

CALIFORNIA FAMILY TO FAMILY HIGHLIGHTS REPORT: 2007

Central/Coastal Cluster

Information contained in following report was self-reported by participating Family to Family counties to highlight their work and accomplishments for 2007.





2007 Highlights from the F2F Counties

California Family to Family Initiative

Central/Coastal Counties: Fresno, Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara¹, Stanislaus and Ventura

Fresno

Year Funding Began: 2003

RECRUITMENT DEVELOPMENT SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES

- As of December 31, 2007, Fresno County had 407 licensed homes with a capacity to care for 946 youth. In addition, there were 66 applications in process for licensure.
- Efforts continue for the recruitment of homes within the five neighborhood collaboratives. Successful efforts have resulted in an average of four prospective foster parents from one of each of the five target neighborhoods attending orientation sessions. In 2007, a total of 24 orientation sessions were held in English and four were held in Spanish.
- General recruitment of resource families continued with public service announcements and interviews with local radio and television stations, along with posters placed throughout county operated buildings (child welfare, public libraries and city hall), public schools, and community based organizations (CBOs). Additional efforts included the continued partnership with a local TV station for child-specific recruitment through the weekly “Wednesday’s Child” segment.
- Support for county licensed homes has increased through the use of geographically assigned Foster Parent Resource Staff. Staff provide resources and training to resource families within their assigned neighborhoods. This has included holding “Coffee Connection” gatherings four times per month. These informal meetings, held within each collaborative, allow resource families to network with other foster parents and gain knowledge by participating in ongoing training opportunities. In August 2007, a Movie Night was held, which was attended by over 40 individuals. In December 2007, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) held a Holiday Luncheon, which was attended by over 430 resource parents and children.
- In August 2007, Traditions of Care pre-placement training for relative caregivers was implemented. Over 20 relative caregivers attended the voluntary orientation session and proceeded to attend the six-week training session.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- The primary focus area for Building Community Partnerships (BCP) work has been in the five community collaboratives. Community leadership and involvement has grown in each of the collaboratives during the past year.

¹ No report was submitted by Santa Barbara for 2007 activities.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING

- During 2007, the Team Decisionmaking (TDM) unit maintained a staff of five full time facilitators and one full time scheduler. The number of TDMs held increased from 838 in 2006 to 1,034 in 2007. The Emergency Response task area continues to be involved in the largest amount of TDMs (634 TDMs held), followed by Permanency Planning (231 TDMs held), Family Reunification (144 TDMs held) and Voluntary Family Maintenance (24 TDMs held).
- Feed back on TDMs is encouraged and collected through TDM Feedback Forms located in each room in which TDMs are held. To address ongoing needs of the TDM process, a TDM Task Force meeting is held monthly and anyone involved in the TDM process is invited to attend to provide feedback, identify challenges and help develop strategies to improve the TDM process.
- Community participation is an integral part of the TDM process. An active list of 25 to 30 community representatives at any given time is maintained, though the individuals who attend may change over time and recruitment efforts are ongoing. This is supported by the assigning of TDM staff to each of the five collaboratives.
- A permanent schedule for the required TDM orientation session for community representatives was set in 2007 to help eliminate confusion. Orientation sessions can also be held in the community as needed. During 2007, 62 potential community representatives attended the eleven scheduled orientations (no orientation was held on December 26th). After gaining experience as community representatives, some individuals have also become cultural brokers.

SELF EVALUATION

- One major area of focus by the Self Evaluation Committee is to identify and reduce disproportionality. Neighborhood based data is being provided to the neighborhood collaboratives to assist them in developing targeted strategies.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

- A newsletter has been developed about life-long connections, "Permanency Is Priceless." All articles are written by current or former foster youth. In these brief stories, youth share about life-long connections they have made, and how these connections have changed their lives.
- Technical assistance was completed in October 2007 for the 3-5-7 Model of dealing with grief and loss. Over 75 participants attended the training, many of whom were community partners, including representatives from Aspira, Family Builders, Families First, Golden State Family Services, Fresno City College, Genesis, Mental Health, California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I), Public Health, Arbor Education and Training Workforce Connection, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA).

CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE

- In the summer of 2007, a kickoff retreat was held to recruit former foster and probation youth for the Youth Advisory Board, which includes six youth representatives. The Board has named themselves Youth Organizing New Ideas (YONI). YONI helps youth become informed advocates who are involved and part of efforts that impact the Fresno County Child Welfare Design.
- In collaboration with several Foster Family Associations (FFAs) and community partners, DCFS held a "Keeping Siblings Together" picnic and movie night for siblings in care. These events provided an opportunity for siblings (separated by care) to spend time together in a recreational environment.
- The Host Family Model Program was launched during summer 2007. The program provides housing and supportive services for 20 youth by allowing the youth to continue to live in their foster family placement or with a caring adult with whom they have a permanent connection.

- In the fall of 2007, a core team was established with representation from DCFS, the County Office of Education, Foster Youth Services and the Advancement via Individual Determination (AVID) Regional Office to engage foster and probation youth to participate in local AVID programs. AVID programs assist with college preparation and career exploration.
- Pathways to Education and Careers, implemented by Fresno's Workforce Investment Board, Fresno City College and DCFS, is providing a one semester learning community, college credit, and English and Math remediation and career preparation coursework. Opportunities will expand with a California State University (CSU) Fresno Guardian Scholar's program that is being developed.
- Fresno's Superior Juvenile Court presiding judge has supported the California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I) work and embraced its inclusion of probation foster youth. DCFS is collaborating with the Probation Department to facilitate their finalization of guardianships and an adoption.
- In partnership with By Design Solutions and Wells Fargo, an Individual Development Accounts (IDA) matched savings account program is being implemented to provide banking, financial management and asset-building opportunities for 20 foster youth. Youth savings will be matched dollar for dollar up to \$1,000 over 24 months for asset purchases related to education, training, vocational opportunities, housing, health care, and other qualifying expenses.

BIRTH PAENT PARTNERS

- A Parent Partner Program has been designed to train parents who have successfully reunified with their child(ren) to become mentors to other parents "entering the system." The Parent Partners help to provide support, motivation and encouragement to other parents. This program helps to ensure that parents have a voice within the system.
- Each quarter a Family Reunification Celebration Dinner is held to celebrate the success of each family that has reunified through the sharing of stories by parents, children and social workers in a relaxed and festive atmosphere.

ELIMINATING RACIAL DISPARITY AND DISPROPORTIONALITY

- In partnership with the community, DCFS formed a task force to address disparity and disproportionality in the child welfare system. This task force has been in place for approximately two years and meets monthly. The task force has hosted two sessions of Undoing Racism, and made many policy and training recommendations.
- The most recent focus of the task force has been analyzing system barriers to reunification, in particular barriers for mothers who struggle with drug dependency. The task force and the steering committee are examining data for African American families receiving reunification services, initial removal TDMs, current substance abuse assessment practices and policy, and guidelines for progressive visitation in order to determine what system changes, if any, need to be made to foster better outcomes for families.
- Disproportionality work has also broadened to include the experience of Native Americans in the child welfare system. New policies and procedures regarding the India Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and best practice for Native American children and families have been developed. The relationship between local tribes and DCFS is also growing and strengthening.

Kern

Year Funding Began: 2005

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES

- “Taking Care of Business” days (TCOB) were held in the target “high-removal” areas to allow potential resource families to complete most licensing requirements in only one day. The TCOB days resulted in increased bed capacity in the targeted desert community, doubling the number of licensed resource homes.
- The two part-time Foster Parent Coordinators (FPCs), in collaboration with Licensing, Relative Assessment and Outreach staff, provide comprehensive recruitment and retention services to potential and existing resource families, which includes: serving as the initial point of contact for the recruitment phone line; participating in recruitment events and resource family trainings; maintaining contact with current and potential resource families to provide emotional support, advocacy and assistance; connecting families with department and community resources; and conducting surveys.
- Foster families are trained to support and mentor birth parents from orientation throughout training required for licensure. PRIDE training are held in English, with Spanish translation available, and scheduled to allow maximum accessibility and support targeted recruitment efforts.
- An “immediate approval process” has been implemented. Assigned staff provide faster service and more effective communication between the Relative Assessment Unit and Emergency Response staff. Orientation classes are held in both English and Spanish for relatives and non-related extended family members (NREFM).

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- Community members are active participants in the F2F core committees and department staff attend monthly general collaborative and neighborhood collaborative meetings. The Junior League of Bakersfield, the Bakersfield Municipal Airport, several community museums, hospitals and churches are all sponsoring Kern’s traveling “Heart Gallery.” The gallery spotlights older youth awaiting adoption.
- Additional outreach and support efforts for resource families included: Neighborhood Strengthening Foster Care “Town Hall” meetings; countywide implementation of Differential Response; participation by community and agency partners in efforts to recruit and retain resource families; and geographical assignment of contracted Birth Parent Mentors and volunteer Parent Leaders to engage staff, clients, and service providers, and provide training.
- Best practices for court-ordered parenting classes were developed to ensure all families who attend the classes are informed of issues related to chronic neglect.
- A specialized child welfare services unit, Engage Assess Serve Empower (EASE), was developed to work with chronic neglect families who have had three or more previous Child Protective Services (CPS) referrals. The unit partners with community service providers to offer intensive case management services.
- The Policy Unit continued to develop policy and procedures that support the philosophy of F2F.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING

- In 2007, Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings were rolled out for all children in foster care experiencing a potential placement change. TDMs are currently mandatory for all placement changes in the Greater Bakersfield area and surrounding communities. From January 1, 2007, to December 31, 2007, Kern held 284 TDMs.

- Special Projects Code was developed in the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) to track TDM compliance in association with placement changes. Data reports are reviewed and distributed monthly to supervisors and managers of targeted programs. In addition, the TDM scheduler emails weekly reminders to program supervisors to ensure TDMs are being held. In June 2007, a TDM participant survey was developed to provide all participants with an opportunity to identify areas for improvement.
- Community participation in TDMs continues to include partners from schools, mental health, CalWORKs, parent leadership, faith, personal and community partners as well as two emancipated youth.

SELF EVALUATION

- Data obtained from Business Objects is overlaid with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping software to identify resources and service gaps. This information is shared with community partners.
- The Policy, Quality Assurance (QA) and Data Units were created following an audit by the Child Welfare League of America. The emphasis of these units is to develop policies which will incorporate best practices and values of F2F, and to use data to drive decision making for program and resource development.

San Luis Obispo

Year Funding Began: 2001

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

- In celebration of National Adoption Month, a BBQ was organized to honor current resource families and adoptive parents. The theme for the BBQ was “There is Room at the Table” and almost all of the costs for the event were covered through local service organizations.
- Monthly Information Outreach Sessions, in collaboration with California Youth Connection (CYC) youth and current foster parents, continue to provide upfront information and referrals for potential resource families. The licensing process has been streamlined to provide better support and guidance from the initial phone inquiry to licensing. The number of county licensed foster home increased by 10 percent from the total in 2006. The quarterly resource family newsletter, Parent Empowerment (PEN), was created to provide resource families and partner agencies with updates on news and events.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- The community partner network has expanded to include faith-based organizations, schools, and staff assigned to work in targeted communities. A F2F newsletter was developed for countywide distribution to over 600 interested stakeholders. The distribution of the newsletter has helped to significantly increase the number of visits to the San Luis Obispo County website.
- Efforts to implement a 3-5-7 Model continue and participants involved in the planning process include Foster Family Agencies, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), foster parents, adoptive parents and the Probation Department.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING

- The standardization of safety language from the Structured Decisionmaking (SDMs) meetings was incorporated into the Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meeting and related desk guides.

- Planning for Icebreaker meetings began in 2007 and were renamed About Your Child (AYC) meetings. The meetings have expanded to include introducing any “set” of caregivers to another “set” of caregivers and when a child(ren) returns home to their birth parents.
- LIFE team meetings are held for emancipating foster youth. Administrative staff are being trained to help support social workers to convene these meetings.

SELF EVALUATION

- The Child Welfare Services and Linkages report is a semi-annual department-wide report that includes data on Structured Decisionmaking (SDM), participant services, Linkages, outreach, and adult services. The Snapshot of Child in Foster Care report continues to provide data on children and youth currently in foster care and helps to educate staff and the community on the nine F2F outcomes. The Information Reporting Team (IRT) continues to meet to evaluate current reports and develop new reports that will assist in all areas of child welfare.
- SafeMeasures was implemented to help overcome the challenge of the supervisor’s role and increase the utilization of data in daily practice. Data is also shared with partner agencies and the community through website access, presentations, newsletters and County Service Assessment forums.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE, YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT:

- As of July 1, 2007, Cuesta College began administering the Independent Living Program (ILP). The program has maintained a high level of service throughout the transition, including offering workshops, special events, individualized case management, and a variety of other activities without interruption or negative impact on the ILP population.
- Cuesta also administers the Permanency Program, which includes two case managers assigned to establishing and nurturing permanent, caring relationships between young people and supportive adults. Case managers are responsible for building relationships with eligible youth, supporting family finding and contact efforts, and conducting education and community outreach. The case managers travel to meet and assess potential contacts, and accompany youth on visits to supportive adults to help build relationships. In addition, the managers are integral members of the local California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) and are active members of the tri-county CPYP advisory board.
- Beginning in August 2007, Permanency Team meetings (PTM) and Life Team meetings (LTM) were implemented. These meetings help set the stage for successful transition to adulthood.

EDUCATION

- An “Education Advocates for Foster Youth” taskforce was created.
- Data reports are provided to the County Office of Education regarding placement information, which has helped decrease in the number of days youth miss school as a result of shelter placement. In addition, the Office of Education is receiving regular updates on Health and Education passports and schools are better able to track test data, attendance, test scores, the number of credits earned and grade point averages (GPAs).
- Through an invitation to the Foster Youth Liaisons, more school representatives are attending TDMs.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH

- Several staff attended a San Francisco Bay Area Out of Home Youth Advocacy Council (OHYAC) Train the Trainers conference in March 2007. The County also trained agency staff, FFA staff and Foster Parent Associations regarding best practices for serving Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth in the foster care system and LGBTQ best practices were added to the PRIDE curriculum.

Stanislaus

Year Funding Began: 2001

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES

- There have been a number of changes in practice to recruit, develop and support resource families, including: implementation of PRIDE training and an increase in the number of training sessions held; inclusion of community partners, resource parents, birth parents and youth in training and/or recruitment of new families; development of support groups for resource families; inclusion of resource families in decisionmaking (i.e., TDMs) and system improvement activities, trainings and conferences; and development of Icebreaker meetings.
- An Activity Committee was developed in collaboration with the Foster Parent Association to provide regular activities and recognition for resource parents and foster youth. Activities have included fall festivals, Easter egg hunts, holiday celebrations, Coffee Connection support groups, etc. In addition, volunteer resource parent positions were established to provide any extra level of support to other resource parents.
- Specialized Care and Incentive Assistance Program (SCIAP) funds are used to provide respite care to county licensed resource parents caring for dependent children. Families are eligible to receive 48-hours of respite per month through coordination by the Foster Parent Association.
- Resource parents are invited to all placement Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings and other agency meetings. Efforts continue to encourage resource parents to develop a relationship with birth parents.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- The West Modesto King Kennedy Multicultural Neighborhood Collaborative (WMKKMNC) continues to be a strong partner for community-based resource family recruitment and support.
- Family Resource Center (FRC) partners participate in TDMs with families they are serving. Due to confidentiality, at removal the family must consent to community partner participation. West Modesto families continue to have representation in most removal TDMs as a result of the WMKKMNC Community Ambassador Program.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING

- Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings are mandatory for removals and changes of placement with some exceptions as approved by a supervisor or manager through a waiver process. Valid exceptions include severe cases of physical or sexual abuse, high profile or confidential cases, and every instance of chronic runaway behavior (when a TDM is not practical) and if a youth-driven Connected for Life meeting is more appropriate. Exit TDMs are beginning as part of System Improvement Plan (SIP) to reduce foster care re-entry. Recent outcome measure indicated a reduction in re-entry rates to 3.7 percent, which is better than the National Standard the County intended to achieve.
- TDM data is evaluated quarterly by the data analyst/researcher. This analysis includes a review of the TDM database as well as approved waivers and change of placement information. Every quarter, data is presented to the Self Evaluation team and all supervisors.
- As possible, community representatives, including families members or other identified community members, attend TDMs. Participation by FRC staff is increasing based on their growing comfort level, attendance in trainings, and participation in bimonthly Multi-Disciplinary Team meetings.
- TDM participants are provided with a copy of the TDM plan prior to the end of each meeting. A printable dry-erase board is used for note taking to allow immediate copying of all notes. Supervisors are responsible for overseeing implementation of plans.
- Icebreaker meetings are held on a voluntary basis and no data is currently collected on meetings held.

- Through the implementation of TDMs there has been a reduction in the number of removals. The number of children entering foster care has also decreased and the number of families served in voluntary services has increased. TDMs have become an integral part of the decision making process. Between January 1, 2007 and December 31, 2007, a total of 312 TDMs were held. This total included 18 emergency placement TDMs, 117 imminent risk TDMs, 156 placement change TDMs, and 21 exit from placement TDMs.

SELF EVALUATION

- The Self Evaluation teams meets once to twice a month to review outcomes and practices in all areas of F2F. Approximately once a quarter, data is reviewed by the team on F2F outcomes, TDMs, AB636 outcome measures, California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I), quality assurance, Council on Accreditation and others. All community, private and public partners are invited to participate in the Self Evaluation process, along with agency staff and supervisors. Attendance varies depending upon the subject of review. An annual calendar is submitted to regular partners.
- Data is shared through PowerPoint presentations, graphic displays, newsletters, periodic “tune-up” flyers, and other means at Self Evaluation meetings, community meetings and/or unit focus groups.
- Data is collected from the UC Berkeley (UCB) website, UCB FC, the TDM database, the Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database, Business Objects, SafeMeasures, Geomapping software, the Resource Parent database, the Independent Living Program (ILP) database, Differential Response client data sheets and outcome based scorecards, and a large variety of other data sources. TDM data and placement stability data are analyzed quarterly by the Self Evaluation team and supervisors/managers. SafeMeasures is reviewed monthly by supervisors with employees, is reviewed monthly by managers, and is used for quality assurance purposes. The California Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) Outcome and Accountability Report is reviewed quarterly by the Self Evaluation team and shared with others on the Child and Family Services Advisory Board.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

- There are a number of programs in place to provide support to transition aged youth, including: California Connected by 25 Initiative (CC25I); the My Home Model of the Transitional Housing Plus Program (THP+); a Bridge program through a partnership between the Modesto Junior College and Alliance Worknet/Workforce Investment Act (WIA); and Individual Development Accounts (IDA), a goal-oriented savings account for emancipated youth.
- Stanislaus County has an exceptionally high rate of adoptions, exceeding the State of California target of 66 percent. The rate of adoptions within 24 months continues to far exceed the National Standard of 32 percent, with 75.3 percent of adopted children remaining in foster care for less than 24 months. The County continues to participate in the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) and has implemented efforts focused on ensuring that every foster youth whom exits foster care to emancipation has a life-long connection with a committed, caring adult.
- The Foster Youth Advisory Board was key in the development of the Connected for Life meeting process and continues to be active in CC25I activities. The local California Youth Connection (CYC) chapter is very active within the County. In addition, former foster youth are employed in positions such as Visitation Aides and Independent Living Program (ILP) Interviewers.

CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE (CC25I)

- The My Home Model of Transitional Housing Plus has served 34 youth since its implementation in June 2006. There are currently 18 youth in the program. Planning has been underway for implementing the Individual Development Accounts (IDA) program. Approximately 20 youth have completed the Bridge Program.

- Emergency Connected for Life Meetings occur before a youth's permanency hearing. The primary goal of the meetings is to identify individuals who are most important in the youth's life, and to establish lifelong connections. The secondary goal is to start the discussion about the youth's future including educational goals, participation in the Independent Living Program (ILP), emancipation, etc. and to be able to identify, at the earliest possible time, resources that can be utilized by the youth for successful transition to adulthood.
- The Connected For Life/Foster Youth Transition Committee meets monthly to discuss issues that concern foster youth and develop strategies to enhance permanency and transition practices. The committee is composed of community partners and youth representatives.
- The Efforts to Outcomes (ETO) database for CC25I has been implemented for data and outcomes.
- Through the partnership between child welfare and the Stanislaus County of Education Foster Youth Services (SCOE FYS), foster youth are prioritized for tutoring services. These services are provided by Huntington Learning Center tutors. The youth who completed the services in 2007 improved their grade level by an average of 2.0 grades.

BIRTH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- Through the AmeriCorps program, birth parents continue to be partners in providing support to other birth parents. Parent Partners have been advocates in Juvenile Drug Court, the Family Maintenance unit and Family Reunification. Parent Partners are also developing an orientation for new parents entering the child welfare system.

DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE

- Differential Response (DR) has been implemented through neighborhood-based FRCs throughout Stanislaus County. The FRCs receive funding from the Stanislaus County Community Services Agency (CSA), Child and Family Services Division, in partnership with the Children and Families Commission (Prop 10/First Five), System Improvement, Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and Prop 10. These funds support services for DR families as well as families with children birth to five years of age. Support services through DR include a strength-based comprehensive assessment, case management, parenting and support groups, school readiness, development screenings, and linkage to mental health, prenatal and other community services.
- Outcomes from the first year of DR demonstrated that FRCs were successful in completing a strength-based comprehensive assessment with 82 percent of referred families. Voluntary case management services were provided to 57 percent of the families.

EDUCATION

- Educational Liaisons continue to work alongside social workers, youth and resource parents to address education issues. Through their work, more extensive training has been provided to foster youth and resource parents on special education laws, college requirements and other relevant topics. The liaisons have also partnered with local educational institutions to advocate for the implementation of AB490 and other educational issues/laws.

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL

- Stanislaus County was one of the first four counties that actually developed the Comprehensive Assessment Tools (CAT) in collaboration with the Social Policy and Health Economics Research and Evaluation (SPHERE) Institute. CAT assessments are completed throughout the life of a case for all families served by child welfare.

Ventura

Year Funding Began: 2003

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES

- A Coordinated Caregiver Recruitment Plan was implemented in July 2007. The goal of the plan is to increase the total number of foster homes by 40 each fiscal year, reaching a total of 300 homes by 2010. The plan has three main recruitment focuses: 1) geographical, 2) client characteristics, and 3) general recruitment strategies.
- Support services, both in and out of home, are provided to resource families through community providers who are often located within the family's own community. Outreach for recruitment has expanded to local faith-based organizations and has included providing onsite pre-placement training, classes, and assistance with completing the licensing application.
- In 2007, there were 44 new homes licensed bringing the total number of county licensed foster homes to 180 as of the end of the year.
- A Recruitment and Retention Program Unit was developed and includes four Community Services Coordinators (CSC), one case aide and a supervisor. The role of the unit includes supporting families once they are licensed (assigned geographically), planning and staffing recruitment events, making home visits, providing training and education, and making referrals to community and other retention services. Resource families and caregivers are also provided support through county contracted service providers and the Ventura County Foster Parent Association. All caregivers have access to respite care services, either through United Parents (for children aged birth to five years old), through the county placement coordinator or through informal arrangements with other parents.
- Caregivers routinely participate in Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings. If needed, foster parent mentors or Recruitment, Development, and Support of Resource Families (RDS) staff may attend TDMs with caregivers to provide support.
- Birth parents and emancipated foster youth participate in the pre-placement training series for newly licensed foster parents, and are guest speakers at various ongoing training seminars and workshops open to resource families.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

- A Community Relations Manager position was created and new partnerships have been formed with faith-based and youth-focused organizations. Foster parents, former foster youth and birth parents are involved in the recruitment and training of foster parents as well as recruitment and mentoring activities.
- The number of community agencies who attend TDMs has increased and participants have expanded to include foster parent mentors, birth parent mentors, and traditional and non traditional partners. Data is collected on community participation and interest levels in TDMs and foster care recruitment. This data is shared with the community.

TEAM DECISION MAKING

- Team Decisionmaking (TDM) meetings are held for placement changes, imminent risk, and emergency placements. Each month, data reports on all TDMs scheduled within the current month are reviewed by program managers.
- Lessons learned through community participation in TDMs and the workgroup have included: schedule meetings during "non-traditional" hours; recognize the impact of participating in TDMs on workload; use stipends to compensate for participants time; and ensure TDMs run no longer than two-hours.

- Formal Icebreaker implementation is currently on hold.
- The continued implementation of TDMs has resulted in a number of important changes and realizations, including that relative placements can happen sooner and that the practice supports more honest communication with foster parents and birth families during a time of crisis.
- During 2007, 84 imminent risk TDMs were held, 80 emergency placement TDMs were held, and 109 placement move TDMs were held.

SELF EVALUATION

- Due to the structure within the Human Services Agency (HSA), a separate Self Evaluation Team does not exist. Instead, a Self Evaluation representative is assigned to various workgroups and projects related to system improvement activities. Data is shared regularly at meetings. In addition, the senior program administrator works with Business Operations Support Services to respond to data requests from the community and all work groups, including F2F strategy groups. Reports are provided to the managers and the deputy director on a scheduled basis.
- Primary data sources include the TDM database, Safe Measures, the UC Berkeley (UCB) website, Business Objects, the Foster Home Licensing database, and the Relative Approval database. The results of TDM meetings are continually analyzed to review the relationship between the meetings and Structured Decisionmaking (SDM) safety decisions (i.e., safe, conditionally safe, and unsafe) as well as the number of emergency placement TDMs and removals. These data have been reported at meetings of the TDM Strategy Workgroup and the Operations Team.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

- An Independent Living Skills Specialized Unit has been developed to serve all “foster care youth in transition.” The development of the program has helped with the implementation of Independent Living Program (ILP) services, the identification of ILP eligible youth, the development of new ILP policies and procedures, and establishing a better working relationship with the Permanency Project and the Family Finding program. Social workers utilize a number of collaborative practices/conferences to bring together staff, youth, community partners and service providers to help identify strengths, resources and barriers facing youth, and develop action plans focused on stability, permanence and successful transitions.
- A meeting was held with the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP) to assess the possible participation of Ventura County in the project, but participation was not pursued.
- The Youth in Transition Advocacy Committee (YTAC) continues to provide a forum for the community to participate in meeting the needs of transitioning youth by addressing housing, transportation, education, employment and mental health services needs. Youth participate in shaping the foster care system through meetings of the Independent Leadership Council (ILC), where they discuss issues of concern, provide input on ILP activities, socialize with their peers, and develop leadership skills.
- The County’s California Youth Connection (CYC) chapter was re-established and allows current and former foster youth to address issues at the local and state level. A Foster Youth Speakers Group was developed to incorporate foster youth into outreach efforts and training for foster and host home families. Youth are paid for their participation.
- The Transitional Housing Plus (THP+) program was approved for implementation and will provide enhanced housing (apartment and host home) and supportive services to former foster and probation youth between the ages of 18 and 24 years of age. Youth are eligible for the program for up to 24 months after exiting care.

BIRTH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

- The Parent Leadership Council, Partners with Purpose, has worked on a number of parent involvement activities, including a hotline for parents, community support groups, advocacy assignments, court orientation for new child welfare clients, a TDM strategy group, community presentations, parole orientation and foster parent training sessions. The Council is supported by an Advisory Board, a contracted vendor and a child welfare management liaison. The Board of Supervisors routinely recognizes the Council for their efforts and activities.
- Icebreakers have not been implemented.

PATHWAYS (DIFFERENTIAL RESPONSE)

- A Pathways Workgroup was formed and membership of the workgroup continues to grow.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- Providers of domestic violence services are members of the TDM strategy group and routinely participate in TDMs.

IMMIGRATION

- An immigration liaison is on staff and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is in place with the Mexican Consulate.

ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUGS AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

- Mental health providers participate in TDMs as needed and appropriate. Alcohol and drug service providers participate as much as possible. The TDM strategy group is assigned to continue to develop partnerships in this area.

EDUCATION

- A staff person is assigned to meet with the County Superintendent Foster Youth Liaisons to discuss issues and identify possible solutions. Child welfare staff presented a workshop at the annual education conference.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH

- A workgroup has been put in place to develop strategies to provide services to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning (LGBTQ) youth.

Family to Family County Contacts

For more information on the work of the counties presented above, please contact the following individuals:

Fresno

Andrea Sobrado

Family to Family Coordinator /Deputy Director

sobraa@co.fresno.ca.us

Kern

Emily Thomasy

Family to Family Coordinator

thomase@co.kern.ca.us

San Luis Obispo

Kim Wooten

Family to Family Coordinator

kwooten@co.slo.ca.us

Santa Barbara

Deborah Hartman

Family to Family Coordinator/Division Chief

d.hartman@sbcsocialserv.org

Stanislaus

Janette Mondon

Family to Family Coordinator/Manager III

mondoj@mail.co.stanislaus.ca.us

Ventura

Elaine Martinez

Family to Family Coordinator/Program Manager

Elaine.Martinez@ventura.org