

Summary Background

On April 14, 2015 the Board of Supervisors approved and authorized the convening of a Child Welfare Safety Net Task Force (Task Force) for the purpose of assessing the overall system of public and community based child welfare services in Santa Barbara County that address the needs of children (and their families) who become, or are at risk of becoming, dependents of the court under Article 6, Section 300 of the Welfare and Institutions Code. Each Supervisor subsequently appointed one member from his or her District with knowledge of child welfare, child development, and family systems issues to serve on the Task Force.

The charter of the Task Force was to conduct a holistic assessment of the strengths, weaknesses and gaps of the Child Welfare System in Santa Barbara County and to produce a report by April 14, 2016 with findings and recommendations for the Board of Supervisors which:

1. Acknowledges what parts of the system are currently working well and why.
2. Identifies and makes recommendations regarding areas of the system that could be improved.
3. Identifies and makes recommendations regarding existing needs not currently addressed by the system and what could be done to fill those gaps.

On April 5, 2016, the Task Force presented its report to the Board of Supervisors with the following recommendations:

1. The Creation of a County Chief Child Advocate Position
2. Specific Responsibilities of the County Chief Child Advocate
3. Additional Recommendations

Following the presentation of the Task Force, the Board of Supervisors requested the CEO and Department of Social Services provide a response to the recommendations of the Task Force. Outlined in the main body of the report are each of the Task Force's recommendations and information and perspective provided by the CEO and the Department regarding the recommendations.

“The Creation of a County Chief Child Advocate Position” and Existing Efforts Toward Integrating Resources for the Benefit of Children

In regards to the Task Force’s primary recommendation, creation of the County Chief Child Advocate position, after review by the County Executive Office and the Department of Social Services, it is believed that many of the goals of the position are being achieved by the Department but can be further enhanced through improved communication and coordination of the system partners. A summary of the key responsibilities of the Task Force recommended County Chief Child Advocate position, as well as the County’s assessment of how to best address the areas are referenced below:

Facilitate communication and intradepartmental coordination within the County: To improve coordination and collaboration among County departments, as well as facilitate collaboration among other partner agencies to enhance Child Welfare, the Interagency Policy Council (IAPC), comprised of all County Health and Human Services Department Heads (Social Services, Behavioral Wellness, Public Health, Probation, First Five, Child Support Services) and lead by the Assistant CEO, will ensure the recommendations of the task force are sentinel issues for coordination and discussion for each monthly meeting. This executive level forum is geared toward facilitating coordination among departments immediately identifying and addressing any barriers to resolving issues. The IAPC has been utilized in the past to ensure robust and coordinated implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Katie A, Poverty Report, prioritization of funding as well as other priorities of the Board. The IACP will coordinate the interdepartmental items that emerge as they pertain to child welfare, provide a forum for discussion and resolution and track progress on issues. The IAPC also plays a critical role in networking among various external system partners and can further facilitate the message coordination of child welfare needs broadly.

Create greater public awareness of issues pertinent to child welfare and at risk youth including recognition/support for resource families: A matter also referenced in various areas of the report, as well as an emphasis for the position recommended, is enhanced communication and public information to ensure awareness of issues and needs within the child welfare system. This included the need for

active and consistent disbursement of resource information as well as a public relations campaign to create greater Santa Barbara Community awareness around the need to support resource families and the children most at risk. The recently retained County Communications Manager/PIO may support the Department of Social Services in formulating a communications strategy and public information messages designed to meet the recommendations outlined in the report.

Strengthened accountability and monitoring of service quality, community involvement, strategic planning and strengthened collaboration/communication among agencies: In order to address these critical areas it is recommended the Department of Social Services will thoroughly utilize the California Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) process as a vehicle to strategically plan for the future, coordinate activities and monitor outcomes and address issues raised with the Task Forces' report. The purpose of the CFSR is to both strengthen accountability and to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of youth in the foster care system. As such, the CFSR operates on a philosophy of setting strategic goals, continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of program outcomes, all which will be utilized to aggressively address the recommendations of the Task Force. The principal components of the CFSR Process include: 1) County Self-Assessment (CSA), 2) County System Improvement Plan (SIP), and 3) County System Improvement Plan Progress Reports (SIP Progress Reports). The Department is preparing for its next five year CFSR Process which will commence beginning in July of 2016. It is fortuitous the Task Force Report was completed immediately before embarking on the new CSFR process. As a result, the Task Force Report in combination with robust stakeholder engagement through a series of community convenings will be foundational in the development of the County Self-Assessment and subsequent System Improvement Plan required by the CFSR process. The Department is also fortunate to have a dedicated and enthusiastic stakeholder community comprised of non-profits, philanthropists, consumers, and County partners all of which play an integral role in the process. The findings and recommendations of the Task Force will serve to inform further stakeholder discussions, build upon best practices, and inspire new targeted strategies designed to improve outcomes for our County's children. In addition, the Department of Social Services will continue holding ongoing quarterly stakeholder meetings and intends to submit a presentation annually to the Board of Supervisors

inclusive of performance, improvements, challenges, and systemic issues in conjunction with the CFSR process.

Monitoring the growing issue of child sex trafficking and legislative proposals that impact the Child Welfare System: Significant efforts are underway within the County to address the issue of sex trafficking. In addition to the Department of Social Services Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program which focuses on youth under the Jurisdiction of CWS, the Resiliency, Intervention for Sexual Exploitation (RISE) program was implemented in July of 2105 to address the unmet needs of sexually exploited children in the County. The Human Trafficking Task Force, spearheaded by the District Attorney, works with partners and individuals to provide traditional and nontraditional supports to improve the lives of those within the program. In addition the Commercially Exploited Children (CSEC) Court is also a multi-agency collaborative component of the overall program which serves sex exploited youth in the juvenile justice system. Together these programs provide a forum for aggressive multi agency response to the issue of child and youth sex trafficking in the County. Further the issue of sex trafficking and the County’s response had been reported on to the full Board of Supervisors. These progress reports will occur annually and Task Force participants will be made aware of these reports.

In response to the recommendation to monitor of legislative proposals, the County will work in concert with our legislative advocates at the state and federal level to ensure that child welfare matters are placed on the County’s “watch” list so that the Department of Social Services and the County Executive Office is immediately informed of legislative proposals that can impact the system and all at-risk children. Once informed the County can work with the Legislative Committee of the Board of Supervisors to review legislative proposals and respond accordingly.

Further detail regarding the County’s efforts, both new and ongoing, to respond to Task Force’s recommendations are discussed in the main body of the report.

Specific Responsibilities of the County Chief Child Advocate as Stated in the Task Force Report and Existing Efforts Related to Recommendations

The following section lists the specific responsibilities of the County Chief Child Advocate as stated in the Task Force Report (bolded, in quotes).

1. **“Facilitating collaboration between County agencies, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and the community itself.”**

The Department agrees that Collaboration between County agencies, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and the community itself is vital in ensuring the best outcomes for the children and families we serve¹.

- Currently Departmental staff participates in numerous collaborative efforts including but not limited to²:
 - a) Inter-Agency Policy Council (IAPC)
 - b) Inter-Agency Program Fiscal (IAPF)
 - c) Kids Network
 - d) Child Welfare Stakeholders
 - e) Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC)
 - f) Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)
 - g) Partnership for Strengthening Families
 - h) Linkages
 - i) Front Porch
 - j) RX for Kids Program
 - k) Pathways to Mental Health Services
 - l) Children’s System of Care (CSOC) Action Team

¹ See Appendix B-1 CWS SIP No Recurrence of Maltreatment S1.1-Strategy 1.1

² See Appendix A for listing of organizations involved in each of these collaborative efforts

- m) SB163Wraparound Steering Committee
- n) Human Trafficking Task Force
- o) Sexual Assault Response Team
- p) Juvenile Court Brown Bag
- q) Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Court
- r) Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program Executive Advisory Council
- s) Foster Youth Advisory Committee
- t) Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) programs
- u) California Youth Connection (CYC)
- v) Juvenile Justice Coordinating Council (JJCC)
- w) Faith in Motion

- The Interagency Policy Council (IAPC) is comprised of all County Health and Human Services Department Heads (Social Services, Behavioral Wellness, Public Health, Probation, First Five, Child Support Services) and lead by the Assistant CEO. This executive level forum is geared toward facilitating coordination among departments immediately identifying and addressing any barriers to resolving issues.

The Department believes the existing collaboration between County agencies, community organizations, faith-based organizations, and the community itself is well facilitated and can be further enhanced through communication and coordination of the system partners.

2. **“Overseeing the development and integration of a comprehensive county-wide multi-year strategic plan with the goal that, from birth to adulthood, not a single child falls through the cracks.”**

The Department acknowledges the value of a strategic plan in ensuring a continuous quality improvement effort to improve outcomes for children and families.

- The request for “a comprehensive county-wide multi-year strategic plan with a goal that, from birth to adulthood, not a single child falls through the cracks” is far-reaching and beyond the mandates of the Department of Social Services, Behavioral Wellness, and Public Health as well as the control and authority of the BOS as the countywide child welfare system includes the courts, community based organizations, etc. However the Department utilizes the California Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) process to both strengthen accountability and to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of youth in the foster care system. The principal components of the CFSR Process include: 1) County Self-Assessment (CSA), 2) County System Improvement Plan (SIP), and 3) County System Improvement Plan Progress Reports (SIP Progress Reports) all of which include significant stakeholder involvement and provide continued opportunities to incorporate the recommendations of the Task Force as well as new strategies which will improve the outcomes of children and families.
- The Child Welfare Services System Improvement Plan³ developed every 5 years and updated annually in collaboration with Behavioral Wellness, Kids Network, CAPC, Juvenile Court, Quality Parenting Initiative, and other stakeholders, and approved by the BOS and California Department of Social Services (CDSS) is a comprehensive effort to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of children that fall under the jurisdiction of CWS. Annual updates to the plan including outcome measures and progress on meeting improvement goals are submitted to CDSS, provided to stakeholders and posted on the Departments website.

3. **“Bringing together the greater community regarding issues concerning at-risk youth, and promote a cultural shift that cultivates a supportive environment that benefits birth families, resource families, foster youth and all at-risk children in Santa Barbara County.”**

³ See Appendix B for Santa Barbara County SIP Matrix

The Department agrees that community awareness and involvement are fundamental in cultivating a supportive environment that benefits birth families, resource families, foster youth and all at-risk children in Santa Barbara County.

- The Department relies on the support of the community in serving the many children it comes in contact with. In 2015, of the 98,512 children ages 0-18 in the County, 186 entered foster care and the average number of children in foster care each month was 431⁴. In addition, the CWS Differential Response program served 1015 children and their families during the year⁵.
- The State required System Improvement Plan (as described in item 2) as well as the Resource Family Recruitment Retention and Support Plan⁶ contain multiple strategies to improve outcomes through increased support for children and youth in foster care, families, and resource families.
- The request for “Bringing together the greater community regarding issues concerning at-risk youth” is far-reaching. However, the existing collaborative structures such as the KIDS Network, Child Abuse Prevention Council, and Partnership for Strengthening Families, allow for concentrated efforts on the specified populations being served by the government and community based organizations involved and further enhanced through communication and coordination of the system partners.

4. “Facilitating better and ongoing communication between all stakeholders, including: the Santa Barbara County schools, Child Welfare Services, Mental Health, the Justice System, independent agencies and other non-profits serving children.”

The Department agrees that communication between all Stakeholders is essential.

⁴ Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., King, B., Rezvani, G., Wagstaff, K., Sandoval, A., Yee, H., Xiong, B., Benton, C., Tobler, A., & Romero, R. (2016). *CCWIP reports*. Retrieved 4/21/2016, from University of California at Berkeley California Child Welfare Indicators Project website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare>

⁵ CWS Front Porch Database

⁶ See Appendix C

- The Department has regularly held stakeholder meetings in conjunction with development of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) County Self Assessment and System Improvement Plans and will continue to do so.
- A quarterly CWS stakeholders Meeting commenced in April of 2016 to work collaboratively with community members and organizations for the good of the children and families served by Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services, recognizing that in the increasingly complex world of Child Welfare, communication, partnership, and cooperation are essential.
- Please see Department’s response to item 1 for additional information on existing efforts.

5. “Producing a yearly “State of the County” report to present to the Board of Supervisors and the community at large.”

The Department recognizes the value of an annual report on outcomes.

- The Department of Social Services intends to submit a presentation annually to the Board of Supervisors inclusive of performance, improvements, challenges, and systemic issues which will address outcomes related to the Department of Social Services in conjunction with the CFSR process.
- Please see Department’s response to item 2 for further information on existing efforts.

6. “Monitoring and addressing emerging issues, such as the growing and critical issue of child sex trafficking, and to monitor legislative proposals that can impact not only the Child Welfare System, but all at-risk children.”

The Department agrees that such actions are critical and relies on an established structure to monitor and respond to legislative proposals regarding emerging issues as well as all issues that impact the Child Welfare System.

- The Department of Social Services is a member of the County's Human Trafficking Task force and is co-chairing, with the DA's office, the CSEC Protocol subcommittee.
- The Department submitted a County plan to CDSS to access funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16 under the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program and received an allocation of approximately \$277,000 for the federally mandated activities associated with identifying and protecting children and youth at risk of sex trafficking.
- In addition to the Department of Social Services Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program which focuses on youth under the Jurisdiction of CWS, the Resiliency, Intervention for Sexual Exploitation (RISE) program was implemented in July of 2105 to address the unmet needs of sexually exploited children in the County and the Commercially Exploited Children (CSEC) Court is also a multi-agency collaborative program which serves sex exploited youth in the juvenile justice system.
- The Department of Social Services is a member of the County Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), a nonprofit association representing the human service directors from each of California's 58 counties. Their mission is to promote a human services system that encourages self-sufficiency of families and communities, and protects vulnerable children and adults from abuse and neglect. To accomplish this mission, CWDA:
 - a. Advocates for policies that will further the mission of the organization.
 - b. Educates state and federal policy-makers and the public regarding the significance of human services policies on individuals, communities, and county human services operations.
 - c. Collaborates with county human service agencies, state and federal governmental entities and community-based organizations to ensure efficient and effective service delivery and the exchange of best and promising practices.
- The County will work in concert with our legislative advocates at the state and federal level to ensure that child welfare matters are placed on the County's "watch" list so that the Department of Social Services and the County Executive Office is immediately informed of legislative proposals that can impact the system and all at-risk children.

Once informed the County can work with the Legislative Committee of the Board of Supervisors to review legislative proposals and respond accordingly.

7. **“Specifically, monitoring and advocating for the following priorities:”**

a) **“Ongoing recruitment and support for Resource families.”**

The Department agrees that recruitment, retention, and support for resource families are critically important issues.

- The Department’s Resource Family Recruitment Retention and Support Plan as well as the Department’s Recruitment Plan⁷ developed in 2015 in response to this issue, contain multiple strategies for recruitment and greater support for resource parents including a community resource specialist, branding and media campaign, funding for concrete supports, and enrichment activities for foster youth.
- The Department’s Resource Family Recruitment Retention and Support team has one full-time and one part-time staff who work in collaboration with the Department’s recruitment and retention workgroup, and the Quality Parenting Initiative to recruit, retain, and support resource families.
- Quality Parenting Initiative workgroups are focused on recruitment and retention as well as training, communication, and service delivery and the Department will continue to work with the Quality Parenting Initiative to look for ways to enhance these areas.⁸

b) **“Social worker support including reduction of case-loads, increased support staff, educational incentives and more efficient technology that will keep social workers from being bogged down in paperwork and pulled from their most critical work.”**

⁷ See appendix D

⁸ See appendix B-13 CWS SIP C4.3 Placement Stability - Strategy 1.1

The Department acknowledges the impact of high caseloads on social workers and has added both social worker and support staff as funding has allowed over the past several years to reduce caseloads.

- In FY 13/14, 4 Administrative Office Professional and 11 Social Services Practitioner positions were added to the CWS Program; in FY 14/15 an additional 2 Social Workers and 1 Social Service Practitioner were added. The Department is continuing to work to reduce caseloads for Social Workers.
- The Department has worked diligently to assure social workers only perform work that is appropriate for their classification. The documentation required of social workers related to case notes, case plans and court reports is some of their most critical work.
- The Department has an existing educational reimbursement program which promotes educational development of staff. The Department also participates in the Title IV-E MSW Stipend Program which allows staff to obtain an MSW degree.
- The Child Welfare Services-New System (CWS-NS) project currently under development by California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in conjunction with Counties, is focused on developing a suite of applications which deliver continually-improving, quality digital services that aid social workers to effectively engage and assist children and families. The agile approach ensures the digital services are built based on user-centered design techniques to maximize efficiency. Testing of the New CWS/CMS is scheduled to begin in July 2016.

c) “Active and consistent disbursement of resource information for children, resource families, birth families, partner agencies and the general public.”

The Department recognizes the importance of active and consistent disbursement of resource and referral information and has a multitude of resource and referral information, guides and services available.

- The Department’s Website (http://cosb.countyofsb.org/social_services) contains information that is user-friendly and easily accessible.
- The Department has launched the Our County Our Kids website (<http://ourcountyourkids.org>), a platform which promotes even greater communication with our stakeholders in the foster care community through website and social media outreach with relevant content, recruitment efforts and educational outreach strategies.
- The new County Communications Manager /PIO can support the Department of Social Services in creating public information messages.

d) “Expediting Mental Health services and/or Occupational Therapy for foster youth and families, with a blanket consent for services to be signed by birth parents to avoid additional steps that serve only to slow down the process.”

The Department agrees that timely appropriate mental health services are imperative for youth in foster care and their caregivers⁹.

- The Department continues to participate in monthly Collaborative Katie A/Integrative Practice Meetings with Behavioral Wellness to expedite the referral and assessment process and evaluate service availability and delivery.
- The Department has an established referral process for Early Start Services for children under age 3 or Regional Center Assessments for those at risk for developmental delays.
- The Department of Behavioral Wellness agrees that timely screening and linkage to appropriate services is critical for youth in foster care. The Department of Behavioral Wellness has a developed process with the Department of Social Services (Child Welfare Services) to facilitate this screening process and linkage to screening and services. When the Behavioral Wellness staff are unable to receive consent from a parent for the initial assessment, or if there is a delay in a parent’s response, Behavioral Wellness staff work directly with Child Welfare Services for their support to assure the permission for initial assessment can occur as quickly as possible.

⁹ See appendix B-2 CWS SIP S1.1 No Recurrence of Maltreatment – Strategy 1.4

- Although a blanket order for services would be the decision of the court, the Department has been working with the court to expedite this process. Currently the court considers each case individually and is not willing to have a blanket order for all children to receive mental health services. However, the court is not opposed to ordering mental health services prior to taking jurisdiction of a child, if the court finds it is in the best interest of the child and the parent(s) are refusing to sign the consent forms.

e) **“Expanded transitional and affordable housing opportunities for former foster youth, resource families, families working on reunification, and those that have reunified, through organization such as the Housing Authority and non-profit housing providers.”**

The Department acknowledges the value of affordable stable housing opportunities for foster youth, resource families, and families working toward reunification and acknowledges the price of housing in Santa Barbara County can be a barrier.

- The Department contracts with Family Care Network who provides a range of housing options for transition age youth including Transitional Housing Placement Program (16-18), Transitional Housing Placement Program Foster Care (18-21), and Transitional Housing Placement Program Plus (18-25). Youths 18-21 in foster care at age 16 or older are eligible to receive housing assistance and all youth who are willing to participate in these programs are being served.
- The Department has an MOU with the Housing Authority of the City of Santa Barbara for the Family Unification Program (FUP) which provides vouchers to families for which lack of adequate housing is a primary factor in the imminent placement of the family’s children or the delay in the discharge of the child to the family from out-of-home care.
- The Department’s Resource Family Recruitment Retention and Support Plan provides concrete support to remove barriers for resource families including time limited rental assistance or housing repairs¹⁰.

¹⁰ See Appendix C-16

f) “Increased sharing of information between agencies, educators and caregivers including an up-to-date comprehensive “passport” of each child’s important information.”

The Department concurs with the need to provide important information about children in foster care.

- The Department has an established process for providing a Health and Education Passport to resource families within 30 days of a child’s placement in their home.
- Although many laws do permit the broad sharing of information regarding the child within the child welfare context, the sharing of some information in the possession of the child welfare agency is limited and requires specific authorization. Some records, such as child welfare petitions and court reports, substance abuse treatment records, and certain medical records, have limitations on sharing based on state and federal law. Documents that are part of the juvenile case file, such as the petition, court reports, delivered service logs, etc., are permitted to be released only when consistent with W&I Code §827. Unless inspection is permitted under that section, a court order is required to share these documents.
- The Department has discussed the importance of sharing information with caregivers in order to make the caregiver a partner in the child’s case, and has provided training to staff as well as caregivers on information sharing. The Department will continue to look for ways to improve this process through the Quality Parenting Initiative.

g) “Greater training of trauma informed care systems and practices for agencies, educators, caregivers, and the public.”

The Department is in agreement that there is a need for greater training on trauma informed care systems and practices¹¹.

¹¹ See Appendix B-13 CWS SIP C4.3 Placement Stability – Strategy 1.1

- In the spring of 2015 the Department of Social Services partnered with Behavioral Wellness to conduct Trauma Informed Care Symposiums throughout the County. Resource Families were included as part of the planning team and part of the target audience.
- The Department continues to work collaboratively with Behavioral Wellness and partner agencies through the Children’s System of Care Action Team to create a new model for interdisciplinary service coordination in order to address the complex needs of children and families and increase access to specialized supports. The current focus is to produce a system directory, mapping system elements, access points, entry criteria, services and providers for all stakeholders.
- In Fiscal Year 15/16 the Department contracted with Child Abuse Listening and Mediation (CALM) to provide a training series and ongoing monthly support meeting for alumni for resource families. The Caring for Children Affected by Trauma series, has the following goals:
 - a. To educate parents about the impact of trauma on the development and behavior of children.
 - b. To provide parents with the knowledge and skills needed to assist children in developing healthy attachments/style.
 - c. To help parents develop coping strategies to guide children to grow into healthy and functional adults.
 - d. To guide parents in appropriately responding to behavioral and emotional challenges of traumatized children.
 - e. To create a community that promotes resilience for youth and their families.
 - f. Due to the positive response to these training series the Department is expanding the number of sessions offered in FY 16/17.

“Additional Recommendations” as Stated in the Task Force Report and Existing Efforts Related to Recommendations

The following section lists additional recommendations as stated in the Task Force Report (bolded, in quotes).

- 1. “There is a need to strengthen the training program for resource families on trauma induced behavior. Further, we must develop a system of professional support, including mentors and respite care, to help resource families address and cope with the wide range of behavioral issues that may emerge as a result of childhood trauma.”**

The Department agrees that our resource families are an integral part of the success of a foster child and is committed to providing the best training and support to its resource families¹². The County will continue to work directly with the Quality Parenting Initiative to look at enhancements to training for resource families. Additionally, this recommendation will be referred to the Children’s System of Care for further action. This forum includes internal and external stakeholders and service providers which can work collaboratively to ensure that trainings are both trauma informed and responsive to the unique needs of resource families.

- The Department leads a Quality Parenting Initiative workgroups focused on training.
- The Department’s Pre-service training includes the effects of trauma on children.
- The Department contracts with CALM to provide a training series for resource families, Caring for Children Affected by Trauma, which includes ongoing monthly support meeting for alumni.
- The Department participates in CSOC meetings and related trauma informed care subcommittee to help develop collaborative strategies with County partners and community based agencies.

¹² See Appendix B-13 CWS SIP C4.3 Placement Stability – Strategy 1.1 and Appendix B-14 CWS SIP C4.3 Placement Stability-Strategy 1.4

- The Department funds a contracted Community Resource Specialist position to provide support and mentoring for Resource Families.
- The Department began offering respite care assistance beginning in April 2016 as part of its resource family recruitment, retention, and support plan.

2. “Support a sustained public relations campaign to bring together the greater Santa Barbara County community around the need to support resource families and the importance of the work they do. We must work to actively address and replace old, negative stereotypes of foster/resource families, with a more enlightened view of the important role these families play in protecting and supporting our community’s most at-risk youth.”

The Department agrees there is a need for a public relations campaign to raise awareness about the need for resource families in Santa Barbara Family and to rebrand outdated notions about foster care and replace them with positive messages¹³. This recommendation will be addressed by the Department of Social Services with the support of the County Communication Manager /PIO to develop a comprehensive communications strategy addressing multiple communications/information related recommendations within the report to effectively communicate the needs of the Child Welfare System.

- The approval of the 2015 Budget Act (SB 97) included funding to help support the implementation of AB 403, California’s Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) initiative. In December of 2015, the Department received a \$200,000 Foster Parent Recruitment, Retention and Support (FPRRS) program plan award which is being utilized to support the Our County, Our Kids Branding and Media Campaign. The Department has contracted with Consortium Media on the Our County Our Kids campaign which includes:
 - a) Public Education, Marketing and Media Relations - Public Education Awareness re-branding campaign to reshape public opinion of foster care through media

¹³ See Appendix C- 11 for Branding and Media Campaign description

outreach in both English and Spanish including PSAs, radio, print, press, web, video, PowerPoint Presentations and social media.

- b) Partnerships and Promotions – Enhance new foster care brand within Santa Barbara County through partnerships with businesses, faith communities, schools and private and public sectors.
 - c) Press Relations – Press opportunities and outreach to local media throughout the calendar year to engage media in foster care awareness and related issues. Work with social services staff and partners to secure speaking engagements and public education and outreach opportunities.
 - d) Web and Social Media Integration – Enhance Santa Barbara County Department of Social Services website and social media outreach with relevant content, recruitment efforts and educational outreach strategies.
 - e) Collateral Materials – Provide strategic content and design for new brand collateral material and provide print management of materials.
- The new County Communications Manager /PIO can support the Department of Social Services in creating public information messages.

3. “Create a path for greater sharing of vital case information with partner agencies, so that those agencies that are tasked with providing supportive services, including counseling, have the information they need to best serve the needs of the child.”

The Department recognizes the need to share vital case information when appropriate¹⁴. This recommendation will be considered as a part of the IAPC coordination activities and via the CSFR process.

- The Department utilizes a teaming approach in child welfare cases in order to identify both professionals and nonprofessionals who provide critical services and supports to the child and family. From multidisciplinary teams to Team Decision Making meetings to the Child and Family Team, this approach permits the social worker to share information

¹⁴ See appendix B-2 CWS SIP S1.1 No Recurrence of Maltreatment – Strategy 1.4

about the child with team members as long as consents to exchange information are kept current.

- Although many laws permit the broad sharing of information regarding the child within the child welfare context, the sharing of some information in the possession of the child welfare agency is limited and requires specific authorization. Some records, such as child welfare petitions and court reports, substance abuse treatment records, and certain medical records, have limitations on sharing based on state and federal law. Documents that are part of the juvenile case file, such as the petition, court reports, delivered service logs, etc., are permitted to be released only when consistent with W&I Code §827. Unless inspection is permitted under that section, a court order is required to share these documents.

4. “For families working on reconciliation, we must create a process to better facilitate healthy communication between resource parents and birth parents.”

It is the Department’s preference that resource families are willing to work with birth parents whenever it is in the child’s best interest¹⁵. The County will continue to work directly with the Quality Parenting Initiative to look at evidence based strategies as well as new innovations to promote reconciliation. This recommendation will also be considered as a part of the CSFR process.

- In September 2015, the Department prepared an overview of Best Practices in Visitation in order to partner with the Juvenile Court and collaterals to ensure that children maintain family connections through frequent and quality visitation.
- Through the Quality Parenting Initiative and the parent partner program the Department continues to work with resource and birth families to facilitate partnerships that will promote healthy co-parenting relationships when safe and appropriate. However the Department does not have the authority to mandate communication between resource and birth parents.

¹⁵ See appendix B-6 CWS SIP C1.1 Reunification within 12 months – Strategy 1.1

5. “We must address the urgent need to recruit, train and retain Social Workers, including review of the recruitment program, incentives for retention, and a re-examination of existing salary steps to encourage experienced social workers to remain with the County.”

The Department is aware of the urgent need to recruit, train and retain Social Workers and will work to retain a new recruitment manager to expedite the hiring processes.

- The Department is in the process of augmenting our efforts in these areas by hiring a recruitment manager.
- The Department adheres to the mandated training of its social workers by ensuring new workers participate in and complete core training and that those who have completed their core training complete the require 40 hours of additional Continuing Education over 24 months (sections 14-130 (c) and 14-510).
- Training personnel and department program managers are required to cooperate in a plan that adheres to the definitions, guidelines, policies and directions contained in regulations.
- Any changes to create positions for experienced workers or increase to costs would result in a decrease to staffing unless fully funded by the County’s general fund.
- Social workers received a 5% salary increase as a result of the Board’s desire to improve retention on September 29, 2014.

6. “Implement technology updates to make reporting and state mandated record keeping more user-friendly and less time consuming; explore possibility of adding clerical support staff to handle routine clerical matters, which will free up time for trained social workers to interact with foster children, resource families, birth parents and their community support network.”

The Department acknowledges efficiencies can be achieved through technological updates and will continue to work in conjunction with the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) on implementation of the Child Welfare Services-New System (CWS-NS).

- The Child Welfare Services-New System (CWS-NS) project currently under development by California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in conjunction with Counties, is focused on developing a suite of applications which deliver continually-improving, quality digital services that aid social workers to effectively engage and assist children and families. The agile approach ensures the digital services are built based on user-centered design techniques to maximize efficiency. Testing of the New CWS/CMS is scheduled to begin in July 2016. However, Counties are not in a position to alter state mandated reporting and records keeping processes.
- The Department has added both social worker and support staff as funding has allowed over the past several years to reduce caseloads. In FY 13/14, 4 Administrative Office Professional and 11 Social Services Practitioner positions were added to the CWS Program; in FY 14/15 an additional 2 Social Workers and 1 Social Service Practitioner were added.
- The Department has worked diligently to assure social workers only perform work that is appropriate for their classification. The documentation required of social workers related to case notes, case plans and court reports is some of their most critical work.

7. “Identify and recruit additional bilingual and bicultural mental health service providers.”

The Department recognizes the importance of providing bilingual/bicultural services and will work through the Cultural Competency Committee of the Behavioral Wellness System Change process to address this recommendation.

- The Cultural Competency Committee of the Behavioral Wellness System Change process has also identified this issue as a priority item for 2016. An action team to prepare goals and objectives was recently established. These action teams work in conjunction with the Director of Behavioral Wellness and the Assistant CEO to advance the overall goals of System Change. The activities are now reported and tracked bi-monthly to ensure timely completion.

- 50% of CWS Social Worker Staff are bilingual.
- 40% of Behavioral Wellness Clinical Staff are bilingual.

8. “Work with physicians, nurses, midwives and other health care providers to encourage the early assessment of pre-natal substance abuse and the importance of providing early referrals for Occupational Therapy to infants and young children.”

The Department recognizes the impact of pre-natal substance abuse and relies on Public Health, First Five, and other partners in the substance abuse and medical communities to encourage early assessment and referrals to services. The Department of Social Services in collaboration with Behavioral Wellness believe that this is a priority for the system. This topic will be considered by IAPC to determine other mechanisms beyond what is currently in place to enhance early assessments and referrals.

- The Public Health Departments Child and Adolescent Health Field Nursing Program provides in-home assessment, education, linkage/referral, and comprehensive case management for women at risk of adverse prenatal outcomes. This program provides maternal-infant and family case management services countywide. In addition the Comprehensive Perinatal Services Program (CPSP) - Provides free and enhanced prenatal and postpartum care to Medi-Cal eligible women with low-income. CPSP coordinates nutrition and health education with clinical obstetrical care throughout the county.
- First Five funds Welcome Every Baby (WEB), a free resource for all babies and their families in Santa Barbara County. The program includes a nurse home visit and offers maternal/newborn screenings, developmental evaluations, and community referrals, as well as a call-line and online resources.

9. “Establish an annual retreat for stakeholders for the purpose of information sharing and exploration of ways to continue to improve the Child Welfare System.”

The Department agrees that stakeholder meetings are vital in ensuring the best outcomes for the children and families we serve. While a formal stakeholder retreat is not envisioned at this time, the Department will continue to hold quarterly stakeholder meetings as well as community convenings in conjunction with the development of the CFSR.

- The Department has regularly held stakeholder meetings in conjunction with development of the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) County Self Assessment and System Improvement Plans and will continue to do so.
- In addition a quarterly CWS stakeholders Meeting commenced in April of 2016 to work collaboratively with community members and organizations for the good of the children and families served by Santa Barbara County Child Welfare Services, recognizing that in the increasingly complex world of Child Welfare, communication, partnership, and cooperation are essential.

10. “Encourage development of short term mental health placements within the County dealing with children with greater needs (Level 13).”

The Department acknowledges the need for Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs for children and youth with the highest level needs¹⁶. Additional specialty mental health placements are a focus of continuum of care reform. The Department of Social Services in collaboration with Behavioral Wellness will address this recommendation and engage with local providers to support this process.

- Currently the closest option is Casa Pacifica in Camarillo. With the implementation of Continuum of Care Reform, group homes will now have the option to transition to Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs which provide intensive therapeutic intervention for children with the highest level needs. The Department is currently engaging with local providers to support this process and Behavioral Wellness is prepared to assist with certification to allow Medi-Cal reimbursement for specialty

¹⁶ See Appendix B-13 CWS SIP C4.3 Placement Stability – Strategy 1.2

mental health services provided within this model should a willing and able provider be identified.

11. “Continue funding to Partner Agencies and those organizations focused on helping families address their needs keeping children from entering the Child Welfare System.”

The Department agrees with the need to support prevention efforts in order to keep children from entering the Child Welfare System¹⁷. The Department is committed to continuing to maintain funding to key partner agencies in support of the overall Child Welfare System.

- The Department is required to fund all services, ordered by the court, for dependent children.
- In addition State law requires each county to establish and fund a child abuse prevention coordinating council, whose primary purpose is to coordinate the community’s efforts to prevent and respond to child abuse.
- The Department’s KIDS Network provides staffing to the Child Abuse Prevention council. KIDS Network staff also serves as the State liaison for federal, state and local child abuse and neglect prevention funding (Preserving Safe and Stable Families, Child Abuse Prevention Intervention and Treatment, Community Based Child Abuse Prevention and Children’s Trust Fund), designated for community-based child abuse prevention activities and contracted to community-based vendors. In Fiscal Year 15/16, the County awarded \$411,824 for prevention activities.
- In recognition of prevention as a successful strategy for keeping children out of the Child Welfare System the Department (in collaboration with First Five and with approval of the Inter Agency Policy Council) provides funding from the SB 163 Reserve account for the differential response/front porch program in the amount of \$259,000.

12. “We must take a hard look at the growing tragedy of youth sex trafficking. There is a critical need to help get these young victims to a safe place, without criminalizing them.”

¹⁷ See Appendix B-1 CWS SIP S1.1 No Recurrence of Maltreatment – Strategy 1.1

The Department agrees and is collaborating with the Human Trafficking Task Force, including the District Attorney, Behavioral Wellness, Probation, Public Health, Juvenile Court and community partners to expand and develop education, outreach, prevention, and intervention programs for youth who are at victims or at risk of commercial sexual exploitation in Santa Barbara County. Together these programs provide a forum for aggressive multi agency response to the issue of child and youth sex trafficking in the County.

- The Department is coordinating and developed local interagency protocols with the Human Trafficking Task Force for the provision of services to children who are victims of commercial sexual exploitation.
- The Department submitted a County plan to CDSS to access funding for Fiscal Year (FY) 2015-16 under the Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program and received an allocation of approximately \$277,000 for the federally mandated activities associated with identifying and protecting children and youth at risk of sex trafficking.
- In addition to the Department of Social Services Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) Program which focuses on youth under the Jurisdiction of CWS, the Resiliency, Intervention for Sexual Exploitation (RISE) program was implemented in July of 2105 to address the unmet needs of sexually exploited children in the County and the Commercially Exploited Children (CSEC) Court is also a multi-agency collaborative program which serves sex exploited youth in the juvenile justice system.
- The Department is participating in the Southern Counties workgroup to develop placement options for CSEC youth.
- Recent legislation (SB 855, Chapter 29, Statutes of 2014) amended the Welfare and Institutions Code (WIC) Section 300 to clarify that, under existing law, commercially sexually exploited children whose parents or guardians failed or were unable to protect them may fall within the description of §300(b) and be adjudged as dependents of the juvenile court. This amendment ensures that CSEC victims are no longer criminalized and afforded the protection of the Juvenile Court.

Conclusion

Overall the recommendations of the task force are on target and in alignment with the existing federal, State, and County priorities that have been developed through the California Children and Family Services Review process (CFSR). The purpose of the CFSR is to both strengthen accountability and to monitor and assess the quality of services provided on behalf of youth in the foster care system. As such, the CFSR operates on a philosophy of setting strategic goals, continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of program outcomes, all which will be utilized to aggressively address the recommendations of the Task Force.

The principal components of the CFSR Process include: 1) County Self-Assessment (CSA), 2) County System Improvement Plan (SIP), and 3) County System Improvement Plan Progress Reports (SIP Progress Reports). The Department is preparing for its next five year CFSR Process which will commence beginning in July of 2016. It is fortuitous the Task Force Report was completed immediately before embarking on the new CSFR process. As a result, the Task Force Report in combination with robust stakeholder engagement through a series of community convenings will be foundational in the development of the County Self-Assessment and subsequent System Improvement Plan required by the CFSR process.

The Department is also fortunate to have a dedicated and enthusiastic stakeholder community comprised of non-profits, philanthropists, consumers, and County partners all of which play an integral role in the process. The findings and recommendations of the Task Force will serve to inform further stakeholder discussions, build upon best practices, and inspire new targeted strategies designed to improve outcomes for our County's children. In addition, the Department of Social Services will continue holding ongoing quarterly stakeholder meetings and intends to submit a presentation annually to the Board of Supervisors inclusive of performance, improvements, challenges, and systemic issues in conjunction with the CFSR process.

In addition to the rigorous CFSR process, the Interagency Policy Council (IAPC) will ensure Child Welfare and the recommendations of the task force are sentinel issues for coordination and discussion for each monthly meeting. This executive level forum is geared toward facilitating coordination among departments immediately identifying and addressing any barriers to resolving issues. The IAPC has been utilized in the past to ensure robust and coordinated implementation of the Affordable Care Act, Katie A, Poverty Report, prioritization of funding as well as other priorities of the Board.

In reference to the twelve additional recommendations provided by the Task Force, the County Executive Office and the Department of Social Services has reviewed each item and concur with many of the areas for improvements in order to enhance the overall system of care. It is again believed that while many of the recommendations are currently being achieved by the Department all areas can be further improved. The activities and strategies detailed above will be utilized to address the additional recommendation of the Task Force.

The work of the Task Force was extremely helpful in bringing new perspectives regarding existing processes and services to the attention of the department and other stakeholders. Further it has started new conversations about partnerships and collaborations as well as new opportunities to enhance current practices and seek innovative solutions to emerging issues. The County Executive Office and Department of Social Services would like to thank the Task Force for its work over the last year and the well thought out recommendations they have provided on behalf of the children of Santa Barbara County.