



24-5547

DATE: May 7, 2024 (Item No. {{item.number}})

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Daniel Little, Director, Social Services Agency

SUBJECT: Semi-Annual Update on the Continuum of Care Services

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive semi-annual report from the Social Services Agency, Department of Family and Children's Services, relating to the Continuum of Care Services.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no fiscal implications associated with receiving this report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION AND BACKGROUND

On November 5, 2019, the Board of Supervisors (Board) approved a referral brought forward by former Supervisor Dave Cortese for Administration to consider a range of options with respect to closure of the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) former Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Center (RAIC) (Item No. 18). Subsequent reports provided information regarding DFCS' plan to close the former RAIC, provided updates on the County of Santa Clara's (County) child welfare receiving center, and outlined efforts to replace the County's receiving center with a continuum of care services that addresses the unique needs of each child and their family. On April 20, 2021, Supervisor Chavez requested that future reports on the continuum of care services also include information regarding the continuum of care evaluation and DFCS's family finding efforts (Item No. 19). On October 19, 2021, the Board approved for the continuum of care services report to be provided on a semi-annual basis (Item No. 27). An update was provided to the Board on October 17, 2023 (Item No. 27).

Continuum of Care Update

In 2015, Assembly Bill (AB) 403 was enacted and initiated Continuum of Care Reform (CCR), which was designed to phase out the use of group homes and to limit the use of other forms of congregate care. While these reform efforts drove important and needed changes, they also decreased the number of placement options, especially those viable for some children with the highest needs. With the enactment of CCR, the former RAIC program located at 2300 Enborg Lane in San José experienced ongoing challenges with timely

placement of children newly entering foster care, which lead to long lengths of stay at the temporary facility.

A longer length of stay at the RAIC too often resulted in conflictual situations and negatively impacted other children being cared for there. The cycle of incidents, conflict, and difficulties to engage in treatment (and the subsequent failure to determine appropriate placement options for children) is common in congregate care settings and was not unique to the RAIC. These issues underscored the challenges presented by congregate care models and highlighted the importance of developing a model that incorporates early and effective assessment and engagement of children and youth, a trauma-aware and healing treatment model, and a true continuum of care that extends from the first point of contact until a child reaches permanency.

Three main areas illustrate the core components that must be present in a trauma-informed and resiliency-based continuum: 1) a model of engagement and treatment for children to address trauma immediately following removal or placement disruption; 2) appropriate placement options that meet the behavioral and treatment goals of every child; and 3) adequate planning to show each child's roadmap to permanency. If any of these elements is missing, all children, especially those with higher needs, have a lower chance of achieving timely permanency and risk spending significant time at placements that do not meet their needs.

Therapeutic Homes

DFCS continues to engage several providers who have Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) and Intensive Services Foster Care Plus (ISFC+) programs to support youth with moderate to high needs in family homes. These programs provide youth with an elevated level of care that identifies their individual needs and uses a trauma-informed approach to facilitate their healing. In addition, ISFC+ is a program that provides specialized mental health and behavioral support services to children who have a history of complex trauma and failed placements in the foster care system. ISFC+ is designed to offer a more normalizing living environment and increased opportunities for permanence, emphasizing careful foster family and child matching. ISFC+ also operates at one of the highest level of care similar to the short-term residential treatment program (STRTP).

Both ISFC and ISFC+ utilize a team approach when working with youth, foster parents, birth parents and caregivers, to help the youth transition out of a high level of care to the least-restrictive environment possible. Providing individualized services in a family-based setting allows for youth participating in both programs to gain skills for future success in their living arrangement and preparation for successful transition to a lower level of care and/or into adulthood.

There are currently 13 youth placed in an ISFC home, 16 in an ISFC+ home, and three additional youth pending placement by end of April 2024. There are currently three Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) providing ISFC+ programs, and their slots have been increased to a total of 33 beds. The FFAs are actively recruiting families to fill their allotted slots in order to serve more children. ISFC+ homes continue to be at capacity with children staying in the

ISFC+ home on average 9-12 months. The treatment and support youth receive in these programs continue to provide stability with an increase in positive and healthy coping skills.

ISFC+ and Innovative Model of Care

In March 2022, California counties were able to apply for certain rates in partnerships with community-based programs or to support County created programs that provide specialized care to youth through All County Letter 22-21.¹ These innovative models of care (IMC) would have to support high acuity youth that were unable to be supported through current funding streams. DFCS has partnered with Rebekah Children’s Services (RCS) and Seneca Family of Agencies (Seneca) to establish an approved IMC rate for their current ISFC+ programs with California Department of Social Services (CDSS) – Rates Division through a request by DFCS. The county must pay the entire non-federal share of an IMC, above the existing rate structure established by CDSS or utilize the county allocation for Complex Care pursuant to ACL 21-119 or ACL 21-143 and must monitor the performance and outcomes of the provider to ensure that the purposes of the IMC will be achieved. (See WIC Section 11460(a)(3)(B) & (C)).

RCS was approved effective August 29, 2023 and Seneca was approved effective July 1, 2023.

Family Finding

DFCS believes that children and youth deserve to remain connected with their family and non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) and that family connections should be encouraged and strengthened through family search and engagement activities. These connections serve as potential placement opportunities and support the long-term health and well-being of youth and their families. Social workers utilize family search and engagement activities throughout the life of a case, and it is a part of regular practice and training for DFCS staff. DFCS has two units, the Family Finding and Engagement Team and Intensive Permanency Services, which support social workers’ efforts to locate and engage relatives and NREFMs. DFCS has also developed practices to further embed family finding into day-to-day social work activities. This includes working with youth, families, and the primary social worker to identify and invite family members to Child and Family Team meetings to support safety, permanency, and well-being.

Family Finding and Engagement Team

The Family Finding and Engagement Team supports social workers’ efforts to locate and engage relatives and non-relative extended family members (NREFMs). The Family Finding unit continues to receive referrals on a daily basis. One staff from this team also began conducting Emergency Relative Placement (ERP) approvals in February 2024. ERPs are conducted to ensure the family and home meet the state’s requirements in order approve

¹ Guidelines for Counties to Request a Program Specific or Child Specific Rate for an Innovative Model of Care to Support Children and Non-Minor Dependents with Complex Needs Unable to be met in Existing AFDC-FC Programs or Using Alternative Funding Sources available at <https://www.cdss.ca.gov/Portals/9/Additional-Resources/Letters-and-Notices/ACLs/2022/22-21.pdf?ver=2022-03-10-144744-350> (last visited April 18, 2024).

relatives and NREFMs to take placement of and care for children in the County's care. A total of 24 ERP assessments have been completed since February.

DFCS plans to train all social workers in the Family Finding and Engagement Team to be able to conduct and complete emergency placements. Since this unit's main focus is to work on identifying relatives and NREFMs, by supporting the completing of emergency placement approvals DFCS will increase the number of children placed in a relative/NREFM setting.

Intensive Permanency Services

The Intensive Permanency Services (IPS) program is focused on serving youth with high acuity needs and no permanency options or connection to familiar, loving adults. IPS staff work intensely with youth to build trust; strengthen and repair relationships with one or more parents; re-engage and build connections with extended family members; reduce hospitalizations/self-harm and aggressive/assaultive behaviors; increase placement stability; and assist youth in achieving emotional and legal permanency. IPS services use a unique combination of approaches that help heal trauma through a lens of grief and loss, helping youth restore their capacity to connect. There are four stages to IPS that are youth driven: trusting, healing, connecting, and supporting. The time to complete all four stages can take approximately 18 – 24 months.

IPS has continued to engage and support nine youth who have been receiving IPS services for 6-18 months. These youth have experienced increased connections with healthy adults, an overall decrease in intensity of pain-based behaviors, and three youth have reached permanency with family. Two youth have successfully graduated from the IPS program and are connected to family members who they see and engage with regularly while they are living independently as non-minor dependents. Two youth are scheduled to successfully graduate from the program within the next two months, as one has permanency with their grandmother, and the other is living independently as a non-minor dependent but strongly connected to their adult siblings. Another youth has re-connected with their birth mother and adult sister and, over Christmas, the family was reunited with a sibling who was adopted and spent the holiday with the adoptive sibling and adoptive mother. With the support of the IPS social worker they are working on strengthening their relationship in order for the siblings to continue to have contact with each other as well as the birth mother. Other youth continue to make significant progress in decreasing pain-based behaviors and reactions, while working toward independent living, permanency, and relational trauma and repair. DFCS is assessing how to cross this work over to all areas of DFCS.

Seeing the Power of Family

Seeing the Power of Family training is a cross system training co- designed by Staff Development and Training, DFCS employees, community stakeholders and Pale Blue (Family Seeing contractor) to integrate local and statewide practices with foundational principles of Family Seeing to further the health and well-being of children and families in the community. Seeing the Power of Family deepens the practice of seeing culture, dignity, justice and equity through trauma-informed and healing practices. The training holds the understanding that DFCS is rooted in safety and carries out intentional engagement with

families to procure better data (family story), create safety plans with familial networks and, if possible, keep children with their family.

Seeing the Power of Family is a 12-hour in person training and 3-hour workshop designed in alignment with the Integrated Core Practice Model whereby all system partners engage, team and use a capabilities approach with children and families. The series recognizes the racial and sociocultural trauma and the historical impact of child welfare. Specifically, it recognizes the trauma of family separation in the context of neurobiology and child development and uplifts family relationship and culture. The training provides an opportunity to reflect on what family means, and on the collective strength of helping families create their own network of support.

Three sessions of the training have been completed with a total of 67 people (including staff and stakeholders) having finished the series. The fourth session is currently underway with another 30 participants.

Children's Continuum and Crisis Continuum

DFCS has been working on updating the policy and procedure for ERP approvals for placement with relatives and NREFMs. With this revised process, the documentation needed was reduced by 40% and streamlined to make the process easier and faster.

DFCS continues to partner with community organizations to support the expansion of the front end crisis continuum for the County. As such, DFCS and the Bill Wilson Center (BWC) have developed a collaboration with its Safety Net Shelter where youth who need a temporary shelter can reside. There are two programs within this collaboration:

- One program is for youth where DFCS is investigating a referral and determines that the youth is not at risk of harm and/or danger and the parents and youth need a period of time to work through family difficulties. Through this program, DFCS is able to refer the parent to work directly with Bill Wilson and if appropriate, the youth may remain at BWC for up to 60–90 days. The parents will need to agree to be part of the BWC case plan and be willing to participate in activities so BWC can prepare for a successful transition back to the parents.
- The second program is for youth who are already dependents and caregivers are in need of a break. DFCS communicates with BWC and if appropriate, the youth can reside at BWC for no longer than two weeks. After this time, the youth will need to return to their out of home placement.

The County's Social Services Agency (SSA) and DFCS have also re-engaged local community based providers to re-look at the short term residential treatment program (STRTP) model. As there is no in-County STRTP, DFCS relies on out-of-County STRTP providers to support youth in foster care requiring that level of care. Most of the out-of-county STRTPs deny youth based on the overwhelming demand for this level of placement, and having no capacity, and many denials have been simply for the behavior of youth being beyond the capabilities of the STRTP.

During outreach by SSA and DFCS, most providers indicated some general interest; however, they are waiting on CDSS to consider a proposal by the California Alliance of

Children and Families, which significantly impacts the rate structure even further allowing for providers to have more financial flexibility and increased finances to support high-acuity youth. As there is still a definitive need for this level of placement within the county, SSA and DFCS continue to examine options for an STRTP program, including a County-ran or County-administered, community based organization program. DFCS has discussed various models with providers and County partners including the County's Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD) to determine the most efficient and effective programming. DFCS has also engaged CDSS – Community Care Licensing (CCL) around this possibility to identify support and additional options.

CHILD IMPACT

The actions described will have a positive impact on children and youth through the **Safe and Stable Families** indicator by developing a system that will provide individualized care for every child with goal of planned permanency, family engagement, and connections.

SENIOR IMPACT

The recommended action will have no/neutral impact on seniors.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The recommended action will have no/neutral sustainability implications.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

The Board will not receive this report.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

The Clerk of the Board will follow the usual process for this type of legislative file.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Continuum of Care Semi-Annual Report Presentation