



24-5548

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

TO: Board of Supervisors

FROM: Daniel Little, Director, Social Services Agency

SUBJECT: Update on the Welcoming Center Evaluation and Steps to Transfer Program Operations to the County

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report from the Social Services Agency, Department of Family and Children's Services, relating to the Welcoming Center evaluation and steps to transfer operations from Seneca Family of Agencies to the County of Santa Clara.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no fiscal implications associated with receiving this report.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION AND BACKGROUND

Since November 19, 2019, the County of Santa Clara's (County) Social Services Agency (SSA), Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) has provided the Board of Supervisors (Board) with regular updates on DFCS's actions to improve the continuum of care for children within the County's child welfare system. The overall goal of the improved continuum is to ensure every child under the County's care is safe, cared for, and grows up in a stable, loving family. DFCS was asked to provide quarterly updates to the Children, Seniors, and Families Committee (CSFC) on topic areas that further the goal of the improved continuum, the Welcoming Center evaluation, and steps to operate the Welcoming Center with County staff.

On December 12, 2023, the Board approved the removal of all DFCS items from CSFC and to present DFCS reports to the Board.

The Welcoming Center

When children are removed from their parent's or caregiver's care, DFCS must find an appropriate placement for these children. If children are unable to be placed, which happens for various reasons, DFCS has contracted with a community-based provider to oversee a transitional shelter care facility program in Santa Clara County. This program provides temporary and short-term care for children and is licensed by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and is currently managed by Seneca Family of Agencies (Seneca). The Welcoming Center is a therapeutic home-like setting where children, who have either

been recently removed and are newly in care or in between placements, can be assessed and cared for while appropriate placement options are identified. DFCS' plan is to continue to partner with Seneca to support community-based intake operations overseeing the Welcoming Center until operations are transitioned to DFCS.

The Welcoming Center served 58 unique youth during the first quarter of 2024, of which 26, or 45%, were under the age of 9. An example of the therapeutic and healing work occurring at the Welcoming Center is a teenage youth with a history of aggressive behavior and distrust of adults was experiencing a challenging period while going through court proceedings. The Welcoming Center staff participated in a Child and Family Team (CFT) meeting and collaborated with the case carrying social worker, the Wraparound team, and the father. The Welcoming Center staff were able to build a collaborative relationship with the youth's team and support their plan to reunify with the father. Youth engaged in conversations about the trauma and the Welcoming Center staff continued to disconfirm the belief that adults can't be relied on. The youth was successfully discharged to their father who continually shows up to protect and care for the youth. The youth provided feedback to the Welcoming Center on a client satisfaction survey, which included the following comments: "it's comfortable and safe place," "everyone was very welcoming," "it was a good experience and staff were nice," "Thx 4 helping me," "Everyone was very respectful," "Staff are amazing and took the time to listen and care."

Location

In conjunction with SSA's Central Services and the County's Facilities and Fleet Department's (FAF) Real Estate team, DFCS is waiting for an update from FAF for the identification of potential locations for consideration for the Welcoming Center. The discussion will be held in the County's April 2024 Space Committee to determine next steps.

Transition Timeline

In collaboration with the Welcoming Center staff, DFCS continues to provide updates to the Transitional Shelter Care Facility (TrSCF) application to CDSS's Community Care Licensing (CCL). The next updated application is due to CCL on April 19, 2024. Once the application is submitted, CCL will provide feedback with any recommendations on the application that need clarification. In addition, Seneca's TrSCF license for the Welcoming Center expires at the end of May 2024. Seneca has submitted an exemption request to have their TrSCF license extended to allow time for DFCS's license application for the Welcoming Center to be fully approved. DFCS supported Seneca by writing a support letter for the exemption. As of this writing, Seneca has not received a response to their exemption request. Seneca and DFCS management continue to meet on a regular basis to continue to ensure a smooth transition occurs once the Welcoming Center license is approved by CCL, as Seneca staff will continue to provide the day-to-day care of children at the Welcoming Center while DFCS will provide operational oversight and management.

Welcoming Center Evaluation

The continuum of care relies on multiple community-based providers, County agencies, and dedicated staff to effectively support youth in the foster care system. The process of

evaluation is a critical step in ensuring services are operating as intended and should be viewed and implemented through a continuous quality improvement lens and strength-based approach.

The continuum of care evaluation plan outlines the strategies and metrics that will allow the collective members of the continuum's operation to understand system-wide strengths and opportunities for program improvement, with particular attention to the Welcoming Center and family finding services. The plan is intended to evolve and be adaptive, as services are added to address newly emerging needs. While each element of the continuum of care differs in services, tools, and youth's needs, collectively they create a powerful offering for youth and the community. The evaluation will provide an understanding of how each of the individual components work to support one another and can be used to draw meaningful conclusions about what is working well and where adjustments need to be made.

The evaluation used a longitudinal cohort model for 2022 and transitioned to a cross-section model in 2023. These approaches allowed for assessing programmatic successes and challenges over time, both when comparing outputs before and after the Welcoming Center was established. As the evaluation is moving to an annual evaluation to allow for a longitudinal perspective examining how associations have evolved over time, the below are steps taken to build out the evaluation including implementing a factsheet and dashboard to track data.

Evaluation Plan

The evaluation previously consisted of quarterly reports providing descriptive data on the following metrics:

- Number of children entering care
- Demographic information (sex, age, race/ethnicity)
- Average number of placements within one month of entering care
- Percentage placed with relatives and non-relative extended family members (NREFMs) or legal guardians
- Welcoming Center outputs (number of children, average length of stay and overstay)
- Percentage of children who were still in care after one month

These descriptive data formed an integral part of the initial evaluation, providing an overview of short-term outputs. However, assessing the impact of the various components of the continuum of care requires more intensive approaches, utilizing a variety of methods.

Moving forward, the following are proposed, which incorporates resource parent, youth and staff voice into program implementation:

- Quarterly Technology Services and Solutions (TSS) dashboards reporting on metrics similar to those captured in the previous quarterly reports
- Human Centered Design approach to understanding youth experience and co-creating youth-centered recommendations regarding the Welcoming Center

- Human Centered Design approach to understanding resource parent and DFCS staff experiences and co-creating solutions around information sharing about children placed with resource parents
- Annual report in December assessing longitudinal outcomes, such as relative/NREFM placement and foster care exit, and how these outcomes relate to both demographic variables (e.g. child/youth's age, race/ethnicity) and child welfare variables (e.g. receipt of specialized services)

Quarterly Factsheet and Dashboard

A quarterly factsheet and dashboard are being developed in collaboration with DFCS and TSS. The factsheet will provide a snapshot of data for the cohort of children and youth entering care each quarter. This will allow leadership and program staff to quickly assess findings from the previous quarter and course correct or adapt practices as necessary.

The longitudinal dashboard will track the same entry cohorts over time. In the first quarter, it will include data only for those newly entering care. Each subsequent quarter, it will incorporate updated information on the previous entry cohorts who remain in the system, in addition to data on the new quarter's entry cohort. This will provide a dynamic platform for leadership and case workers to monitor key metrics closer to real-time as cases progress.

By visualizing critical indicators like demographics, placement statistics, lengths of stay, congregate care rates, and use of therapeutic programs, the factsheet and dashboard will equip DFCS to identify trends and highlight areas needing attention. The interactive dashboards will also enable staff to drill down based on factors such as age and race/ethnicity. Ultimately, these data tools aim to help improve outcomes for children and families by informing more effective, data-driven practices and decision-making.

The factsheet and dashboard are anticipated to be launched in quarters three and four of 2024 respectively. The following metrics are proposed for inclusion in the tools and are subject to change, pending approval from DFCS leadership.

- Demographics: age, sex, ethnicity
- Relative Placement
 - Percentage relative/ NREFM placements
 - Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings – Number of family members involved in CFTs
 - Number of CFTs around placement
- Short Term Placement
 - Welcoming Center: Number of children, average length of stay, longest stay, average length of overstay, number of children who overstayed
- Long Term Placement
 - Percentage of children in foster care one month after entry
 - Average number of placements

- Placement Stability (Entry Cohort): Of all children entering care in the 12-month period who were still in foster care at selected time frames after entry, what percent were in their first, second, third, fourth, fifth or greater than fifth out-of-home placement?
- Placement Days: number of placements and the number of placement days in a 12-month period.
- Median Length of Stay (disaggregated by age and ethnicity)
- Congregate Care Placement: For children and youth in congregate care on a selected day, these reports calculate the percentage who spent at least 365 of the preceding 400 days in congregate care settings.
- Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP): Number of children in an STRTP placement (disaggregated by in county/out of county)

CHILD IMPACT

The actions described will have a positive impact on children and youth through the **Safe and Stable Families, Early Childhood Mental Health, and Developmental Assets** indicators by developing a system that will provide individualized care for every child and assure access to and increase coordination of services with a goal of planned permanency and 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:

- Welcoming Center Quarterly Report Presentation