



MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Striving for Positive Outcomes

Now that I have been here several months and had a chance to meet with staff, many of you have heard me discuss these three priority outcomes for the Department:

- We must decrease the amount of time children spend in foster care;
- We must improve the safety of children in our care; and
- We must reduce our reliance on placement to achieve safety.

The planning to achieve these three outcomes has already begun. We are examining the work performed by non case-carrying Children's Social Workers (CSWs) and deploying more staff into the field. This will ultimately lower caseloads and increase the amount of time CSWs spent with families.

The Homestudy Completion Project is complete. The goal of this short-term project was to complete a backlog of home studies for thousands of children, freeing them up for adoption.

Regional Administrator (RA) and CSW work groups are currently looking at ways we can reduce the number of repeat referrals on cases. Our goal is a 40 percent reduction in the number of referrals.

The Department is examining ways to integrate adoption work into the Service Planning Area (SPA) offices in order to decrease the time from placement of children to adoption. Specifically, we will be implementing elements of the Torrance Adoption Model in each of the offices.

We are also looking at opportunities to work with the state and federal governments on funding options. We are exploring methods that would put more resources at the front-end of the system in order to keep families together and reduce the number of children we detain.

These are steps in the right direction, but it is only the beginning of the journey. As an organization, we can only accomplish these three priority outcomes by working as a cohesive team. Bureau Chiefs must support RAs. RAs must support staff in the SPAs. And staff must support each other.

Your commitment to achieving these outcomes is the only way we will improve our work and provide improved safety and stability for children in our care.

David Sanders, Ph.D.
Director

Improving Outcomes Drives Plan for Department Organizational Structure

Teamwork, Cooperation and Respect Urged

During the first months of his tenure, Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) Director Dr. David Sanders made the rounds at Service Planning Area (SPA) offices to introduce his vision for the organization to staff. The vision refocuses the Department on a "back-to-basics" approach focusing on three priority outcomes that will help the children served by DCFS: improving permanence, improving safety and a reducing reliance on detention.

Now, the vision has evolved into an implementation phase. The first part of realizing the vision was to organize the Department in a way that would create the best environment for providing good outcomes for children. In late summer, Dr. Sanders and the new DCFS Executive Team (see page 2) presented a series of organizational changes to Regional Administrators and other top managers, urging teamwork, mutual respect and cooperation while the Department undergoes the transition.

DCFS staff were consistent in their observation that Department leadership often did not work together or provide the consistent decision-making necessary to assure positive outcomes for families, an issue Dr. Sanders plans to address.

"The future of our success is determined by the leadership in this organization, not by an organizational chart," he told the group. "Everyone has one goal and makes decisions together."

Driven by this vision, a teamwork approach and focusing on better outcomes for children, the Executive Team has already implemented many strategies that will support positive results. Some of the strategies include organizing to a more community-based, service-oriented delivery model and assigning staff back into the field to work with families.

Reallocating Staff

Perhaps the most dramatic affect of the changes is to reallocate positions to the frontline.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

The Key Three

IMPROVED PERMANENCE

Shorten the timelines for permanency for children removed from their families with a particular emphasis on reunification, kinship and adoption. Reductions in the emancipation population will also be critical.

IMPROVED SAFETY

Significantly reduce the recurrence rate of abuse or neglect for children investigated and reduce the rate of abuse in foster care.

REDUCED RELIANCE ON DETENTION

Reduce reliance on detention through expansion of alternative community-based strategies.

FALL 2003

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

- 3 • COMPTON PROJECT
- 4 • TORRANCE ADOPTION MODEL
- 5 • ON THE LINE
- 6 • SPA SPOTS
- 8 • UPCOMING EVENTS
- PARAMOUNT CENTER

“The most common barrier to achieving the expected outcomes is that there have not been enough CSWs (Children’s Social Workers) providing direct services to children and families,” said Dr. Sanders. “We need to reduce CSW caseloads and create an environment for direct service staff to spend more time with families.

“Leadership positions need to focus on staff and how to get the best out of workers,” continued Dr. Sanders. “Our staff need to have a reasonable workload and a supportive culture and time to do the work they need to do with children and families.”

Currently, only about 1,800 of the Departments approximate 6,600 workforce are in positions working with clients. The reallocation of staff is expected to eventually increase the number of case-carrying CSWs by approximately 1,000.

Since September, the Executive Team has been working on reconciling the Item Control System for the Department, examining static items and decreasing programs and initiatives staffed by non-case carrying CSWs.

In addition, a labor management group was convened to review the Department’s current distribution of non-case carrying CSWs. The group worked to determine which of the non-case carrying CSWs and Supervising Children’s Social Workers (SCSWs) should be assigned to provide direct services to children and families. Representatives from Local 535 and Local 660 were partners in the process to ensure that any movement of staff complied with the Memorandum Of Understanding between the County of Los Angeles and the Union to assure a direct service staff perspective in the decision.

In September, the labor management group came up with a series of recommendations that have resulted in more than 200 positions reallocated from non-case carrying to case-carrying CSWs and direct service SCSW positions.

Creating Service Bureaus

A second component of the changes is the decentralization of the Bureau of Child Protection (BCP) Emergency Response (ER) functions. These functions have now been split into four new Service Bureaus. The new Service Bureaus provide direct services to children and families that effectively address needs for safety, stability and permanence within a specific geographic area. Each Service Bureau also includes specific countywide programs that are integrated within or are supportive of all SPAs. This model helps assure that ER services are consistent across all SPA offices.

THE DCFS EXECUTIVE TEAM

The organizational structure decentralizes operations in the Department to provide more control in decision-making to the Service Planning Areas (SPAs). An Executive Team of 10 members including the Director, Chief Deputy Director, the Office of Health Care Planning and heads of the Support Bureaus and Service Bureaus will make decisions at the executive level. Input from staff is considered a valuable part of the decision-making process.



OFFICE OF HEALTH CARE PLANNING

DR. CHARLES SOPHY, DIRECTOR

Coordinates and monitors all the medical and psychiatric treatment of children under the care of DCFS. The team includes Public Health Nurses, the Harbor UCLA Crisis Center and the USC Medical Center for Health, Mental Health and Substance Abuse.



SUPPORT BUREAUS provide effective Department-wide resource management, in partnership with Operations, to achieve the Department’s outcomes for children and families.

BUREAU OF ADMINISTRATION

ANGELA CARTER, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes the Human Resources Division, Labor Relations, Quality Assurance, Property Management, Contracts Management Division, Out-of-Home Care, Policy Development, Training Division, Education and Licensure, Disaster Unit and the Family Reception and Conference Centers.



BUREAU OF FINANCE

JOAN SMITH, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes the Budget Services Division, Finance Services Division, Revenue Enhancement, Procurement Services, Internal Control Unit, Grant Management Unit and Resource Development and Control.



BUREAU OF INFORMATION SERVICES

LEO YU, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes the Strategic Planning Division, Performance Measures Division, GIS Laboratory, Research Section and Information Technology Services.



SERVICE BUREAUS provide direct services to children and families that effectively address needs for safety, stability and permanence within a specific geographic area. Each bureau also includes specific countywide programs that are integrated within or are supportive of all SPAs.

SERVICE BUREAU 1

PAUL FREEDLUND, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes BCP/SPAs 2 and 5, Juvenile Court, Emancipation, Kinship, Service Delivery and the Child Abuse Hotline.



SERVICE BUREAU 2

RUSS CARR, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes BCP/SPAs 4 and 6, Specialized and Alternative Programming, Emergency Response Command Post, Out-of-County and Community-Based Programs.



SERVICE BUREAU 3

JACKIE ACOSTA, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

Includes BCP/SPAs 1 and 3, Wraparound, Systems of Care and Permanency Teams.



SERVICE BUREAU 4

TRISH PLOEHN, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

BCP/SPAs 7 and 8 and the Adoptions Division.

Integrating Services into SPAs

Ultimately, most services and service programs will be incorporated into SPA operations including Adoptions, Wrap-around, Kinship and Permanency Teams under the supervision of Service Bureaus. Staff will be given the opportunity to participate in a number of short-term workgroups on a number of service program issues.

Staff Input

A staff advisory group began meeting in October to address issues affecting the line staff and bring those issues to the attention of management. Dr. Sanders, Bureau

“The future of our success is determined by the leadership in this organization, not by an organizational chart. Everyone has one goal and makes decisions together.”

—Dr. David Sanders, DCFS Director

Deputies, designated SCSWs and CSWs from each SPA office, a Union representative, representatives from specialized Department areas such as Kinship and Emancipation, Clerical Administrators, Human Resources representatives, Policy representatives and designated staff from each of the Service and Support Bureaus take part in the monthly meetings located in various SPA offices.

The first topic tackled was reducing the number of referrals. The meetings always include a question and answer period and advisory group members are asked to create an “Improvement Plan” following each meeting in order to implement the needed changes.

With many organizational changes underway, the planning will continue well into the fall and winter. Dr. Sanders and the Executive Team will continue to update staff about any changes through management and the L.A. Kids web site. ■



Compton Project Uses Community-Based Approach to Keep Kids with Families

An innovative community-based initiative called the Compton Project seeks to establish a working presence within Service Planning Area (SPA) 6 with community partners, the provider community, schools, churches, law enforcement and hospitals to achieve better outcomes for children. The Compton Project, initiated by Los Angeles County Supervisor Yvonne Brathwaite Burke, will be housed at 921 E. Compton Boulevard in Compton. It is scheduled to open early next year, with a second site at 2000 W. Slauson Avenue to follow in a couple of years.

“Nearly one-quarter of all children in our system come out of SPA 6. This is too small a geographical area to have 10,000 children,” said DCFS Division Chief Eric Marts, who is spear-heading the project. “We want to start focusing on providing services to reduce that number and develop some type of prevention plan to keep those children from going into placement.”

Main components of the Compton Project call for placement avoidance and placement prevention, making sure that families get appropriate services, reducing the reoccurrence of abuse and addressing the issue of permanency for these children.

There has been an ongoing dialogue with community-based agencies to specifically target the most important services the families need in SPA 6 such as family preservation, drug treatment and prevention, domestic violence prevention and mental health. Those agencies are being asked to assist the Department with placement prevention and getting children back home in a timely manner.

The Wateridge office, in SPA 6, is currently training and field testing two new initiatives that will be key components of the Compton Project — Point of Engagement and Multi-Disciplinary Assessment Teams. Point of Engagement is a service delivery system that changes the way the Department transfers cases from worker to worker.

“This is more of a team decision-making process where emergency response and services come together at the very beginning of a case when the Emergency Response Children’s Social Worker (CSW) determines that services are needed for a family,” explained Marts.

Multi-Disciplinary Teams, headed by DCFS Medical Director Dr. Charles Sophy, then provide assessments for every child taken into care for mental health, developmental, educational, psychological, social and environmental concerns. Teams will also have the ability to assess biological parents and the current caregivers, which could be relatives or foster homes. Early on, back-up placement options will be considered looking ahead towards permanency in the event that reunification efforts fail.

Marts emphasized the importance of including local hospitals’ forensic exams in the Multi-Disciplinary Assessments so that all the information is gathered in one place and given to the case carrying CSW. “The CSWs will have all the pertinent information they need on a child and a family to help develop effective case and treatment plans,” he said.

Wateridge staff and SPA 6 community providers have been trained on this new service delivery system. CSWs will staff the Compton Project with all the needed programs including Emergency Response, Family Maintenance and Reunification, and Permanent Placement units. There may be some additional staff employed for Emancipation and Independent Living Programs. ■

Torrance Adoption Model Simplifies and Expedites Adoption Process

When Maureen Small, a Supervising Children's Social Worker (SCSW) with an adoption unit, moved to the Torrance office four years ago, she noticed how the close working quarters promoted the sharing of case information with caseworkers. She reasoned that the adoption process could be streamlined, more comprehensive and provide greater continuity if the adoption Children's Social Worker (CSW) and the case-carrying CSW worked more closely as a team.

After two years of planning, the Torrance Adoption Model was introduced in 2002. The plan was simplicity itself. Once the Service Planning Area (SPA) CSW submits a Permanency Planning Adoption Assessment, the Permanency-Planning Liaison completes it. If the case is activated as an adoptions case, Small then assigns it to one of her adoption CSWs and the Home Study is opened right in the same building.

Small has assigned each SPA unit an adoption CSW. While the adoption CSWs still physically work in the adoption unit, they are encouraged to spend time in SPA units, getting to know the CSWs, attending unit meetings, and explaining the adoptive process.

The result is a more cohesive team effort with the adoption and SPA CSW working with the family together. Now SPA workers can be provided with continuous feedback on how the child is doing. Anxious adoptive families can be given specific adoption-related information. With everyone in the same office, group case consultations with County Counsel, Public Health Nurses, administration, supervisors and SPA workers can be scheduled in an afternoon. When complex case situations arise, all parties can sit down and hammer them out. By the time the case is ready for court, the Department has one united opinion.

"This speeds up everything. Before, activating the Adoption Home Study, sending it to the Adoptions office and having an actual CSW assigned, might take weeks if not longer. With this arrangement, they know every time that they open a Home Study, it's going to go to that same adoption CSW who they can consult with and discuss their concerns. It's so much easier," said Small who encourages CSWs and SCSWs with questions about adoption to stop by and get immediate answers.

With adoption CSWs more accessible, personal relationships can be established to facilitate a proactive attitude toward adoption. The follow-up and feedback from adoption CSWs helps bring to light important issues that previously were lost in transition. Adoption CSWs can ask CSWs questions involving front-end situations that they are unfamiliar with.



SCSW MAUREEN SMALL DISCUSSES AN ADOPTION CASE WITH CSW WILL COCHRANE (ABOVE) AND TORRANCE ARA SERGIO PEREZCANO (LEFT.)

"The CSWs communicate with each other and resolve the issues between themselves. It's a much more fluid way to move from the regional worker to the adoption CSW. They know each other; they talk to each other; they work with each other. It provides more stability for the child as well as a quicker resolution or permanent plan," said, Senior Deputy County Counsel Patrick Furey, who is stationed in the Torrance office.

Will Cochrane, a CSW III in the Torrance office, credited the Torrance Adoption Model with providing continuity for his families after he left the case, especially, for children approaching a .26 (Permanency Planning) hearing. "Because the adoption CSW has been working with me throughout the period of transition going towards the .26, they know the special needs of the children. They are best able to identify realistic adoptive homes for these particular children," said Cochrane. Cochrane also pointed the savings in time and workload.

Currently, the Department is looking at a streamlined adoption process which has components of the Torrance Adoption Model imbedded in it. ■

AB 636 Sets Up New Ways to Monitor Agencies

Assembly Bill (AB) 636 by Assembly Member Darrell Steinberg (D-Sacramento) was signed into law in 2001 and required the California Health and Human Services Agency to convene a workgroup to establish a work plan for the federal Child and Family Service Review. It also required the Department of Social Services (DSS) to establish the California Child and Family Service Review System in order to review all county child welfare systems per federal standards for child and family outcomes, starting on January 1, 2004. In addition, AB 636 requires DSS to take various measures to assist counties in achieving the outcomes outlined in the Agency plan.

Because it is the largest agency in the state, the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) will be at the forefront of the state monitoring.

The AB 636 implementation design calls for more analysis of data gathered throughout the state. Data collected from DCFS will include the time to permanence, the percentage of repeat abuse in foster care and other factors.

"When AB 636 was passed, it required the state to meet with stakeholders and develop a new way of monitoring counties," said DCFS Chief Deputy Director John Oppenheim.

That new approach includes more discussion of the data through a county self-assessment process known as a Peer Quality Case Review. During the Peer Quality Case Review, the Department solicits staff from other counties, along with state representatives to review cases on a random basis, interview staff and parties involved in cases. This will be conducted beginning January 1, 2004. A Department self-assessment will be due every three years. ■

Department Makes Strides with New Mental Health Initiatives

Team of Experts, Court and DCFS Working Together to Improve Service

The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is moving forward on efforts to improve mental health services to the Department's most troubled children. Under a class action lawsuit settled in March 2003 known as *Katie A.*, DCFS has agreed to improve its physical and mental health care to children. This will be achieved by streamlining the assessment process, as well as customizing the child's needs based on that assessment.

As part of the *Katie A.* settlement, a six-member panel of mental health experts nationwide was assembled to work with the Department. For two years, the panel will work in conjunction with the Department, the Juvenile Court, children's attorneys and County Counsel, to oversee the system and deal with issues and barriers to preventing permanence and safety.

"While the *Katie A.* case settlement focuses on five plaintiffs, they are representative of overall issues regarding children's physical and mental health in our system," said DCFS Medical Director Dr. Charles Sophy. The panel meets approximately every eight weeks, but panel members and Department officials are frequently in contact and conferencing about various issues, said Dr. Sophy. Members include leaders in mental health and child welfare reform, attorneys, the former Executive Deputy Director of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services and a psychologist.

Department issues already earmarked for improvement include identifying proper services, creating services for needs and building safer and more stable homes for children. The panel and the Department have also been looking at permanency issues including stabilizing families. According to Dr. Sophy, this includes helping sick family members, working with Wraparound and using "Systems of Care," a mental health intervention service for children who are at higher risk of being displaced. Making treatment and access to in-home services a more seamless process will also be examined.

"We will be looking at improving the quality of service from physical and mental health providers with whom we contract," said Dr. Sophy. "This includes a system of monitoring and auditing and other initiatives designed to improve accountability. We're basically making them accountable."

A staff workgroup assigned to tracking children at risk for placement disruptions has identified approximately 700 children considered to be the Department's hardest-to-place. Many of these children, referred to as "MacLaren Children," have already begun to receive more intense services from the Department, resulting in success. ■

ON THE LINE

"ON THE LINE" IS A "DCFS NEWS" COLUMN FEATURING LOS ANGELES COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES' CHILDREN'S SOCIAL WORKERS (CSWs) WHOSE ACHIEVEMENTS AND PRACTICES EPITOMIZE THE BEST IN SOCIAL WORK.

CSW Empowers Families and Focuses Youth on Future

Children's Social Worker (CSW) Rob Hirschhorn brings a special passion to Family Group Decision-Making (FGDM) emancipation conferences by supporting youth in achieving their goals as they near emancipation. As part of the emancipation protocol he created, Hirschhorn starts with identifying the 12-month short-term goals the youth wants to accomplish such as obtaining a driver's license or enrolling in a community college. Then he focuses on future plans, one to three years down the road, such as obtaining transitional housing, gaining job experience, saving money or completing college.

"I want to give these youth the opportunity to plant seeds in their minds for what their dreams are. It's amazing to see the passion that these kids have after what they've gone through. I think it's very important to create a very structured detailed plan for them," said Hirschhorn.

Hirschhorn, a 10-year veteran of the Department, has been working in FGDM for the past year-and-a-half. Since its inception in 1999, FGDM has facilitated more than 300 family conferences. At a family conference, Hirschhorn explained, anyone who cares about the child is welcome to attend. This may include the immediate and extended family, friends, clergy, teachers, peers, CSWs and therapists. The invited parties create a safety plan or a plan for the child's future. At an emancipation conference, the youth decides who is invited.

In addition to emancipation conferences, a general FGDM conference meeting can serve a number of purposes including reunifying the child with the parents, placing a child with relatives out of foster care, developing a safety plan for the child or developing visitation plans for the siblings.

It takes Hirschhorn anywhere from 20 to 40 hours to coordinate a family meeting. The conference itself averages 3 to 5 hours. All present assess the family's strengths and voice their concerns. Resources are then offered for the family to consider putting into their plan to ensure that specific goals are achieved. Also, the case-carrying CSW might have questions or suggestions for the plan.

Hirschhorn feels if a referral is made to FGDM early, chances are better the family can be kept out of the system. Early on, the family is more hopeful, positive and willing to take more responsibility for their children. The families realize if they don't act, the children will languish in foster care or they might end up without a plan when they emancipate.

"As a therapist, I enjoy seeing positive change and this is a quick process. At one of the first conferences I coordinated, 20 people showed up with half the group wanting nothing to do with the other half. There was such amazing honesty with everyone sharing, open and vulnerable in a positive way. By the end of the meeting, everyone was crying. The family created a wonderful plan for this boy who had many special needs. When they were done, everyone was hugging and exchanging information."


For more information on FGDM, call Rob Hirschhorn at (323)290-8518. ■



ROB HIRSCHHORN

"I want to give these youth the opportunity to plant seeds in their minds for what their dreams are."

— CSW Rob Hirschhorn



SPA SPOTS

In every issue, "DCFS News" will provide information about what's happening in the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Service Planning Areas (SPAs). If you have SPA news to report, please submit your ideas to Stuart Riskin of the DCFS Public Affairs Office at riskis@dcfs.co.la.ca.us.

Community Donors Recognized

The Santa Clarita office held a "Community Donor Recognition" on September 18, 2003. Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich's deputy, Millie Jones, presented certificates to the honorees who included Santa Clarita Valley Service Center Director Lupe Lopez. Lopez started a gift giving distribution program six years ago as a project for Santa Clarita Valley seniors. Initially, the group collected and distributed gifts to local children under the care of DCFS. The program soon expanded to include beautiful, handmade blankets created by the Blanket Brigade of the Santa Clarita Methodist Church. The Brigade was also honored at the ceremony. Today, toiletry packages, plush toys and Christmas ornaments have also been added to the group's distribution list. All the items are packaged in attractive travel bags. Other community donor honorees included Maricella Sholes of the Foundation of Children's Dental Health and Garvel Wike of the Salvation Army.

Program Helps Stabilize Kids in One Placement

Counseling 4 Kids, a non-profit counseling agency with offices in Sun Valley and Lakewood, is beginning to facilitate an innovative program entitled Early Intervention Program (EIP). The program was developed to prevent the problems of disruption associated with multiple placements and to ensure that foster children will receive the treatment they need. The EIP will assist in stabilizing and maintaining children in one placement until reunification occurs or permanent placement is identified. Services include providing in-home mental health treatment to children while providing treatment, support and training to all relative caregivers, foster parents and biological parents with whom the children may be permanently placed. Additionally, therapists and staff will provide daily phone contact with the foster parent, family counseling for the biological family, and 24/7 crisis coverage. After-care services for up to six months will also be provided after a child is reunified or placed in permanent placement. This pilot program started on September 3, 2003 in the North Hollywood and Lakewood DCFS offices.

Campaign Addresses Special Needs

The Specialized and Alternative Services Division and the Los Angeles County Sheriff's co-sponsored the 17th Annual 999 Ice Cream Social on August 27, 2003. The Medical Placement Units East and West, along with the SPA 3 Deaf Unit hosted. Sheriff Lee Baca and DCFS Chief Deputy Director John Oppenheim presented recognition awards to the Sheriff's Department units and others who generously donated thousands of dollars to the "999 for Kids" fundraising campaign. Four scholarships were presented to foster youth who have graduated from high school and can use assistance to help further their education. Children and caregivers affiliated with the Medical Placement and Deaf Units were invited to attend.

The money raised from the campaign is used to purchase special items and services for special children including sport wheelchairs, computer games, toys and camp fees. Requests for assistance are processed through a Trust Fund form. Workers can fill out the forms that are then reviewed by DCFS Medical Placement and Deaf Services administration staff. For more information, call Resource Coordinator Pam Risinger at (626) 858-5929.

More than \$17,000 Raised for Trust Fund

Under a backdrop of red, white and blue, the 8th Annual "All For the Love of Kids" awards and auction fundraiser dinner was very well attended and raised more than \$17,000 for the DCFS Trust Fund. The August 28, 2003 program honored the Los Angeles County and City Fire Departments, Metro Link, Sav-on and ABC 7 for their outstanding community service and efforts on behalf of the Department. Dr. David Sanders, DCFS Director, and Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael Antonovich honored these organizers for their work on the Spark of Love Holiday Toy Drive.

Adopt-A-Child Abuse Caseworker Program Celebrates its 12th Year

The Adopt-A-Child Abuse Caseworker (ACAC) program is completing its 12th year of providing wonderful support by meeting the needs of DCFS children. In SPA 2, community liaisons sponsor a Halloween Carnival and Party for DCFS children. The liaisons also continue to provide many goods and services year-round to support the children and families under DCFS CSWs' caseloads. Recently, these generous volunteers collected "back to school supplies" enabling DCFS children to begin their classes with plenty of school supplies.



PIP Mirrors DCFS Goals

In June, the federal government accepted California's Child and Family Service Review Program Improvement Plan (PIP), a series of planned improvements to fix performance deficiencies in child welfare agencies throughout the state. The PIP is a collaboration between the state and child welfare agencies throughout California with the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) being a major focus of the plan.

The PIP consists of a series of Program Improvement Goals, sources of problems in the agencies and action steps needed to correct the problems. The Program Improvement Goals illustrated in the PIP mirror the three key goals for improving the outcomes for children that the Department is now striving for. Among them are reducing abuse of children in foster care; reducing the incidence of maltreatment following case closure; accelerating the completion of adoptions; achieving Family Reunification within the first year after placement; and decreasing the incidence of re-placements.

The PIP was mandated and developed in response to California's performance on the federal audit known as the Child and Family Services Review issued in September 2002. The review, which will ultimately be conducted in all states and U.S. territories, required California to correct deficiencies associated with seven outcomes and seven systematic factors. California only passed one of the systemic factors and none of the outcomes. None of the approximate 30 states which to date have undergone the review passed all factors.

The state has two years to meet most of the outcome goals outlined in the PIP and one year to meet the safety goals. Millions of dollars in federal funding are at stake if the state does not meet its goals.

DCFS has already begun working on implementing the corrective actions identified in the plan. "Because Los Angeles County is the largest child welfare entity in the state, the state can't achieve the goals of its PIP without us," said Gene Gilden, head of DCFS Quality Assurance, the division that worked on the PIP. "That challenges us to improve."

Information sessions to provide DCFS staff with an orientation about the PIP will be held throughout the fall. In addition, a public outreach campaign to inform stakeholders about the PIP has also been initiated. ■

Parenting Program Offers Support

The Latino Family Preservation Program (LFPP) graduated parents from their Los Niño's Bien Educados Parenting Program on August 20, 2003. Twenty-two graduating parents received certificates from DCFS-LFPP and scrolls from Los Angeles County Supervisor Gloria Molina's office at Rowan Elementary School in East Los Angeles. Dignitaries, family, friends and DCFS staff were in attendance to cheer on the parents and lend their support.

The 13-week, Los Niño's Bien Educados is a partnership between DCFS and the Los Angeles Unified School District to especially reach out to DCFS clients, and to the rest of the Latino community. The Latino Family Preservation Program staff has been teaching the parenting classes for 11 years and also provides limited childcare to the parents.

"As a worker, I have given many parenting classes and each time the joy of seeing the parents complete a class and learn to be a better parent is worth the time and effort," said LFPP CSW Margie Navarrette.

Couple Named 'Volunteers of the Year'

Every now and then, a very special couple comes along and enriches the lives of all of us. Recently, Mattie and Johnny Jerry were named as the 2003 Volunteers of the Year by Los Angeles County. For more than 25 years, they have provided a loving home to 17 children. Six were born to Mattie Jerry, one to Johnny Jerry, seven are adopted and living at home and three adopted children are now attending college. Among the adopted children are two sibling sets who without the Jerrys might not be together.

Johnny Jerry, a deacon at their church, served 25 years in the Navy and ultimately retired as an officer. Mattie Jerry is actively involved in many community projects and exemplifies the positive impact one can have as a foster parent. Both Jerrys currently staff the DCFS Foster Care Recruitment Hotline. When asked what it means to be a volunteer, Mattie Jerry said, "Volunteering is giving a part of yourself and expecting nothing in return."

SPA 6 Kids Go Shopping

The August 9, 2003 Mervyn's Child Shopping Spree was a big success for a fourth year in SPA 6. The Redondo Beach Junior Chamber of Commerce in cooperation with Mervyn's South Bay Galleria Store provided 20 South Bay DCFS youth with \$100 gift certificates and 10 percent off to buy their own back-to-school clothing. The store worked with the children, so that even if they went over their budget slightly, no clothes had to be returned. Breakfast was also provided for the youth along with a backpack filled with school supplies. The Chamber of Commerce matches Mervyn's donations for the spree.

Join Team DCFS

Run, walk or bike the Los Angeles Marathon on March 7, 2004. The Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' Team DCFS invites you to join our team. Monies raised will benefit a number of special programs providing for children under DCFS supervision including the Children's Trust Fund. For those of you who prefer structured and expert supervision, the Los Angeles Road Runners offers a marathon training program with weekly group runs at Venice Beach. However you choose to train, register with Team DCFS now. To register, click on L.A. Kids and scroll to the Team DCFS Marathon Application. Be a race day volunteer or sponsor a DCFS runner/walker. For more information contact Neil Zanville in the Office of Public Affairs at (213) 351-5718 or your SPA representative.

NATIONAL ADOPTION DAY

Saturday, November 22, 2003
9 a.m.
Edmund D. Edelman
Children's Court
Information : (213)351-6661
Courts around the country along with Edelman Children's Court will open their doors to finalize hundreds of adoptions and celebrate the adoptive families.

SUPERVISOR MICHAEL ANTONOVICH'S MAGIC MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY FESTIVAL

Saturday, December 6, 2003
10 a.m.
Magic Mountain
Information: SPA Resource Coordinators
A day of fun beginning with gifts and lunch for 500 foster youth, ages 7 to 18, who live in the Covina, North Hollywood, Santa Clarita, Lancaster, and Pasadena areas.

SUPERVISOR YVONNE BRATHWAITE BURKE'S MAGIC MOUNTAIN HOLIDAY FESTIVAL

Sunday, December 7, 2003
10 a.m.
Magic Mountain
Information: SPA Resource Coordinators
A day of fun for 400 foster youth, ages 7 to 18, who live in the supervisor's district. Bus transportation will be provided at SPA offices.

To submit upcoming DCFS events, please e-mail Stuart Riskin in the DCFS Office of Public Affairs at riskis@dcfs.co.la.ca.us.

Paramount Family Conferencing and Reception Center to Open Soon

DCFS Looking at Using Community Agencies to Incorporate Other Centers

Renovations were completed in September on the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services' (DCFS) Paramount Family Conferencing and Reception Center. The 3,500-square-foot facility, designed to serve nine children at any given time, will operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide a place where a child can wait while a social worker locates a relative or appropriate placement.

"The goal is not to have kids stay 23 hours or overnight," said Angela Carter, Deputy Director of the DCFS Bureau of Administration. "Instead, it's a way for us to focus at the front door of the system on identifying the critical needs that children and families have. DCFS staff can then focus on helping the family to access resources and develop a plan to address the issues that bring families and children to the attention of the Department. We believe that by doing this successfully, more children will be able to remain or reunify successfully with their families."

The facility is a child-friendly, more home-like setting with rest areas, a conference room, a multi-purpose room and a kitchen. Children brought to the center will be given health and mental health screenings and will be evaluated in order to make the quickest decision regarding placement or family reunification. Family conferencing facilities and supervised family visitations will also be available at the reception centers.

The Department plans to use existing community agencies for locations for more Family Conferencing and Reception Centers throughout Los Angeles County. ■

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THE NEW PARAMOUNT FAMILY CONFERENCING AND RECEPTION CENTER OFFERS A CHILD-FRIENDLY SETTING.