organized three focus groups with key stakeholders. The following feedback was offered by participants of the focus groups.

For consistency and organization purposes, comments made by focus group participants were captured and categorized as strengths, challenges and recommendations though they were not necessarily specifically labeled as such. Please note: listed items do not appear in prioritized order.

Focus Group: Court Partners

Nine court personnel participated in the court partners focus group including the Juvenile Dependency Court presiding judge, County Counsel (2), parents’ attorney(2), minors’ attorney(2) and CASA(2),

Strengths and Promising Practice

- Santa Cruz has good social workers who make good assessments.

- Settlement conferences where players talk about the specifics of a case plan are successful.
- We have interim reviews which support the process of staggering parent requirements; interim reviews are generally helpful.
- New email process, administrative assistant who prepares a case transfer report has helped identify who the current social worker is.
- Many social workers do graduated visits and this contributes to reunification success
- If parents have established rapport with their social worker, tend to have good outcomes and poor outcomes if they do not.
- Amazing counselors at the service agencies
- Family maintenance is more likely to contribute to a parent making changes because their child is with them so they are connected and can practice skills.

Challenges

- Lack of community resource centers in certain areas of the county creates disparities for clients.
- Not enough services are available county-wide (many have waiting lists) to meet client's needs and no available funding to add services.
- There are significant differences in style, approach and philosophy from social worker to social worker.
- Not all social workers have the same information about available resources.
- Once families enter the child welfare system it seems they never get out.
- Given that it is very difficult to measure whether a parent has internalized changes, knowing what the "right" decision is, is also very hard.
- The process of a case moving from unit to unit and the corresponding change of social workers is very challenging and often "derails" families. The switch of social workers from Emergency Response to Dependency Investigations is the

most challenging. The change from Dependency Investigations to the Ongoing Unit is problematic as well and seems to take an exceptionally long time.

- Often at end of disposition it is unknown who the social worker is; court personnel are not advised.
- Sometimes parents lose their jobs as a result of having to complete all the services CPS requires to get their child back.
- Parent's Counsel are over-worked and under-funded so it is difficult to hold social workers accountable for participatory case plans which are lacking.
- Social workers not always inviting attorneys to planning meetings.
- Case plans contain a lot of boiler plate language and are not tailored to clients.
- Court and FCS have philosophical difference about how to address family planning.
- Need more money for supervised visitation

Court Partner Focus Group Recommendations

- Develop a fluid list of available services, send it to all social workers and update it regularly.
- Develop a more efficient case transfer process so that there is less of a delay when social workers change.
- Add a dedicated page to the case plan with each specific service objective clearly bulleted; clients could take this page out and have as a good reference that could be put in a calendar provided by social worker (free calendars given out by businesses). Ask service providers to go over this with them at each visit.
- Use interns to go over time management with parents using the aforementioned calendar and within the context of timeframes for completing services and objectives.
- Specific strategies need to be developed for father engagement; men need to be engaged in different ways than women.
- Recruit UCSC or Cabrillo students to transport and/or supervise visits and work with colleges to set-up a structure to allow them to get credit for this.

- Go over safety planning with children at nearly every contact.
- Provide more sober supports and family supports to families in order to ameliorate isolation.
- Offer parents 18 months of services because parents need more time to address their issues, especially those with substance abuse problems.
- There are no differences between Family Reunification (FR) case plans and Family Maintenance (FM) case plans. FM case plans should be more specific and reflect current circumstances.
- Greater solicitation and utilization of interns and volunteers; (i.e. retired social workers or parents that were successful in the system could do mentoring with parents; Spanish translation).
- Strengthen the communication between FCS and other service providers like CASA.
- Provide every parent with a CASA to be an advocate for them, similar to what is done for children
- Expand family mentoring program.
- Expand use of TDMs.

Focus Group: Supervisors

Five FCS supervisors participated in this focus group.

Strengths

- Meet with staff regularly and ask about worker's use of SDM and encourage them to use it to help with decision-making.
- Encourage staff to engage families and establish relationships.
- Talk to staff about the role of bias.
- Talk to staff about identifying family strengths and prompt them to consider what has worked previously to help clients overcome barriers.
- The county has really exceptional services available for drug exposed babies.

- Able to revise case plan informally to include more creative services without going to court
- New contract with Parents Center is improving the quality of visit supervision.
- With Family to Family, paradigm is shifting to emphasize more family contact and involvement including relatives being included in after care planning.
- SDM helps with uniformity and minimizes the use of anecdotal information and bias and facilitates objectivity.
- Social workers strive to help parents with their children's return home.
- Social workers are skilled at developing safety and support plans.
- Agency is giving more attention to relapse prevention plans and is doing a better job of making this a more formal process and social workers are asking parents to sign them.
- Social workers have increased their awareness of parental ambivalence issues.
- Family Preservation Court is very successful.
- Extended family participation in visits helps enhance visits and ultimately helps with reunification.
- Current judge understands the need for frequent visitation.

Challenges

- Some social workers, especially those with children of their own, have difficulty managing transference issues related to parental ambivalence.
- Too often visit supervisors (prior to Parents Center contract) merely policed the visits rather than seizing upon teachable moments and modeling.
- Lack of services for Spanish speakers
- There is not lot of integration with SDM and decision-making especially when things happen in-between status reviews (middle portion of case).
- Family Strengths and Needs Assessment (FSNA) is a tool that only gets social workers to what they already know; tool is easily able to be manipulated.

- Just because something is a FSNA priority, doesn't mean you can sustain it in a petition and if you can sustain more than 4 things in a petition FSNA does help you prioritize them.
- .Because of Santa Cruz' small size, there is a lack of service variety and service options in the county. For example there is only one treatment program where mothers and children can reside together, so, if a mom were to have a conflict with one of the other residents in this program, she would have no other options.
- Agencies providing services for FCS clients are too quick to kick clients out of their programs, leaving those people with few/no options.
- IEPs are hard to get and child gets offered SST instead.
- School districts do not have a proper understanding of AB 490.
- Resource parents are not willing or able to provide what kids need.
- The county is not doing well at participatory case planning; 65% of case plans are written for parents instead of with them.
- Court doesn't like revised case plans- in some cases refuse to calendar them.
- Quality of mental health services vary greatly (sometimes therapy is provided by untrained interns or unlicensed people).
- Gallows humor is too prevalent among social work staff and this detracts from a strength based perspective; "it is a necessary evil but in this county it sometimes goes too far"; supervisors feel everyone has to work together more to emphasize compassion.
- The quality of placements available is often sub-standard and this sometimes creates pressure to expedite reunification.
- There are no services for deaf children.
- Social workers do not sufficiently consider the input of resource parents and birth parents when making decisions to reunify.
- Developmental assessments really lacking- other than for those children involved with Family Preservation Court.
- Terrible idea to mix and match who transports kids to visits; goes against everything we know about healthy child development.

Supervisor Focus Group Recommendations

- Clarify agency expectations/vision regarding the extent of relationships sought for birth parents and resource parents and the role of the social worker in facilitating this
- Social worker assessments and their work with families would improve by occasionally supervising visits and regularly talking to visit supervisors.
- Visitation should occur more hours per week and should be done in the parent's home and other natural settings; Parents and young kids (under 5) should get more and longer visits (infant- 5 visits a week- 4-6 hours a day).
- To help with consistency and a sense of routine for children, it would be best for substitute care providers to be doing visit transportation.
- Allow key case decisions to be made according to the natural progression of a case rather than artificial court timelines.
- Implement TDMs for removal decisions.
- More stability in re-entry will require strategies to address worker burnout, high case loads and the disproportionate number of inexperienced workers in ongoing units.

Focus Group: Social Workers

This focus group was attended by ten social workers from various units.

Strengths

- Social workers are having conversations about concurrent planning “up front” and having “straightforward” conversations about parental ambivalence early on, and are constantly reassessing.
- Visits are started immediately which gets parents engaged in the process early and reduces the potential of parental ambivalence.
- Social workers are attempting to include substitute care providers in step-down transition plans.
- Social workers are creative and seek “out-of-the-box” solutions.

- Social workers have high amounts of empathy for clients.
- Social workers link families with many services.
- Recently started utilizing TDM's before a child is returned home and this is working well to reduce problems.
- Other teaming meetings, (i.e. placement conferences and difficult case staffings) are being used and are deemed successful by social workers.
- The Roots and Wings process is promoting relationships between birth parents and substitute care provides.

Challenges

- Due to an insufficient number of Spanish speaking workers, some social workers are working with clients via a translator which renders them less likely to get the right and best services for a family and detracts from trust and rapport being developed, which contributes to re-entry.
- Workers feel SDM tools are not client-specific, not useful, too easy to manipulate and simply "tell you what you already know".
- When social workers try the best practice technique of prioritizing and limiting case plan services and objectives, they are pressured by supervisors, management and the judge to add more; furthermore, supervisors and judge are requiring parenting classes in every case plan.
- Social workers do not feel the department is supportive of social workers being strength-based or "invested" in their clients; such things are perceived as weaknesses or naiveté.
- Social workers who fight hard for reunification are told they are "too emotionally invested" in clients.
- Social workers feel that the attitude in the agency is that failed reunification/re-entry is equated to the social worker's failure.
- Social workers are offered little emotional support by management.
- When advocating for a recommendation with a supervisor, social workers feel the standards they are held to are excessive and rigid and that manager's recommendations as well as service provider's are valued more than social workers'.

- Concurrent homes sometimes sabotage birth parents and undermine reunification services.
- There is currently a split in the department between those who are proponents of reunification and those who are not.
- Due to a lack of foster homes, social workers are placing children based on “what bed is available” rather than securing a placement that meets the child’s needs and profile.
- Social workers are not taking a lead role in promoting relationships between birth parents and substitute care providers.
- The agency’s culture is to overreact to calls from community which means that families come into the system that shouldn’t be involved with FCS and that takes social worker’s time from higher need cases.

Social Worker Focus Group Recommendations

- Through training and performance evaluations, supervisors and management need to ensure that more thorough assessments are being conducted and that social worker bias in decision-making is noticed and addressed (“too many people are losing their kids and not getting them back because of bias”) and social workers should have to better defend their rationales for decisions as they relate to the minimum sufficient level of care (MSLC).
- When receiving a referral on a case where a child was returned after FR services (re-entry cases), have a TDM before going out on the investigation. This could prevent a removal.
- Before going out on investigations for re-entry cases, establish a protocol that requires the Emergency Response worker to talk to the dismissing social worker and review the file.
- Increase the amount of child-care available to parents who have recently reunified with their children.
- Clarify expectations and develop strategies for getting substitute care providers more involved with birth parents and visitation.
- Have an ongoing and consistent strategy that addresses the lack of foster homes in the county. (Note: This is a major focus of Roots and Wings.)

- Work with non-profit agencies to increase the amount of neighborhood/grassroots resources. (Note: This is a major focus of Roots and Wings.)
- Provide more training to teachers and substitute care providers about trauma and MSLC.
- Once a case is in dependency investigations, conduct developmental assessments of all children and psychosocial assessments for all family members and potential placements.
- Identify a means for non-FPC (family preservation court) clients to receive the Matrix model of substance abuse treatment.
- Increase the numbers of bi-lingual/bi-cultural social workers and therapists.
- Develop systems and address barriers so that psychiatric evaluations can be completed more quickly.

Focus Group: Parents Center Staff

Parents Center is a key FCS partner which conducts all of the parenting classes and many of the counseling services provided to CPS-involved families. For the last two years, they have also been the contractor that provides therapeutic supervised visitation between parents and children. Ten staff attended the focus group.

Strengths

- Mentor Mom program and Family Preservation Court programs are very successful and both are having clear positive impacts on parents and families. Parents who have Mentor Moms are more likely to have successful reunification.
- Social workers are often providing the court report and case plan to Parents Center staff.
- Parents Center staff are completing comprehensive assessments and doing mental status exams within two months. In completing these assessments they consult with care providers, school personnel, birth parents, doctors, CASAs, other service providers, extended family and the like. They also complete a child

behavioral checklist which is sent for external analysis and the results are then used to develop service plans and interventions

- Parents' therapists adapt the "generic" case plan provided by CPS to make it specific to the client and add specific measurable goals.
- Parents Center staff have a great deal of empathy for how difficult the job of a FCS social worker is

Challenges

Case work Practices: Parents Center

- Parents Center visit supervisors are utilizing a limited generic checklist that never gets changed from week to week or from family to family. Parents Center therapists and CPS social workers rarely provide family-specific targeted information to look for during the visits. This visit checklist is thought by some to be "useless" because no one seems to look at it and the information on it doesn't seem to inform any decisions that are made.
- Most parents are taking parenting classes when their children are out of their care. Because they are not able to apply the information, they forget what they have learned.
- Given Parent Center's programmatic structure, one family could have up to 4-5 different therapists (each parent could have one, each child could have one and there could be a family therapist).

Case work Practices: FCS

- FCS social workers rarely come to parent-child visits to observe.
- There is tremendous variation in levels of client support, frequency of communication, style and philosophy among social workers. Outcomes for clients can differ dramatically depending on who the social worker is.
- CPS social workers sometimes disregard Parents Center staff recommendations regarding transition plans. PC staff often suggest a slower transition but some social workers start transitions back home with weekend visits. These social workers offer the following rationale for not doing more graduated visits " I want to see if they(the parent) can handle it".

- Ambivalence is not being addressed by CPS workers. Social workers may not want to have that discussion because foster care is undesirable and social workers believe that children are better off with their families. Some parents have gotten pressure by social workers not to relinquish.
- Some parents are having their kids returned sooner than parents are ready.
- Court reports often leaves out the “good stuff” parents are doing; parents think they are making progress and then feel totally blind-sided when they read the report.

Policy/Protocol Issues

- Parents Center staff are not being notified at all or are being given very little notice of TDMs or difficult case conferences so often they are not there.
- Once families have children reunify and dependency is dismissed, they lose their eligibility for a number of services in the community including the loss of their family therapist at Parents Center
- Parents have their kids removed and then they lose their Section 8 voucher. Thus, they are either less likely to have their children returned or children are returned and re-enter because the lack of housing adds stressors and risk to the family.
- The assigned social worker on a case changes often and Parent Center staff is often not notified; sometimes they find out from the client. Information does not get passed well from one social worker to the next so information is lost.
- Social workers are not consistently referring eligible families to Families in Transition (FIT).
- Not all parents are required by CPS to work with mentor moms as part of their reunification plan.

Resources

- There are too few mentor moms (1-2) available to meet the need.
- Parents used to be able to attend a drop-in parenting class but this is no longer available.
- The level of services and support available for kin is severely lacking.

- There is only one attorney available for biological parents and many have a very hard time understanding her as English is her second language.
- There is a lack of services for undocumented parents and children.
- In-home programs such as the former ABC at the Live Oak Resource Center have been cut.

Parents Center Focus Group Recommendations

- Upon having their children returned, parents need better, more specific, hands-on (in-home) preparation for what kinds of behaviors to expect and how to deal with their children's acting out behaviors. They also need to be taught practical life skills such as bedtime routines and meal routines.
- Provide parents with in-home services pre and post reunification to allow for more coaching and training while they are with their children.
- Reinstate the parenting/parent support drop-in group
- Increase the amount of child care available to parents. PC staff felt this was the most important service that would help parents and children overall.
- Create additional reunification options so that it isn't "all or nothing". In other words, consider ways for parents to have partial custody of their children or to be able to maintain relationships with their child if they relinquish (e.g. open adoptions, legal guardianship)
- There seems to be a lack of understanding and tolerance for relapse being part of the recovery process. Develop broader and more nuanced understanding of substance abuse and recovery and depart from the current black and white thinking that exists; perhaps explore harm reduction models.
- Expand use of TDMs so that it is utilized for all major case decisions and give ample advance notice of the meetings to families and service providers.
- Provide specialized parenting classes for parents of teens.

Survey Responses

There was a strong response rate from each of the three groups that were mailed surveys. The following numbers of surveys were returned: Substitute care providers, 18; youth, 8; birth parents, 10.

Information from returned surveys was compiled, minimal edits made and responses were summarized in the same fashion as the focus groups: items were grouped as strengths, challenges or recommendations though they were not necessarily specifically labeled as such. Please note: listed items do not appear in prioritized order.

Survey: Youth

Strengths

- Social workers support us well, get us the services we need, tell us our rights, listen well, encourage us.
- Placements were supportive of reunification.
- Received a variety of services including individual counseling, visits with siblings, personal interest activities, ILP and job training
- Visits with mom were encouraged; allowed visits to happen in places that made it easier for my parent(s).
- Provided transportation
- Social workers didn't have a negative attitude about my parent(s) and they said positive things to me about my future.

Challenges

- Too many social worker changes – most youth had at least 4 social workers, some as many as 15.
- Social workers didn't mention the possibility of reuniting with birth family.

Youth Survey Recommendations

- The most beneficial services are individual counseling, family counseling and visits with siblings - need more of these services

- Offer more transportation support.
- Facilitate more visits between foster youth and their siblings.

Survey: Substitute-Care Provider

Strengths

- The agency supports a working relationship between me and the birth family.
- We were able to continue to have a relationship with the child through phone calls and visits after the child was returned to the birth parent's home.
- The child was returned to his birth family at the right time.
- We had adequate opportunities for input into the child's service needs.
- Able to keep the child in close contact with his family via visits, telephone calls, reassurance that they are safe in the foster home and encouraged efforts to help families/parent reunite with the child.
- The agency has been good at letting me have as much or as little contact with the birth family as we like.
- Everything was set up for me to easily take the child in for medical appointments.
- Referral to children's mental health happened quickly and easily and it felt like they were really listening to our concerns.

Challenges

- My personal experience on receiving kids into care is that I receive a phone call telling me the age and gender of child, and usually that the placement "will be short term", however almost every child I've received has stayed for years.
- We got very little information about the mental health challenges of our foster child "pending mental health assessment". CASAs receive a lot more information than foster families, yet to do a good job, it would be helpful to have more information.

- My child was doing poorly in school, acting out in class. She had suicidal tendencies and night terrors. She has a serious eating disorder. She was behind on her immunizations, dental, etc.
- Hard to get the services we needed for several reasons: Insurance carrier/manager constantly changes the doctor with little notice and no apparent reason; long waits for needed services; long wait for referrals
- Medi-cal cards do not come, you have to repeatedly ask social worker
- We have had our granddaughter for six months and until last weekend there had been NO joint meetings with the parent and us. These kinds of meetings would benefit the child.
- There were no team meetings.
- Children are sometimes returned to their family too soon.
- Some birth parents have big problems that can't be repaired in six months.
- One child had 18 different social workers in one year.
- The current system of visitation for children and families doesn't support successful reunification.
- We need to have more background information about parents; we should know if they have ever been violent, etc, including the kids. We should receive the full court report as we did in years past.

Substitute Care Provider Survey Recommendations

- It would be helpful to get written documented findings instead of word of mouth information. Should get assessment information including family dynamics.
- It would be nice to know where the parent stands in the process - knowing that information is confidential, still some information about their status would be helpful (i.e. Is on track for reunification, still needs assistance).
- We need more respite. More time to give to our families. Our permanent children need to be considered more. They deal with these kids also.

- Offer more than five hours of respite prior to completing Successfully Parenting At Risk Kids (SPARK) training. Special needs kids have special needs from day one and we need more support.
- Need therapists that do therapy, not play games with child for months.
- Need anger management classes for children
- Need a training regarding connecting better with the birth family
- Reunification would be more successful if the foster parent would be allowed to get more involved with the birth family, not just the social worker always facilitating visits.
- More frequent contact with the social worker is needed to discuss the child's needs. Provide a regular forum to discuss changes, successes, problems, etc. (telephone, email, etc).
- Reunification success could be improved if there were longer transition times (overnights --> weekends --> week long stays) so both child and parent can get used to new relationship with each other.
- Prospective adoptive family should have to go through training to understand child's needs, whether the child's adoptive family is child's "family" or non-family.
- Better social worker support for relative families is needed to reduce disruptions.
- Long term family maintenance follow-up from social workers and not giving children back too early are key to successful reunification.

Survey: Biological Parents

Strengths

- We received the services we needed to resolve issues.
- Our social worker does his job well.
- I received support from my social worker.
- Required me to participate in Parent Education course that increased my parenting knowledge

- Received services I needed to resolve significant behavioral issues

Challenges

- Social workers not returning parent's phone calls in a timely manner
- Social workers not spending enough time talking about the case plan, their impressions of parent's progress on the case plan and the like.
- Parents expressed that social workers too often focused on parent's "negative actions" rather than on positive actions.
- Parents not given any input about where child was placed.
- Parents received very little information about child while they were out of the home (no information about child's progress in school, daily activities, illnesses).

Biological Parents Survey Recommendations

- FCS to facilitate a better relationship between birth parents and the foster parents by creating opportunities for both parties to communicate and interact.
- Give social workers smaller caseloads and have them available on Fridays (Note: Santa Cruz County workers are furloughed one Friday per month).
- More variety and availability of individual counseling services would be helpful.
- Provide more visits for parents with child; one hour per week is not enough time to maintain a relationship with child.
- Provide more activities during visits and create better opportunities for positive "real-life" parent-child interactions during visits – (i.e. set-up visits to happen at a park).
- Provide more housing support.

Summary of Practice: Probation

Case Documentation

- Sometimes when officers make re-assessments on transferred cases, the additions or refinements they make are never recorded
- Officers use a “transition list” provided to the youth and the next assigned officer to have a clear reference about the status of the case. This checklist includes very concrete instructions for the youth, contact phone numbers and next steps

CWS/CMS

- The CWS/CMS system was not addressed as it is not utilized by Juvenile Probation officers.

Strengths and Promising Practices

- Case plan template includes a specific section for concurrent plan and cues officer to think about it
- Some probation officers are critically thinking about the assessments they inherit from a previous officer and adding to it as needed to ensure it is as comprehensive as possible
- Probation officers are strongly advocating for youth, requesting that programs adapt their services to meet the youth’s individualized needs
- Upon return home, youth was taken by probation officer to all the agencies that work with youth to familiarize him with the service providers and officers did other things that help set youth up for success (i.e. picked them up for court)
- Probation officers exceed departmental expectations and go “above and beyond”: call youth regularly, take them out to lunch, help with school, keep their phones on 24 hours/day, etc.
- Indicators of strong youth engagement efforts: department has officers that are very “hands on” with the youth, use creative case management methods and seek creative solutions

- Probation officers make special effort to meet parents in their physical location or at a place where they need to be anyway (i.e. employment office) to reduce burden on parents
- Strong skills in the area of matching kids to placements: probation officers are thoroughly looking at kids strengths and needs and considering that when making placements
- Make referrals early on in the case with active thinking about transitional planning(e.g. after care counseling, job training services, educational services,)
- Transition planning meetings, attended by the youth parent and other family members, happen a month before graduation and a month later or even sooner and family members get asked for input at this meeting
- Despite many barriers, probation officers are persistent in trying to get services for youth
- Particular focus on establishment of strong relationships with the youth (“if I can’t build a relationship- I’ll find someone that can”)
- Deputy and supervisor are engaging in shared decision-making; officers receive regular consultation and feel like they have support from supervisors.
- The agency’s culture and philosophy is to choose a placement carefully rather than just accepting whatever placement is available

Barriers & Challenges

- When cases transfer from one officer to another, sometimes documents are being taken at face value and are not being reviewed or reassessed to see if they are still current or accurate
- Services exist “on paper” and may look great but they are not providing what they say they provide, they provide the bare minimum or the service is not available when youth need it
- Sometimes a big gap occurs from the time a referral is made to the time when a service provider responds. Wraparound program accepts youth but simply call the youth on the phone and ask “hey do you want to see me today? and kid says no”

- Confusion exists regarding the availability of ILP and THP and because the two programs are offered by the same agency the waiting list status of one program is sometimes mistakenly assumed to be the same for the other
- The Court is making non-negotiable decision for kids which are different from the probation officer's recommendations and which they feel aren't in best interests of kids
- Officers feel that their input is not valued by the court which sometimes translates into officers feeling powerless
- Undocumented youth are not eligible for the same services as other youth which limit how complex their transition and concurrent plans can be
- Parental accountability: youth have a number of court ordered requirements but parents aren't held accountable or ordered to do anything by the court as they are in child welfare cases
- Due to gang-related fear, parents say one thing to an officer in court or other public forums but then change their statements when they talk one-on-one with officers
- Probation officers have to "sell" youth to service providers, placements and other probations in order to get them to accept some youth for services
- Rely on others to do family finding; probation officers don't know how to do it and don't know they're supposed to do it
- No systematic way that officers are being updated about resource availability
- The services being provided by Wraparound program are not meeting youth needs

Training Needs

The following training needs were identified:

- How to develop individualized youth-specific case plans and how to conduct re-assessments to ensure the assessment on a youth is the best and most accurate
- Systems and specifics of family finding
- Strategies and systems for intra-agency dissemination of resources information

- More thorough understanding of ILP and THP programs and how to navigate these programs to best meet youth needs; also want information about ILP/THP staff roles and referral/wait list logistics

Policy and System Changes

- Probation officers and court personnel not working together effectively
- Fiscal issues: probation officers spend an inordinate amount of time justifying expenses and encounter many obstacles trying to get reimbursed
- The attention from those providers drawing Medi-cal funding is on drawing down money rather than providing services to meet youth needs
- Much information in the division gets shared by word of mouth rather than by formalized processes
- Current system is set up to be very siloed and there's not a graduated transition (as soon as a youth returns home, their relationship with their placement officer is severed) so youth go from getting lots of structure in placement and lots of officer contact to no structure and less officer contact;
- The case transfer system causes delays in officer assignments and youth often reoffend when they are "between" officers

Resource Issues

- There are too few service options available in general
- Many northern California group homes are primarily filled with Norteño gang-affiliated youth so more options are needed for Sureño gang-affiliated youth
- Not enough placement options are available in Santa Cruz county and there are not enough group homes that work with youth with specialized needs (substance abuse, mental health)
- There is a lack of quality aftercare services

State Technical Assistance

- Training for the judge and courts (AOC)
- Provide contact information for counties where there are successful collaborations between the court and juvenile probation departments
- Convey best practice successes from other juvenile probation departments about how to successfully engage families
- Provide a written list of the specific kinds of technical assistance that CDSS might be able to offer and examples of technical assistance offered to other counties that are looking at the same focus area so county can better utilize this assistance
- Information on strategies for working effectively with and providing services to undocumented youth and families

Interview Team Recommendations

This section consists of a prioritized list of the specific recommendations made by the two probation interview teams.

1. Designate one deputy as ILP liaison who maintains up-to-date services list/log

To help address the problems with communication that exist between the ILP program and juvenile probation, the department would benefit from designating one deputy who is the primary contact with ILP. This designee's role would include facilitating a two-way flow of information between the agencies and internally updating other officers about the status of ILP services via formalized methods.

2. Provide family finding training

Because there seems to be a lack of awareness about the officer's responsibility to do this and because relative searches are being conducted

sporadically and without the benefit of any tools or specialized training in best practices, training in this area would be beneficial.

3. Provide training on concurrent planning

The objective of this training would be to increase their awareness of what concurrent planning means in practical terms and how it should guide case management activities and decisions

4. Provide resource training

This training would increase staff awareness about what resources are available in and out of county and how to access these services.

5. Develop protocols that ensure formalized information sharing

Develop strategies to increase the amount of collaboration with partners in ILP. Invite their staff to Probation staff meetings on a quarterly basis.

6. Review and modify policies pertaining to case/officer transfers

Policy changes are needed to ensure graduated and planned transfers that include secondary assignments to ease the transfer from one officer to another.

7. Address issues of accountability and develop quality standards for service providers

As a precursor to this process some increased, direct and solution-focused dialogue among the juvenile probation department and the identified agencies would be helpful. These standards to be developed, in conjunction with the services providers, would be measurable and objective indicators that address timeliness and quality of service delivery among other factors.

Focus Group Observations and Recommendations

The following comments were elicited from members of the three focus groups.

Focus Group: Youth

Strengths

- “Lots of probation officers helped and cared”
- “felt like I had a team around me”
- “My officer set me up with a job and didn’t give up on me”
- Probation officer met with youth weekly
- Probation officer kept youth motivated
- Given months notice regarding return home which youth felt was the appropriate amount of time
- “If I got into trouble, I had support people I could call”
- Probation officer took time to make a personal connection
- Probation officer asked youth what he needed and don’t tell him what to do

Challenges

- Not all probation officers are the same and some aren’t good (don’t call, don’t offer help)
- “I wanted to talk about family issues but nobody asked me”
- Some youth need more support than they are getting

Youth Focus Group Recommendations

- Keep checking-in on youth when they return home

Focus Group: Parents

Strengths

- Probation officers asked parents about family strengths and youth strengths
- Parents were asked about changes they wanted to see in their children and for their active involvement in working with probation
- Family meeting happened within 1-2 weeks upon the youth's initial entry into foster care placement
- Parents were sent letters every week about behavior and progress
- Parents received regular phone calls from the probation officer to update them on progress
- Probation Officer would call parents the day before they were going to visit the youth and ask if they wanted them to convey any information
- Group home staff called once per week and gave family progress reports
- Parents felt officers were concerned for their child and wanted to help them
- Youth came home for transition visits
- Family offered wrap-around family meetings every week
- Parents felt youth made big changes in placement
- After parent requested a change in officers, the agency accommodated her without issue

Challenges

- Though the families wanted it noted that the vast majority of officers are very effective, one officer they encountered didn't return phone calls and in their estimation wasn't advocating on behalf of their child
- Sometimes help is only offered or provided after lots of persistence on parent's part

Parent's Focus Group Recommendations

- Have the probation officer maintain active contact with youth after they return home
- Enhance efforts to prepare youth for life after group homes and probation; provide self-esteem classes, life classes, job placement assistance

Conclusion

Santa Cruz County FCS and Probation systems continue our strong commitment to build upon our many strengths as we improve service delivery to children and families. The results of the PQCR process are key to these efforts. The PQCR has validated some of the internal decisions that we have made about needed changes to improve our service delivery and outcomes, and some of these changes have already been implemented. New ideas and recommendations also emerged from the PQCR, and we will consider these ideas in our future planning.

With the thoughtful participation of local stakeholders and staff, as well as agency partners from throughout the state, Santa Cruz County has conducted a comprehensive PQCR process and report. We will carefully consider the observations and recommendations documented in the PQCR report for the next steps: to prepare our Self-Assessment, due in September 2010, and to prepare our three-year System Improvement Plan.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: FCS Interview Tool

Appendix B: Focus Group Tool: Parents Center Staff

Appendix C: Focus Group Tool: FCS Court

Appendix D: Focus Group Tool: FCS Supervisors

Appendix E: Focus Group Tool: FCS Social Workers

Appendix F: Survey Tool: FCS Youth

Appendix G: Survey Tool: FCS Sub-Care Providers

Appendix H: Survey Tool: FCS Biological Parents

Appendix I: Probation Interview Tool

Appendix J: Focus Group: Probation Youth

Appendix K: Focus Group: Probation Parents

Appendix A: FCS Interview Tool

Appendix B: Focus Group Tool: Parents Center Staff

Appendix C: Focus Group Tool: FCS Court

Appendix D: Focus Group Tool: FCS Supervisors

Appendix E: Focus Group Tool: FCS Social Workers

Appendix F: Survey Tool: FCS Youth

Appendix G: Survey Tool: FCS Sub-Care Providers

Appendix H: Survey Tool: FCS Biological Parents

Appendix I: Probation Interview Tool

Appendix J: Focus Group: Probation Youth

Appendix K: Focus Group: Probation Parents