

SANTA CRUZ COUNTY
SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SIP)
STEERING COMMITTEE – SPRING MEETING

MAY 11, 2026 11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

WELCOME & OPENING REMARKS

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Assistant Director of Family & Children's Services

Jimmy Cook
Assistant Director of Juvenile Probation Division

MEETING GOALS

Participants in today's meeting will...

- Learn about the strategic vision and integrated Theory of Change for the 2026-2030 Santa Cruz County System Improvement Plan (SIP).
- Understand relevant child & family outcome data to become more informed about current trends in the service population.
- Explore key issues related to implementation of the SIP strategies.
- Know what activities are on the horizon for the SIP Steering Committee and the SIP Work Group.

AGENDA

- Welcome & Opening Remarks
- Setting the Stage for Working Together
 - The role of child welfare – a continuum of care in a community context
 - Sharing responsibility for child protection
- Vision for SIP Strategy Commitments
 - Aftercare Enhancements
 - Improving Parent Engagement
 - Increasing Networks of Support
 - Promoting Family Connections for Probation Youth
- Closing & Next Steps

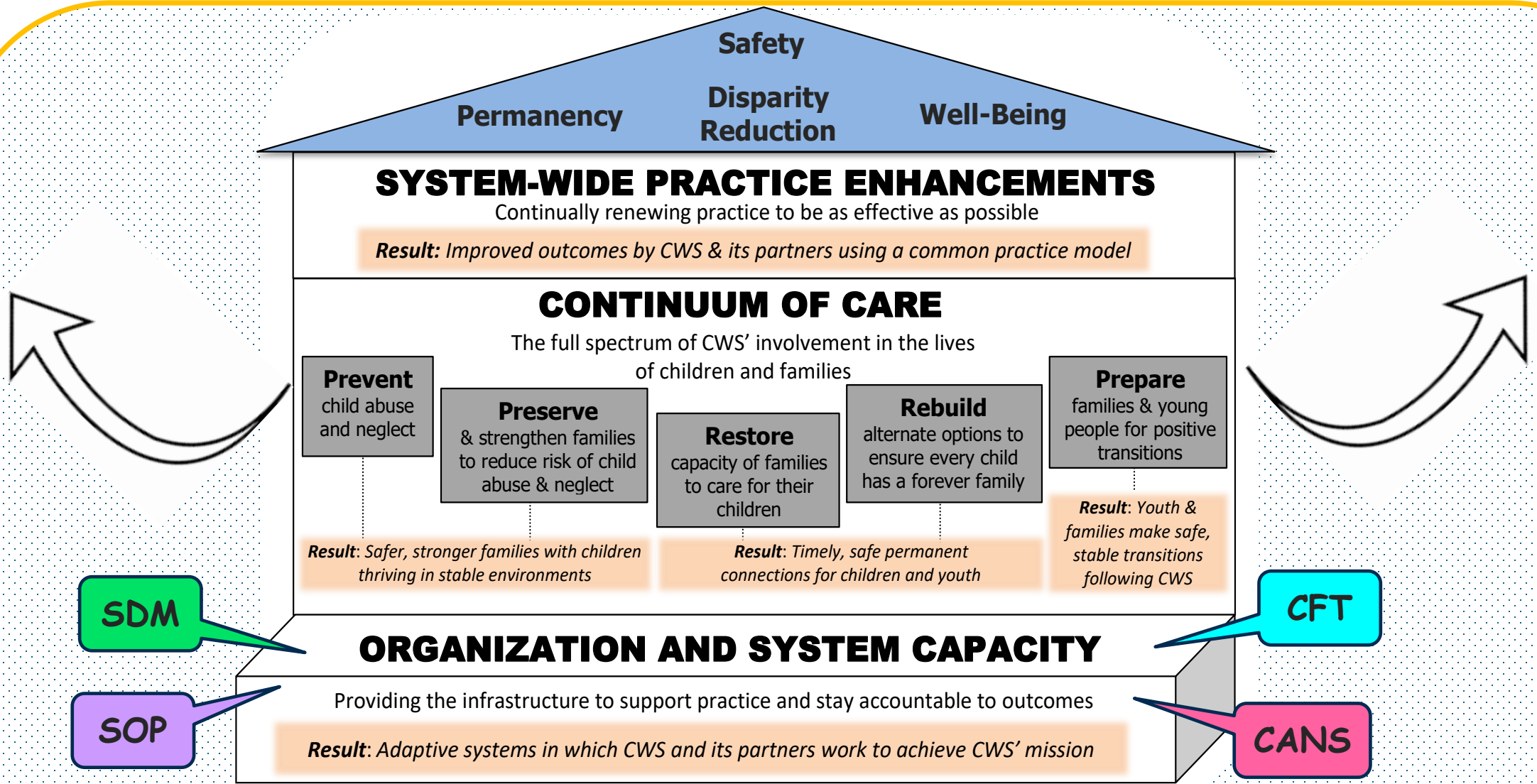


WHAT ROLE DOES CHILD WELFARE PLAY?

To ensure child safety, promote permanency (stable living situations), and enhance family well-being by providing services, preventing maltreatment, and investigating abuse. It acts as a safety net that intervenes as needed to protect children from abuse or neglect while strengthening families, and, when necessary, arranging foster care or adoption.

— Child Welfare Information Gateway—

Role of Family & Children's Service in Santa Cruz Co.



P R E V E N T I O N / C O M M U N I T Y L A N D S C A P E

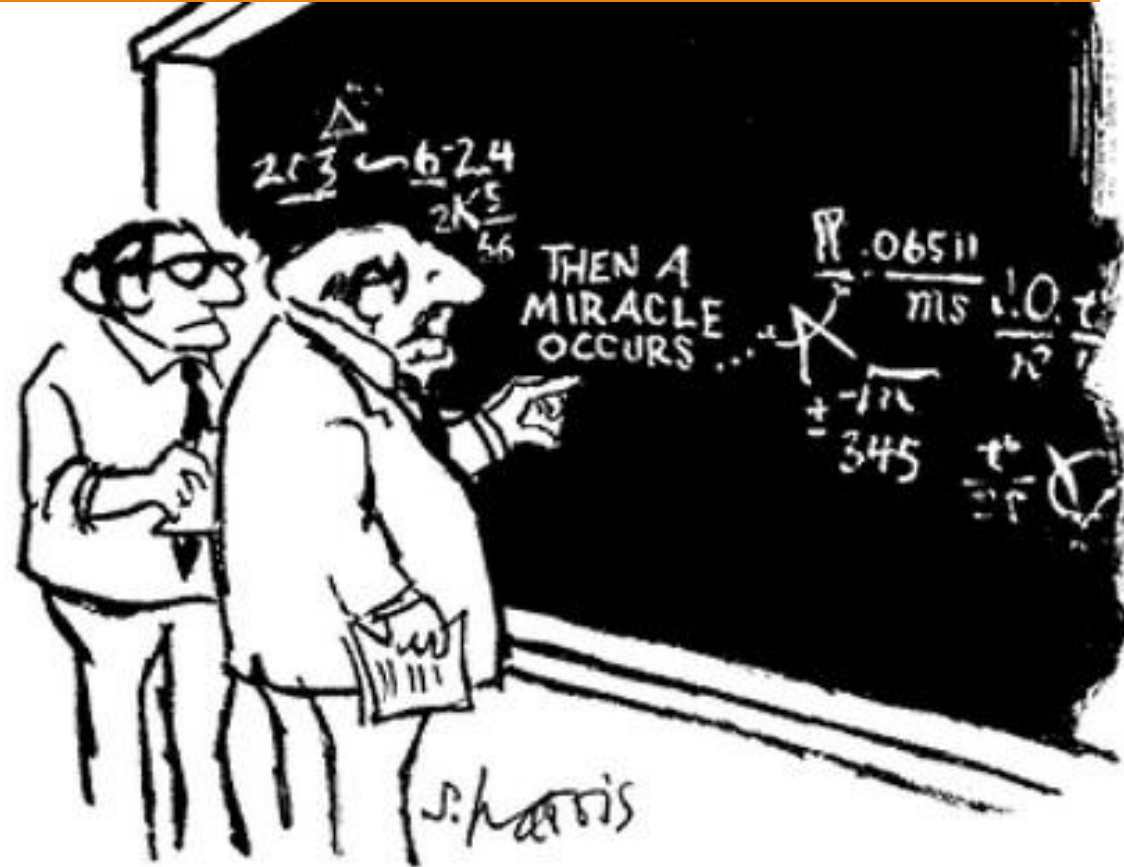
SIP STRATEGIES AND LEADS

SIP STRATEGY	LEAD
1. Aftercare Enhancements – Enhance aftercare planning and connection to prevention providers by preparing families for exiting the system from the start.	Yesenia Salinas (FCS)
2. Improve Parent Engagement – Better engage parents in meeting individualized case goals through targeted educational and support activities.	Stephanie Vikati (FCS)
3. Increase Networks of Support – Expand the circle of natural and community-based support for every family entering the system.	Melissa Delgadillo (FCS)
4. Promote Family Connections – Strengthen community & family support networks to promote permanency for probation youth.	Jimmy Cook (JPD)

What is a Theory of Change?

An explanation of how & why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context.

- Clear, testable hypothesis about how change will occur.
- Stakeholder agreement about what defines success.
- Blueprint for evaluation.
- Powerful communication tool.



"I think you should be more explicit here in step two."

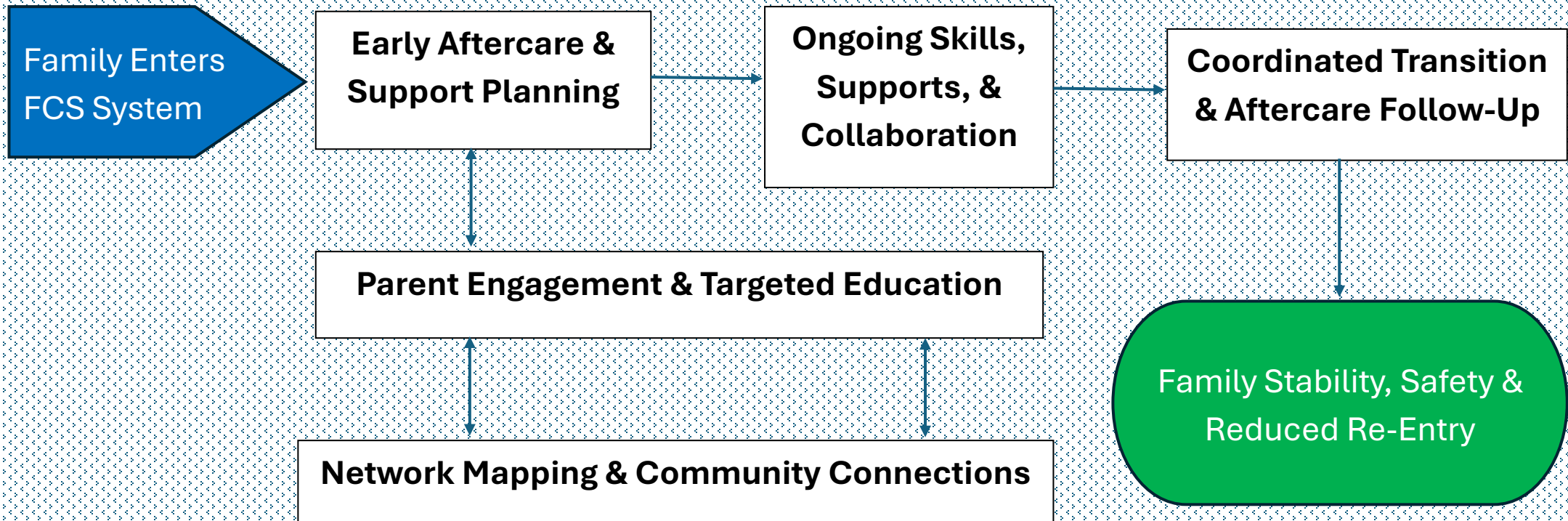
Theory of Change for SIP Strategies

Summary Logic

- If families are engaged early, supported by their natural and community networks, and connected to preventive aftercare supports,
- then they will be better prepared, more resilient, and less reliant on the child welfare system,
- which leads to sustained family stability, safety, and overall well-being.

Theory of Change for SIP Strategies

Overview of System Level Change



PREVENTION/COMMUNITY LANDSCAPE

Aftercare Enhancements →

Enhance aftercare planning and connection to prevention providers by preparing families for exiting the system from the start.

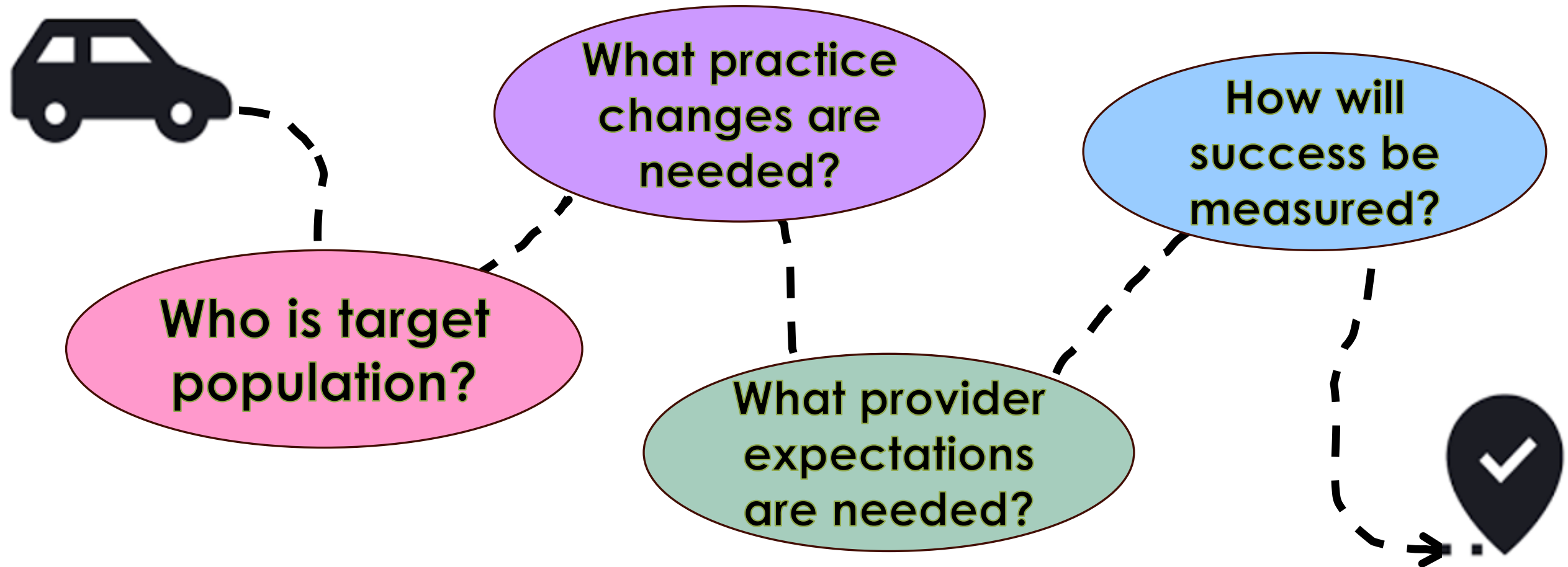
RATIONALE

- Ongoing family support after case closure is linked to lower rates of foster care re-entry.
- Parents and youth often struggle to access needed services after their cases close, feeling unsupported and disconnected.
- Aftercare services and supports help stabilize families and promote a safer home environment.

KEY AREAS OF EXPLORATION

- Pilot test innovative, individualized aftercare planning approaches.
- Strengthen service partnerships between FCS & SUD providers.
- Integrate aftercare planning into CFT practice throughout case life cycle.
- Define provider expectations to match aftercare service needs of target population.
- Launch pilot & evaluate its success.

Aftercare Critical Questions...



Target Population: 2025 Case Trends

- 11 Cases transitioned from Family Reunification (FR) to Family Maintenance (FM)
- 14 Families housed with Family Unification Program (FUP) vouchers
- 37 FM Cases dismissed into the community
- 7 Cases dismissed to fathers as primary caregivers



Target Population: Key reasons for re-entry

Challenges FCS sees at point of re-entry:

- Difficulty maintaining sobriety / recovery given chronic substance use issues
- Difficulty managing chronic, ongoing mental health issues
- Lack of sources of support (both professional and natural) for the family to access during tough times

Characteristics of Target Population

What other factors do you see that destabilize families after they've left the child welfare system?

Improve Parent Engagement →

Better engage parents in meeting individualized case goals through targeted educational & support activities.

See SIP
Strategy
Overview
Handout

Improve Parent Engagement

WHAT: Better engage parents in meeting individualized case goals with targeted educational & support activities.

WHY: Research demonstrates that parent education is strongly linked to reduced re-entry into care by improving family stability, reunification plan compliance, and advocacy skills. Enhanced education also reduces parental stress, encourages engagement with services, and increases long-term stability following reunification. Plus, birth parent and community partner focus groups identified the need to strengthen skills of social workers and resource parents to address complex needs of parents, such as mental health and substance use.

How:

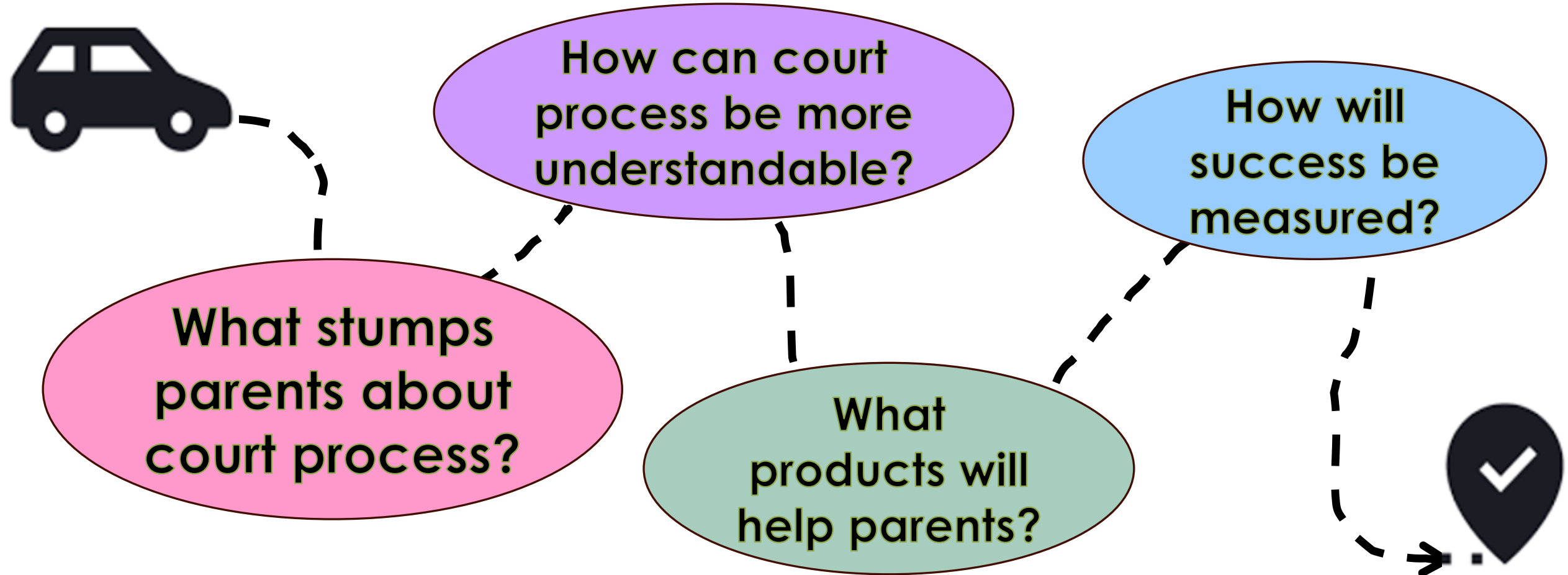
- Improve parents' understanding of dependency court processes to improve case planning participation.
- Assess parent engagement experiences through case review data; interviews with Parent Partners & recently reunified parents; and staff surveys.
- Identify & employ best practices for engaging families with complex needs (mental health & substance use).
- Identify skill gaps and provide training opportunities for social workers & resource parents.

Today's Focus:

- Improve parents' understanding and experience of dependency court processes to improve case planning participation.



Parent Engagement Critical Questions...



Key Barriers to Parent Participation in Dependency Court

Failure to Appear

- Transportation
- Access/ability to navigate remote participation
- Proper notice
- Work conflicts

Process Delays

- Continuance requests
- Knowing when to show up
- Centrally calendared hearings and lengthy wait times for case to be called
- Ability to take time off work
- Incarcerated clients

Language / Comprehension

- Interpretation of legal concepts
- Understanding court expectations, rules, consequences, timelines
- Confuse dependency court with other courts

Unique Obstacles for Fathers

- Paternity status determination
- Role of non-offending parent

What else?

Critical Success Factors for Parents Involved in Dependency Court

- Parents understanding that success is not simply service participation, but behavior change sustained over time.
- Showing the court that parent can demonstrate protective behavior even when parent stumbles.
- A “family-friendly” court calendar and hearing process.

What other factors do you think are important for parents involved in dependency court to be successful?

Increase Networks of Support →

Expand the circle of natural & community-based support for every family entering the system.

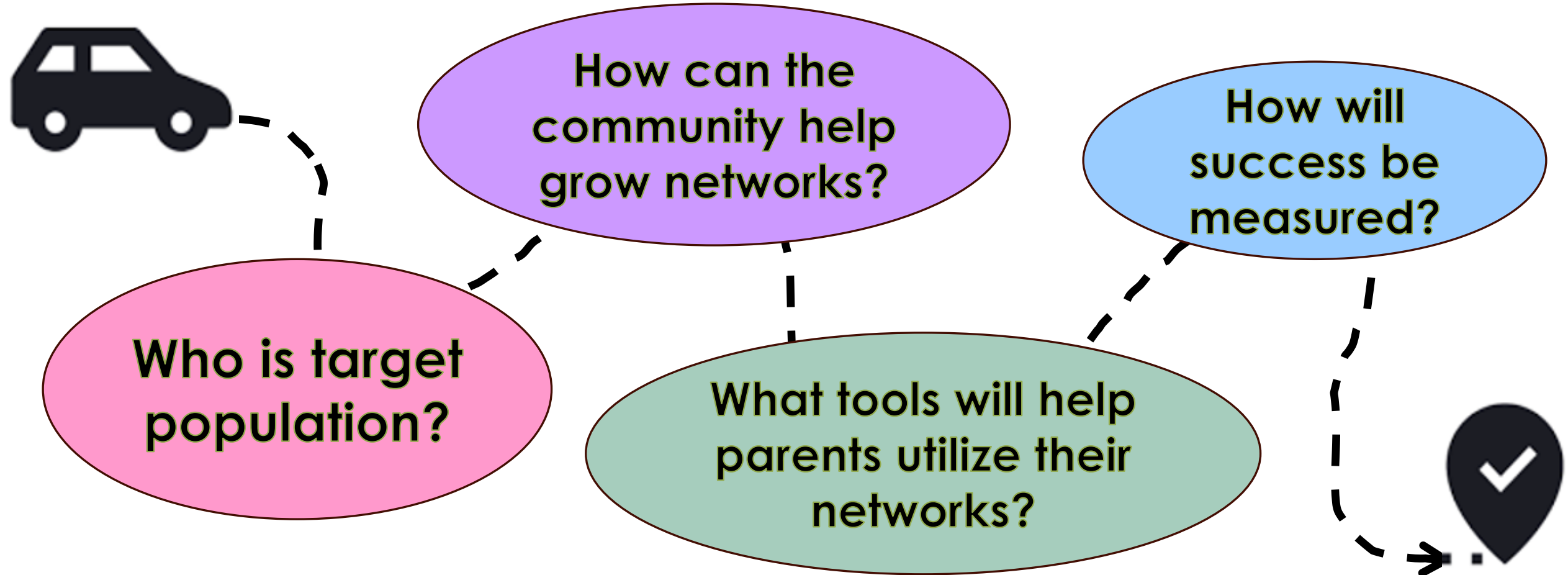
RATIONALE

- A more stable & sustainable support environment at home can reduce re-entries into care.
- Ready access to practical and emotional support from trusted individuals can address issues before they escalate.
- When parents feel supported and less isolated, reliance on formal helping systems can be reduced.

KEY AREAS OF EXPLORATION

- Develop method for early identification & assessment of families with limited networks of support.
- Enhance CFT practices to include natural supports.
- Integrate development of individualized networks of support for each family from case entry to dismissal.
- Strengthen resource parent capacity as family allies through peer support groups, coaching, and respite.

Networks of Support Critical Questions...



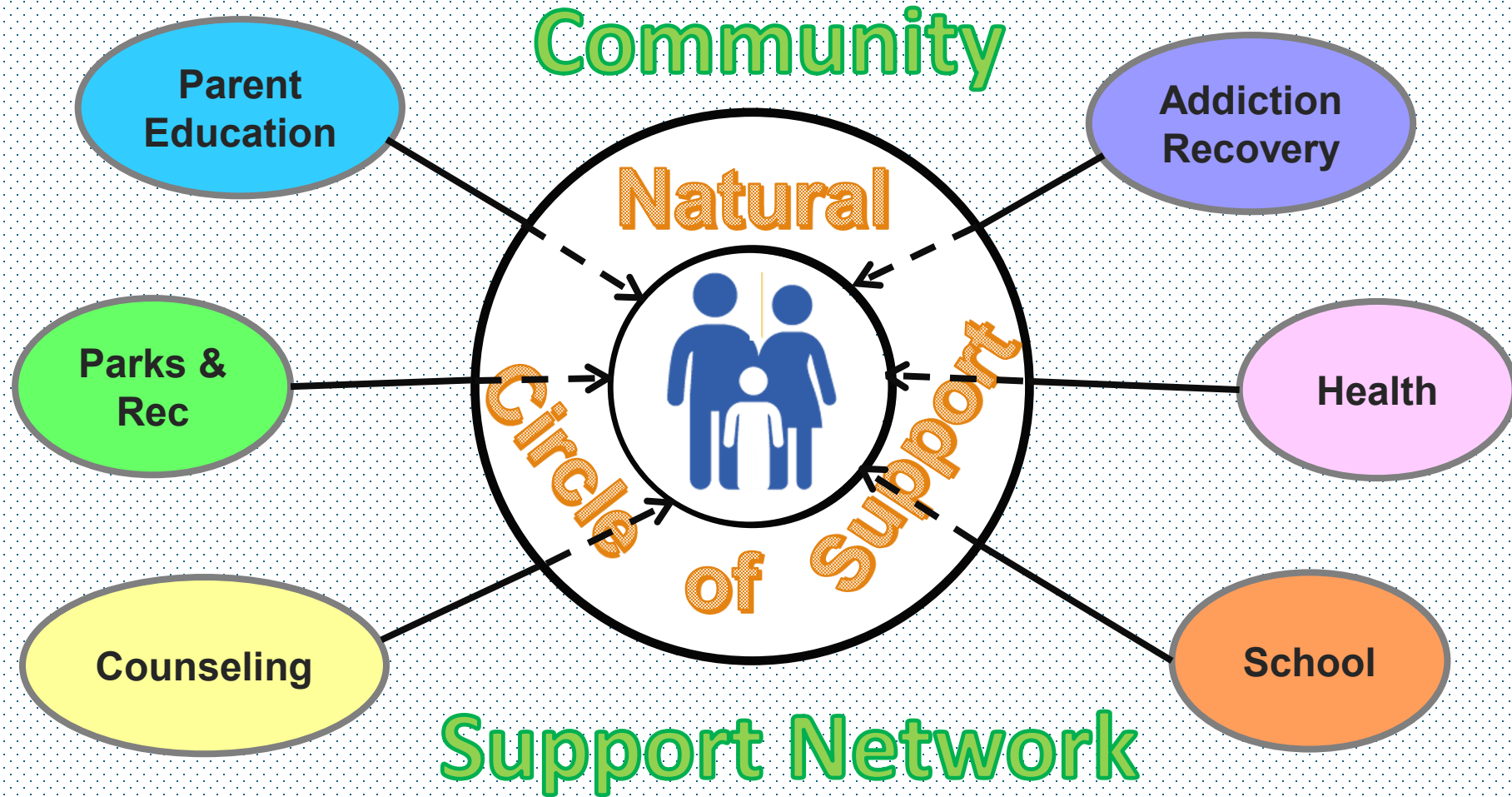


Characteristics of the target population

Of the 37 cases dismissed in 2025:

- ❖ **Ethnicity:** 62% Latino; 38% White
- ❖ **Age:** 54% under age 5; 46% age 5-18
- ❖ **Gender:** 54% Female; 46% Male
- ❖ **Area of Residence:**
 - 68% North/Mid County
 - 32% South County

Support Network Structure



P R E V E N T I O N / C O M M U N I T Y L A N D S C A P E

Partnering to Support Families

Family & Children's Services

**Starts Early Connecting Families
to Community Resources...**

Case Plans

Flex Funds

*Aftercare
Plans*

***What programs &
resources are
available in the
community to
support our
families?***

P R E V E N T I O N / C O M M U N I T Y L A N D S C A P E

Promote Family Connections →

Strengthen community & family support networks to promote permanency for **probation youth**.

RATIONALE

- Family engagement and relational permanency improves outcomes for probation youth.
- Stronger connections with bio family, extended kin, and trusted adults helps youth build a more stable & supportive social network.
- More pro-social relationships accelerates reunification or permanent placement.

KEY ACTIVITIES

- Structured identification & engagement of natural supports during case lifespan.
- Resource guides & connection plans to link youth & families to ongoing supports.
- Coordination with FCS & community providers for high-fidelity wraparound.
- Structured CFT meetings focused on transition and aftercare planning..

Keeping Connected

□ Website

- [https://www.santacruzhumanservices.org/FamilyChildren/SystemImprovementPlan\(SIP\)](https://www.santacruzhumanservices.org/FamilyChildren/SystemImprovementPlan(SIP))
- Place for all things SIP related

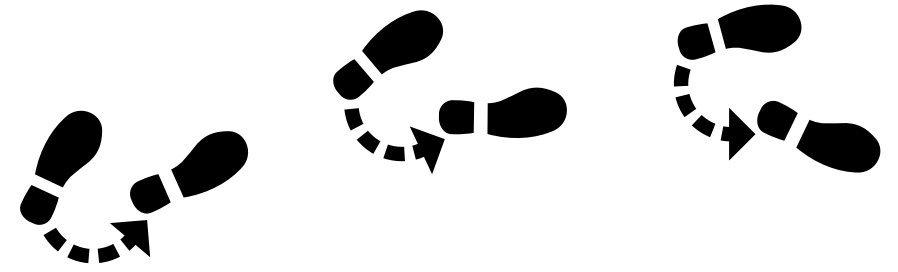
□ Data Dashboard

- <https://santacruzhumanservices.org/Home/AboutUs/MakingaDifference/SafetyandCare>
- Access to FCS data trends

□ Questions?



Next Steps



- ❑ By 5/18/26: Content from Spring 2026 Santa Cruz County SIP Steering Committee Meeting will be posted to website
- ❑ Next SIP Steering Committee Meeting
 - Monday, August 10, 2026, 12:00 – 1:30pm (11:30 lunch mingle)
 - In Person at Simpkins Center
- ❑ Next SIP Work Group Meeting
 - Wednesday, June 10, 2026, 3:30 – 5pm
 - Virtual on Zoom...calendar invite & link coming soon!

Thank You

