

**Sacramento County
System Improvement Plan Update
May 2007**

BACKGROUND

The Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services (CPS) Division, continues to implement systemic changes in accordance with California's Child and Family Service Review (C-CFSR) guidelines. The May 2007 System Improvement Plan (SIP) Update reflects the County's current performance and progress based on the identified outcomes and systemic factors in the May 2006 SIP.

Each county is required to update the State annually, highlighting the progress on the priority areas and key strategies to accomplish the objectives of the SIP over a three-year period. The SIP Update is an expression of the County's vision and commitment to assuring the safety, well-being and permanency for children and families in our community.

The lead agency for completing the SIP is the Department of Health and Human Services, Child Protective Services (CPS) Division. The Probation Department is a contributing agency to the SIP Update and is responsible for assessing outcomes for the youth under its direct supervision, who also receive Child Welfare Services.

OUTCOMES AND SYSTEMIC FACTORS

Based on the County Self-Assessment and SIP submitted to CDSS in 2006, and the May 2005 Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR), the County identified seven priority areas to address over three years. Below is a summary assessment of the County's performance by outcome measures based on the January 2007 County Data Report.

Outcomes

Recurrence of Maltreatment (1A, 1B, 2A):

The rate of recurrence within 12 months in Sacramento County is 15.3%, representing a decrease in recurrence. This is an improvement in the last year, however, this area continues to be a high priority for the County. The rate of recurrence within the first 6 months has remained the same as last year at 9.5%. The County is actively working to reduce recurrence by expanding Differential Response with community partners in targeted neighborhoods to provide prevention and early intervention services and resources. The County is building relationships with community partners to ensure supportive services to families as the need arises. These include Birth and Beyond, Head Start, Infant Mental Health, and home visitation. Further strategies to reduce recurrence include the use of Family Engagement techniques and Family to Family principles throughout the community. The use of Team Decision-Making (TDM)'s has further spread family engagement, by including families in the decision-making process.

Referrals with a Timely Response (2B):

Sacramento's current compliance rate is 93.9% for immediate responses and 93.1% for ten-day responses. The immediate response rate continues to show improvement over prior years, but is below the State's performance rate of 95.8% for immediate responses. Sacramento County's ten-day response is 93.1%, which exceeds the State performance rate of 92.3%. Timely response to a referral is a prerequisite to ensuring that children are safe. The County has addressed this outcome by focusing on internal processes and program specific solutions.

Multiple Foster Care Placements (3B, 3C):

The percentage of children who are in care for less than 12 months and had no more than two placements is 81.6% for Sacramento County; the performance rate for the State is 84.6%. For children still in care after 12 months, 52.6% had no more than two placements, compared to the State performance rate of 67.3%. Incremental progress has been made in reducing the number of foster care placements for children in care for 12 months. The implementation of Team Decision-Making, during the testing process, has demonstrated an increase in placement stability for those situations where TDM was used. The plan is to expand TDM throughout the Division to improve placement stability outcomes and better support the caregiver. Emergency shelter placements for the first 24-48 hours impact this outcome as they are considered a placement in this outcome measure.

Foster Care Re-Entry (3F, 3G):

The percentage of children that re-entered foster care within 12 months of reunification is currently 20.7 % compared to the State performance rate of 12.7%. Reducing the foster care re-entry rate is a high priority for Sacramento County. Child Welfare Services and Probation are working to develop additional resources and practices to strengthen families and reduce foster care re-entry. These resources include community-based and neighborhood-based services and programs that will support the family after the child exits foster care. More effective case planning is accomplished through Team Decision-Making, which empowers and engages the family in identifying their areas of strengths and needs.

Systemic Factors

Foster/Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention:

Sacramento County has identified this as a systemic factor impacting placement stability, family connections, and permanency for children. Activities include neighborhood-based recruitment, early identification and assessment of kin-care homes, expansion of family-finding efforts, and support for resource and kin-care families. Resource family orientation meetings, trainings, and convenings are provided in local neighborhood

settings. Partnerships with community agencies have been established to support recruitment and retention efforts. A Resource Family Liaison position has been created to support resource families.

Case Review:

Sacramento County has a number of systems in place to facilitate services to families to ensure compliance with Court and case management-related items. Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tools are used in the assessment and case planning process. Safe Measures is a tool utilized by staff to track compliance with case management activities, which impact the outcome measures. The County and the Court maintain a working relationship and good communication through regular meetings.

Management Information System (Probation):

Probation foster youth data is submitted to the State through an online data collection form. The data collected was not useable due to challenges in interpreting the form and lack of standardized training on its use. The form has been corrected and Probation staff will participate in standardized training on the appropriate use of the form.

IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

In the three-year SIP, the Department identified three core strategies to improve on the identified outcomes and systemic factors. These strategies are Comprehensive Safety Assessment, Differential Response, and Permanency and Youth Transition. Child Welfare Services (CWS) Redesign provides the framework for program improvements.

Comprehensive Safety Assessment:

Sacramento County utilizes the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) model to assess safety, risk, family's strengths, needs and placement stability. The County is educating communities, partners and consumers on how SDM is utilized in making decisions regarding response time, removal, reunification, return home, and placement.

To further impact placement, child safety, risk, and matching children with resource parents, the County is exploring the new SDM Placement Module. This layered SDM safety, risk and protective capacity tools will enhance social workers' assessment of placement families by using strength and needs questions to create stronger, stable placements.

Comprehensive Safety and Risk Assessments are vital for reducing recurrence of maltreatment and foster care re-entries as well as increasing the overall safety of children in the community. SDM remains a viable strategy used in the improvement and achievement of the County's outcomes.

Differential Response:

Under Differential Response, the County works collaboratively with community partners to provide prevention, early intervention and ongoing support services to families. These services are tailored to the family's individualized needs while capitalizing on the family's identified strengths.

Differential Response utilizes an intake structure comprised of three response paths, as follows:

- **Path 1** refers to a response protocol for allegations that do not meet any of the regulatory, Penal, or Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) definitions of child abuse and neglect and the allegations do not include any known or suspected safety concerns. In addition, the family or child presents with an issue that could be addressed through neighborhood-based services.
- **Path 2** refers to a joint CPS and community response, when reports of maltreatment meet the regulatory, Penal, or Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) definitions of child abuse and neglect. Allegations may or may not include suspected safety concerns, but not to a level indicating the need for immediate removal and/or Court intervention. The family is likely to benefit from early linkage to neighborhood-based services.
- **Path 3** refers to a response protocol for families who may need more intense services and for whom Court intervention may be appropriate. As reported, allegations meet the regulatory, Penal, or Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) definitions of child abuse and neglect and may include one or more safety concerns.

The first phase of Differential Response began in July 2005, within a targeted zip code of the County. The second phase of Differential Response was completed in 2006, with a contract awarded for three community agencies to provide services to families in seven (7) additional zip codes. The services are designed to enhance family well-being and mitigate circumstances that lead to abuse and neglect. The expansion of Differential Response is expected to reduce the number of children with substantiated referrals for abuse and neglect, reduce the rate of recurrence of abuse in homes where children were not removed, and reduce the rate of foster care re-entry.

Permanency and Youth Transition:

The County has implemented the Family to Family model to engage families and youth in their case planning process in order to increase permanency and stabilize foster care placements. The Family to Family model consists of four major components:

- Recruitment, training and support of resource families at the neighborhood level to ensure children, if removed, can remain in their own neighborhoods. The County is partnering with faith-based organizations and non-traditional partners to recruit resource families in neighborhoods with the highest removal rates. A specialized unit completes the relative home assessment, which facilitates the placement of children and youth in relative homes.
- Building community partnerships with a wide range of neighborhood-based organizations in areas with high child abuse/neglect referrals, in order to create a network of support for families. These networks include schools, community-based organizations, faith-based and cultural organizations, as well as formal and informal community leaders and stakeholders. In order to enhance prevention and early intervention services, the County is working closely with the eight Family Resource Centers that are the focus of family engagement strategies at the neighborhood level. Such strategies include joint visits and assessments, participation in Team Decision-Making, and aftercare support for families who have successfully reunified.
- Team Decision-Making (TDM) involves the child or youth, the birth family, the resource foster family, and community members in making decisions involving the child's placement. TDM has been implemented in the Family Reunification and Permanent Placement programs with very positive results, stabilizing placements and reducing placement changes. TDM is scheduled to be implemented in the Family Maintenance and Emergency Response programs to impact initial removal and placement decisions.
- Evaluating results to quantify progress. Data pertaining to the Child Welfare Outcomes is analyzed to track the progress toward improving outcomes. Training and support is provided to improve the accuracy of the data entered into the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System. The County is working to make the appropriate changes in policy and practice to ensure the accuracy of all data gathered for children in Probation and CWS systems. This improvement directly impacts the outcomes and remains a priority for the County of Sacramento.

APPROACH

Sacramento County continues to move forward with the Child Welfare Redesign as the key strategy for improvement in the identified outcomes. This includes the new Differential Response intake structure, contracts and partnerships with public and private agencies to share responsibility, a standardized safety assessment, engagement of youth and family through TDM, and offering a continuum of services at the neighborhood level. The attached SIP Update template details Sacramento County's efforts and progress in improving Child Welfare Outcomes.