



2006 HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CENTRAL COUNTIES

CALIFORNIA FAMILY TO FAMILY INITIATIVE

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA FAMILY TO FAMILY COUNTIES (6): Fresno, Kern, San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Stanislaus, and Ventura Counties

FRESNO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

F2F Funding Began: 2003

Contact: Helen Viau, F2F Coordinator, viauh@co.fresno.ca.us

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (RDS):

Fresno County's target strategy for 2006 was successful in recruiting families who were willing to adopt older youth. The number of County licensed homes increased 15% from 329 to 384, reflecting a net gain of 55 foster homes. Regular "Coffee Connection" meetings are being held monthly (in both English and Spanish) and act as a support system for the foster parents in their local communities. The Placement Services are now geographically assigned, which divides up the resource families regionally, and they are then assigned to one case manager. The case manager becomes familiar with the geographic area and is able to develop stronger relationship with each foster family. Phone calls are returned quicker and the case manager helps the foster families navigate the DCFS system. The department combined all Placement Services together (i.e. Licensing, Adoptions, Foster Parent Resources, Emergency Shelter Care and Relative Home Assessment), which has increased staff collaboration towards improved outcomes.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (BCP)

Three of Fresno County's earliest neighborhood collaboratives are sending Community Representatives on a regular basis to TDM meetings. Both outcome data (from UC Berkeley) and real-time data are presented during every collaborative meeting. The numbers serve to advise collaborative members about how many children were removed from the particular community over the prior month, how many TDM's were held, and where each child was placed. In September 2006, Fresno County received funding through California's Outcome Improvement Plan (OIP), specifically targeted for Differential Response activities. Working with the three collaboratives, the Department developed a strategic plan to channel the funding to the families. The idea of a team of neighborhood-based "Cultural Brokers" emerged from discussions with the collaboratives. The cultural brokers are community members that have received extensive training on F2F and the child welfare system have been a Community Representative for a minimum of six months. Cultural Brokers share their knowledge and information about ethnic groups as well as on specialized topics such as substance abuse, domestic violence, and immigration.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING (TDM)

The Fresno Facilitators sponsored and organized the first-annual Resource Provider Fair. There was over 50 booths set up in the DCFS parking lot so that service providers could share and introduce their programs to agency staff (lunch was provided, courtesy of the Stuart Foundation). Fresno has begun holding bi-monthly recognition and training luncheons for TDM Community Representatives. As part of the Fresno Disproportionality workgroup strategy, trained African American TDM representatives are paired with African American families whenever possible.

SELF EVALUATION (SE)

The Self Evaluation Team has taken the lead in the development of the County's System Improvement Plan. As the quarterly report published by the state with the AB636 data become longer, the team felt it would be beneficial to supplement the AB636 report with a shorter, two-page overview. This two-page report shows current data along with analysis of historic and current trends. A longitudinal report from 2001-05 looks at Fresno's Disproportionality data, along the key decision points throughout the child welfare system. A new department Evaluator position was developed.

CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE (CC25I)

Fresno County has implemented and expanded support services in the areas of K-12 Education, Post-Secondary Education and Training, Housing, Financial Literacy and Competency, and Youth Permanence. CC25I Task Force and sub-workgroups were created to assist with the planning of activities for each focus area.

- **ILP Expansion**-There were 8 (eight) ILP Educational Workshops provided regarding ILP Services, emancipation conferences and the importance of permanency for all foster and probation youth. These trainings were mandatory for all child welfare staff.
- **K-12 Education**- An Education Liaison was designated for collaboration with the three major school districts in Fresno County. ILP Social Workers were placed at assigned high school campuses. Fresno County was selected as one of ten national sites by the Annie E Casey Foundation to be a part of the Breakthrough Series Collaborative, "Improving Educational Stability for Children in Out-of-Home Care."
- **Post-Secondary Education and Training**- In collaboration with the Workforce Investment Board and City College, the Fresno County Foster Bridge Program was implemented in 2006. The Program provides post-secondary education, life skills/social development, and career guidance for foster/probation youth.
- **Housing**- DCFS submitted a THP+ application to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) to provide the "Family Host Model." The model allows youth to continue to live with their current foster family or with another caring adult with whom they have a permanent connection.
- **Financial Literacy and Competency (IDA)**- Fresno received a grant from the Hewlett Foundation to implement an Individual Development Account (IDA). The IDA program assist youth to learn financial management, obtain experience with the banking system, save money for education, housing, health care, and other specified expenses, and gain streamlined access to educational, training and vocational opportunities.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

Fresno County is participating in the California Permanency for Youth Project (CPYP). A Permanency Specialist position was created to help identify a lifelong connection for each youth. Fresno County is partnering with Fresno City College to implement the Ameri-Corp Mentoring Program. A permanency handbook was developed which emphasized the practice and principles surrounding permanency.

DISPROPORTIONALITY AND DISPARITY

In partnership with the community, the Department formed a task force to address Disproportionality and Disparity in the Child Welfare System. This task force has been in place for approximately one year. Three subgroups were formed with a focus on the following topics:

Training (internal and external), Community Outreach, and Assessment of Internal Procedures/Tools. The task force meets monthly with staff, Collaborative partners, Cultural Brokers, and representatives from many areas and agencies.

KERN COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES

F2F Funding Began: 2005

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RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (RDS)

The RDS committee helped plan the first “Taking Care of Business” day in Kern County. The event targeted African-American families and the Southeast Bakersfield community and allowed applicants to attend orientation, complete licensing applications, obtain CPR and First Aid certification, fingerprinting, and TB testing, all at one location on a single day. There were 39 individuals (22 households) in attendance and fourteen completed applications were received that day. The RDS committee created a subcommittee to reduce or eliminate the emergency foster home program. This subcommittee consists of primarily current or former parents and created placement binders for children in out-of-home care. The binder also included health and educational information and followed the child with each placement move. The RDS committee is working on a system to track resource families from initial phone call to licensure.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (BCP)

The BCP committee focuses on expanding and enhancing collaboration with traditional and nontraditional community partners. The committee participated in community events including local festivals, a race, and a diversity symposium. The BCP committee has completed a substantial amount of surveying in 2006. Customized surveys were developed for agency staff, birth parents, and community partners. Hundreds of surveys were gathered, analyzed and compiled, providing an excellent tool for the BCP work group to utilize as it tailors its approach to best fit the needs of the community. In 2006, the first ever BCP neighborhood-canvassing event took place. A neighborhood in the targeted community was identified and approximately 24 agency staff, including line workers and Assistant Directors, visited approximately 200 homes.

TEAM DECISION-MAKING (TDM)

In November 2006, Kern County rolled out TDMs. To prepare for and familiarize internal and external partners with TDM, many presentations have been provided. The three key phases of implementation and types of TDMs will progress as follows: placement changes, emergency removals and exits from care.

SELF EVALUATION (SE)

The SE committee is comprised of internal staff and community partners, including CASA, Cal State Bakersfield, Kern County Network for Children, and foster family agencies. GIS data specific to child abuse and foster care has been geo-coded and mapped. The reports have included visuals of foster homes in specific neighborhoods, foster homes within school boundaries, and child abuse rates and child removals by neighborhoods.

SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

F2F Funding Began: 2001

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RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (RDS)

Highlights and accomplishments in 2006 include participation in events like the Farmer's Market and Children's Day in the Plaza. The Heart Gallery produced 19 foster/adoption placement inquiries thanks to a successful radio, press and TV campaign. A contracted Public Information Officer (PIO), in partnership with a half-time social worker is now dedicated to recruitment efforts. In conjunction with the local Foster Parent Association (FPA), a new curriculum was developed to educate resource/foster parents about what to do and what happens when a complaint is made against them. Icebreakers are in the expansion phase with the FPA's involvement. The FPA will receive training on TDM with the goal of reducing the number of 7-day notices. A new assessment and treatment center for children, Martha's Place, opened its doors for children in 2006. Martha's Place works with children 0-5 including children in foster care who are prenatally exposed to alcohol and other drugs and those with behavioral issues. The Kinship Center was established in San Luis Obispo County in 2006 and began providing direct services for children ages 0-17 in support of relatives and other caregivers.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (BCP)

San Luis Obispo County has had 100% community partner involvement, as identified by the family, at all its TDMs. The Equal Access Committee is leading the Model Standards efforts for LGBTQ youth. The Vulnerable Families Committee is working on countywide utilization of early assessment tools for children 0-5 years old, and assessments for children 6-17 including those in foster care. This group consists of representatives from AOD, Probation, EOC, Public Health, DSS, schools, birth parents, and the SAFE sites. There is an internal staff advisory panel and an external/community partner advisory panel, which is ensuring ongoing communication and integration of new initiatives and practices. There is now a Speaker's Bureau to reinforce the philosophy that recruitment and retention is everyone's job. Sharing child welfare data specific to a local area is an important component of community engagement.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING (TDM)

Quarterly data reflects ongoing outcomes improvement directly attributed to TDMs. The TDM facilitators are re-introducing the Department's TDM policy and procedure to staff and will review new and existing forms such as the revised DSS801, which has been reformatted to include standard language around the Safety and Action plan. An internal protocol is being developed that utilizes the existing "Foster Care Child Location Form" to ensure that a TDM is held on every child move; and where appropriate, to identify if a "TDM Exception" applies (e.g., respite care, child is 5150'd.). Three activities are in progress to enhance the TDM model: 1) Implementing Icebreakers following a TDM; 2) Using "bridge" meetings to ensure continuity of communication with birth and/or foster parents after a TDM such as child visitation if a child is placed, and 3) Instituting LIFE meetings in conjunction with TDMs, which will assist emancipating youth.

SELF EVALUATION (SE)

San Luis Obispo County has a dedicated Information Reporting Team, which provides ongoing and ad hoc reports for line staff, supervisors, managers and community partners. The quarterly

“Child Welfare Services & Linkages” report provides data on the AB636 outcome domains of Safety, Permanence, and Family/Child Well-Being in a user-friendly format. The semi-annual “Snapshot of Children in Foster Care” report provides data on the children and youth currently in foster care, and helps to educate staff and community as related to the nine F2F outcomes. One of the biggest challenges in carrying out the self-evaluation component is quantifying the supervisor’s role and significance in data utilization, and identifying how and what to communicate to staff in a consistent and standardized way. To address this challenge, the implementation of the “Higher Standards” data evaluation for supervisors will be a tool to improve upon San Luis Obispo County’s desired outcomes.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

More than 25% of youth in foster care in San Luis Obispo County are 15 or older. A curriculum for “LIFE” meetings is in development for youth who are transitioning out of foster care, which will ensure connections to existing and other available resources. ILP Case Managers and student interns receive training from ILP staff regarding the importance of permanency, and ways to help youth identify the significant adults in their lives. ILP provides a specific workshop on identifying permanent connections every year, at Cuesta College entitled "Identifying Your Support System". There are two dedicated ILP Permanency Case Managers working on permanency case management. The local chapter of the California Youth Connection is developing its own speaker’s bureau as well.

SANTA BARBARA COUNTY SOCIAL SERVICES DEPARTMENT

F2F Funding Began: 2001

Contact: Deborah E Hartman, Division Manager/ F2F Coordinator. D.Hartman@sbcsocialserv.org

RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND SUPPORT

Santa Barbara has one full-time recruiter. Some recruitment activities conducted included interviews with local English and Spanish-speaking TV stations, magazines, and letters sent to local nonprofit agencies. There were advertisement via internet postings and a Yahoo account was created so that the recruiter’s name came up when there were local searches for adoption and foster parenting. The recruiter was successful in getting items donated for foster youth and for the shelter from the Symphony, Botanic Garden, Zoo, Natural Museum, and Yacht Club. The Boys and Girls Club provided extra benefits to foster youth and through Big Brother/Big Sister program. PRIDE classes were published in 11 newspapers and in the county’s Recreation Guide. The recruiter has compiled a Respite list and contacted every foster parent. Finally, the recruiter helped support the Foster Parent Association, including working on complaint resolutions and the foster parent appreciation bash.

SELF EVALUATION

Santa Barbara’s self-assessment plan included a gaps analysis with several existing groups, including the Kids Network (an advisory group to the Board of Supervisors), the Child Abuse Prevention Council, Children’s System of Care, and Juvenile Court. The report showed their partnerships with several community agencies, private agencies, and youth.

STANISLAUS COUNTY COMMUNITY SERVICES AGENCY

F2F Funding Began: 2001

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RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (RDS)

Since F2F implementation, Stanislaus County has made numerous RDS changes. These include: implementation of the F2F PRIDE curriculum; including community partners, resource/birth parents, and youth in the training and recruitment of new families; development of support groups for resource families; inclusion of resource families in decision making, such as TDM, as well as system improvement activities, training and conferences; development of Icebreakers; supporting activities for resource families and youth; and respite care for licensed resource parents (48 hrs per month).

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (BCP)

Differential Response has been implemented through the Family Resource Centers. The Family Resource Center received funding from the department as well as the Children and Families Commission (Prop 10/First Five) to provide strength-based comprehensive assessment, case management, parenting and support groups, school readiness, development screenings, linking to mental health, prenatal and other community services. Additional system improvement funds and County general funds from foster care savings were used to expand services. Stanislaus County continues to partner with the West Modesto King Kennedy Multicultural Neighborhood Collaborative for community-based resource family recruitment and support. Family Resource Centers are participating in TDMs. Due to confidentiality, at removal, the family must consent to community partners' participation.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING (TDM)

TDMs are mandated for removals and changes of placement with some exceptions as approved by the Supervisors and System Improvement Supervisor and/or Manager through the waiver process. Valid exceptions include severe cases of physical or sexual abuse, high profile or confidential cases, chronic runaway behavior (when it's not appropriate), and when a youth-driven Connected for Life meeting is the more appropriate option. Exit TDMs are recommended but not mandated, though a TDM by the 9th month of reunification is required to plan for a child's return home and/or permanency plan development. TDM data is evaluated quarterly by the data analyst/researcher. The information from the TDM database is analyzed in addition to review of approved TDM waivers and change of placement information. There is an African American Community partner who represents the West Modesto region in TDM meetings on a regular basis. Family Resource Center staffs are starting to participate in TDM meetings, after receiving training in various topics and participated in TDM meetings twice monthly. A printable dry-erase board is used for notetaking that allows for immediate copying of all notes. Icebreakers were implemented as a voluntary strategy a couple of years ago. The most important change in the agency as a result of implementing TDM has been our reduction in removals. The number of children entering foster care has decreased and the number of families served in voluntary services has increased.

SELF EVALUATION (SE)

The SE team reviews all outcomes and practice in all areas of the F2F work. Analysis of F2F outcomes, TDM data, AB 636 (C-CFSR) outcomes and accountability report, Connected by 25

initiative, Quality Assurance, Council on Accreditation, and others are reviewed on a quarterly rotation. Data is shared through presentations, graphic display, newsletter, periodic tune-up flyers, and other means at Self-Evaluation, community and/or unit focus groups. TDM data and placement stability data are analyzed quarterly by Self-Evaluation and Supervisors/managers. SafeMeasures is reviewed monthly by Supervisors with employees, is reviewed monthly by Managers, and is used for QA purposes. The C-CFSR Outcome and Accountability Report is reviewed quarterly in Self-Evaluation and shared with others in the Child and Family Services Advisory Board.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

Stanislaus County has an exceptionally high rate of adoptions, with over 120 adoptions finalized during the 2005-2006 fiscal year, exceeding the state target of 66. The rate of adoptions within 24 months continues far exceed the National Standard of 32%, with 68.5% of the county's adopted children in foster care for less than 24 months (Federal Measure 3D. 07/01/05- 06/30/06 study period). In addition to adoption, the county has participated in the California Permanency for Youth Project for a number of years and continues to implement efforts to assure that every foster youth whom exits foster care to emancipation, does so with a life-long connection with a committed and caring adult. Stanislaus County has a foster youth advisory board that has been active in the development of the Connected for Life process as well as the California Connected by 25 Initiative activities. The Connected for Life meeting process was an entirely youth developed process. The California Youth Connection is chapter is active in Stanislaus County. The County has employed former foster youth in positions such as Visitation Aides and ILP Interviewers.

CALIFORNIA CONNECTED BY 25 INITIATIVE (CC25I)

CC25I has been in progress for a couple of years and has seen a lot of development during 2006. The My Home model of Transitional Housing Plus was implemented this fall with a target of 16 youth this fiscal year and 20 youth in the 2007-2008 fiscal year. There are currently 14 youth who are living in homes with Life-long connections and receiving a room and board supplement. Through partnership with Modesto Junior College and Alliance Worknet/WIA, a Bridge program has been in operation since Spring of 2006 which offers youth transitioning into junior college support and services. Individual Development Accounts (IDA), a goal-oriented savings account for emancipated youth 18-24 years of age, will be implemented in 2007 so that youth can receive matching dollars toward the purchase of items such as computers, vehicles, housing deposits, etc. Through a strong partnership with the Stanislaus County Office of Education, the first Foster Youth Employment Institute was organized in January 2007.

BIRTH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Stanislaus County is in the third year of including birth parents as partners in working with other birth parents, through AmeriCorps program. In the first year, there was one parent advocate working with parents in the Juvenile Drug Court program. Since January of 2006, AmeriCorps members have been added as parent advocates in the Family Maintenance unit and Family Reunification. The parent advocates are developing the County's first parent orientation process for new parents entering the child welfare system.

EDUCATION

Stanislaus County is in its third year of employing an educational liaison to work alongside social workers, youth and resource parents around education issues. This has resulted in more extensive training for foster youth and resource parents on special education law, college requirements, etc.

COMPREHENSIVE ASSESSMENT TOOL (CAT)

Stanislaus County was one of the first four counties that actually developed the Comprehensive Assessment Tools in collaboration with the SPHERE Institute. CAT assessments are completed throughout the life of a case for all families served by Child and Family Services.

VENTURA COUNTY CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

F2F Funding Began: 2003

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RECRUITMENT, DEVELOPMENT, AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (RDS)

Data was generated on specific geographical areas to support recruitment of foster homes in targeted areas. There has been an increase in recruitment with faith-based organizations. In 2006, a total of 44 homes were licensed, 36 homes were lost, with a net gain of 8 homes. RDS staff consists of 4 community services coordinators and a supervisor. Vendors are utilized for support services such as respite care, childcare, and training. Data indicate from January to June 2006, there was a decrease of 13 in Group home placements. From July to December 2006 there was a gradual increase of 15 placements. Data indicate that of 334 children removed from home in 2006, 24% (n=79) were placed close to home. In addition, 200 of the children removed were part of a sibling group. Of the 200 children who had a sibling, 100 were placed with at least 1 of their siblings. An Ombudsman provides one-on-one support to resource families and does an assessment of the family to assess the families' needs and the best match possible when placing a child in their home. An additional recruiter was hired to support the recruitment of resource families and provide resource families with assistance through the licensing processes. Licensing staff provided support through the licensing process by holding orientations in the community and by providing back-to-business days to assist with completing the licensing application process. Respite services are funded through a combination of grants and CWS funds. Foster parents routinely provide respite care outside of the formal respite program (foster care payments are prorated accordingly). Higher rates for special needs children are routine. Both birth parents and youth are being utilized as trainers for new staff and newly recruited resource families. Pre-placement training is provided by the Community Colleges utilizing the PRIDE curriculum.

BUILDING COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS (BCP)

New and existing relationships have been strengthened through common projects and regular meetings. A database has been developed to track community contacts as well as the interest level. Efforts with the faith-based community have resulted in an increase in licensed foster homes. The agency has gained support from a County Supervisor who is active in speaking on

resource family recruitment. Data shared has consisted of rate of removals, the number of licensed foster homes and the cities in which those homes are located as well as TDM outcome statistics.

TEAM DECISIONMAKING (TDM)

TDMs are held for placement changes, imminent risk, and emergency placement. Meetings are mandatory. Phase I TDMs are for placement changes, Phase 2 TDMs are for imminent risk, emergency placement for the day shift. Phase 3 will be for permanency. For 2007, there will be focus on refinement of placement changes, imminent risk, and emergency placement TDMs and if possible, implementation of emergency response night shifts. Firewalls have been implemented so that staff is required to schedule a TDM before information on a new placement is provided. The department's placement coordinator will seek placement options upon request, but will not release the placement until a TDM is scheduled. Monthly data reports review all change of placements and all TDMs scheduled within current month. To ensure that Safety/Action plans are completed, each supervisor receives a copy of the Safety/Action plan so follow-up can be ensured. Formal Icebreaker implementation is on hold at this time, though many foster parents already engage in icebreaker activities. TDMs implementation has raised awareness that relative placements can happen sooner.

SELF EVALUATION (SE)

The SE team developed a plan to evaluate processes and outcomes related to TDMs for placement moves. Data regarding foster home placement and licensing activity by city and ZIP Code are contained in a monthly report for the Supervisor for District 1, Ventura County Board of Supervisors. Also reported are monthly totals for (c) new licenses issued and (c) licenses terminated. Ad hoc reports from the TDM CA database have been prepared for the TDM Strategy Group and F2F Strategy Group Leaders to support the development and implementation of TDM. Increasing the involvement of relatives as caregivers for children in foster care is a target in the County's 2007-10 SIP. An important strategy for accomplishing this is to strengthen the relative approval process conducted by the CFS Licensing Unit. The Operations Team in County Department of Child and Family Services has adopted a monthly process for reviewing performance for selected AB 636 outcomes. The process employs a report, referred to as the Balanced Scorecard Ledger, which includes performance trends for Placement Stability Measure 3C and Least Restrictive Placements Measure 4B. The Ledger also reports measures for internal processes related to these outcomes including number and placement decisions for TDMs for placement moves, referrals and referral outcomes for relative approval, and children placed in a relative home.

FOSTER YOUTH PERMANENCE AND YOUTH TRANSITIONS AND INVOLVEMENT

A needs and services analysis was conducted in 2006. The report served as a driving tool in implementing contract modifications and practice implications. A vendor provides a majority of Independent Living Services to youth in Ventura County. Progress toward permanence has included contract modifications to the wide range of services intended to prepare foster youth for in self-sufficiency. The Leadership Action Council has been developed by the foster youth, for foster youth, with the support of ILP Coordinator and contractor to provide a forum where youth in foster care can address issues or concerns and take leadership roles in developing an action plan. Ventura County has sustained the foster youth panel as part of the education, training and recruitment efforts. Ventura County has re-established YTAC (Youth in Transition Advocacy

Council), which fosters public/private collaboration among organizations working with foster youth. Host Homes for emancipated foster youth are in place with a need to recruit more.

BIRTH PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parents with Purpose is a small but active group working to recruit more. A vendor assists this group by preparing schedules, facilitating meetings and providing overall guidance on projects assumed by the group. The group already provides training to new child welfare staff and staffs a support line. The group also participates in the TDM strategy group. Recently, the Board of Supervisors recognized the group for their efforts and activities.