

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

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DATE: May 7, 2024
TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: Damion Wright, Director, Department of Family and Children's Services
SUBJECT: Data Guiding November 2023 Direction and Future Assessments

At its February 6, 2024 meeting, at the request of Supervisor Arenas, the Board requested policy options to expand court oversight for additional targeted sub-populations, similar to DFCS Director's Interim Direction regarding 0–5-year-olds, with analysis of when court supervision is appropriate. This report outlines the data that supported DFCS's issuance of the Interim Direction with a focus on 0-5-years-olds, and the further analysis DFCS will be conducting to determine whether there is another population where the data indicates that similar direction should be issued to ensure child safety.

Safety and Risk Assessments in Determining Interventions

The safety of children is the utmost priority and only when safe for a child, DFCS will work with families to support safe stabilization of children in their homes. When determining the type and level of intervention for a family, DFCS has to identify the level of risk of future child abuse or neglect and determine any safety concerns. This safety and risk determination is done by social workers using the Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools coupled with their clinical judgement, as required by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and Structured Decision Making (SDM) policies and procedures.

Child Welfare Data and Determining Need for Increased Court Oversight

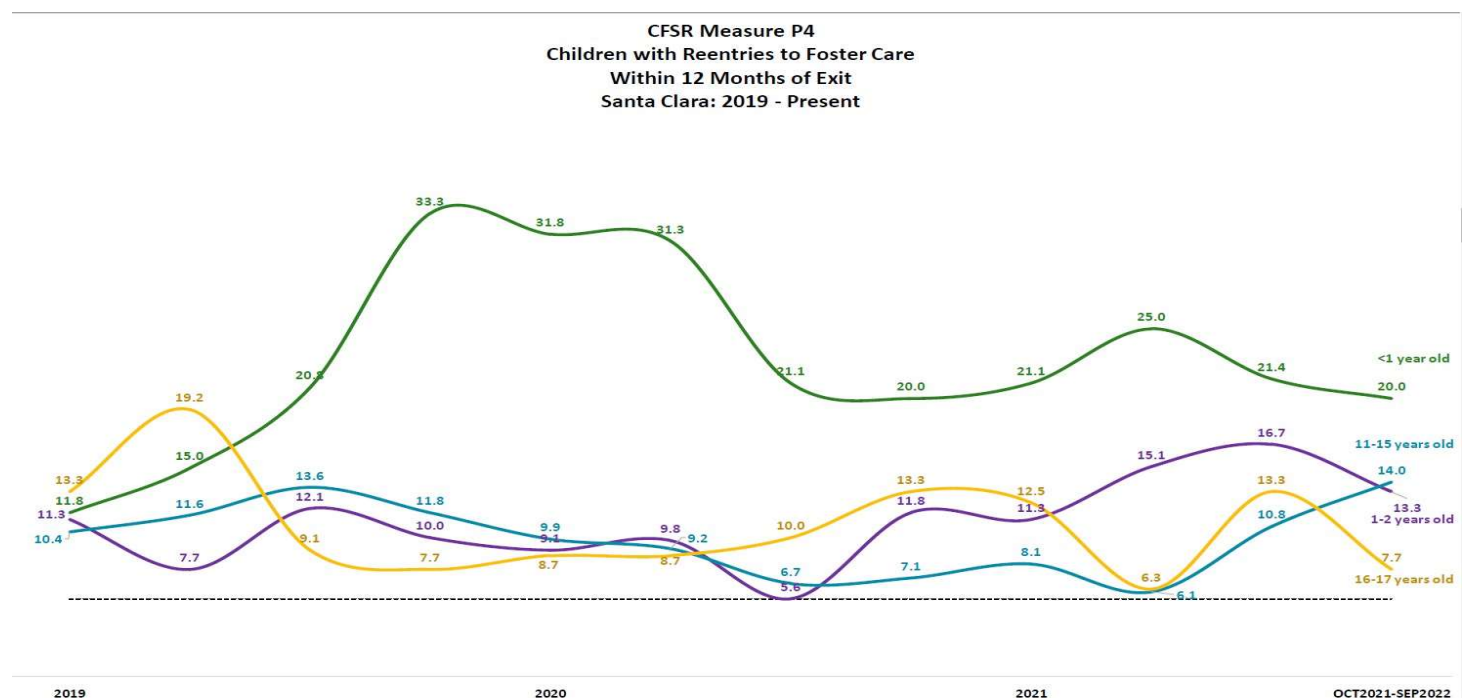
DFCS uses State and Federal outcome measures connected to its System Improvement Plan (SIP), as required for all counties, to monitor progress and to identify areas of opportunity or gaps. DFCS also uses its outcome measures to ensure the right level of intervention for children and families. Specifically, DFCS is monitoring the recurrence of maltreatment federal measure (Safety Measure 2 – Recurrence of Child Maltreatment), which is defined as a subsequent substantiated allegation within 12 months from the prior substantiated allegation. In this review, DFCS determined there was an increase in recurrence of maltreatment for children who were under one year old, and it was this data that supported the implementation of the November 2023 Interim Direction, for when a social worker should pursue court intervention for certain families.

Trends in reoccurrence of maltreatment indicate the following:

- More likely to involve children from ages birth to five
- More likely to have two of the three risk factors for parents: substance abuse, mental health and intimate partner violence (IPV)
- For 2022, 6.5% of children experienced recurrence of maltreatment.
 - Of these children, 61.8% (N=34) were five years old or younger and 38.2% (N=21) were over the age of five .
 - 27% (N=15) of those with a Recurrence of Maltreatment were originally in non-court services ages birth to five versus 14.5% (N=8) of same age children in court services

DFCS is also monitoring the re-entry of children into foster care, which is federal Permanency Measure 4 – Children with Reentries to Foster Care (P4). P4 is defined as children achieving permanency, and within a 12-month period, they are re-entering foster care (Figure 1). In this review, there was an increase in re-entries with children who were 1 – 2 years old.

Figure 1: Children with Re-Entries to Foster Care



Evaluation of these trends in coordination with the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) and in relation to the required SIP supports the shifts in policy for more supervision and monitoring of children ages birth to five as well as non-verbal children and youth. This also aligns with greater use of CFM as an intervention and supports increased intervention due to the risk and vulnerability of these children.

Additional Sub-Population for Court Intervention

Younger Children (0 – 5) and Parental Substance Abuse or Domestic Violence/ Intimate Partner Violence

Based on the information above, the sub-population of children ages zero to five is an area of continued review by DFCS in determining court intervention particularly when substance use and/or intimate partner violence (IPV)/ domestic violence (DV) are included in the case profile. Also, as the continued impact of fentanyl and methamphetamines climbs in Santa Clara County, DFCS data supports that parental substance increases the risk level to the family namely due to impact on the caregiver's ability to potentially care for and/or protect their child. Furthermore, proximity to these drugs, particularly fentanyl, also pose significant dangers to young children (or anyone) if ingested, oral exposure, or inhalation.¹

Older Youth

DFCS continues to assess trends related to interventions related to older youth behavior and parental capacity to care for older youth. As of April 27, 2024, for youth ages 16 – 17, there are 31 in voluntary family maintenance (VFM) cases, and 18 youth in out-of-home placement. In addition, there are 12 youth that are ages 16 – 17 in Court family maintenance (CFM) cases, and 78 youth in Court-ordered out-of-home placement. DFCS will provide a more comprehensive look at the different outcomes of older youth when involved in family maintenance cases versus when they are in out-of-home placement.

DFCS continues to make strides in creatively addressing these challenges by supporting families with services like Wraparound², Placement Stabilization Services (PSS)³, or Intensive Stabilization Services (ISS)⁴ that can be provided to families with or without court intervention. The County has made Wraparound available to families that are not involved in the court process even though it is previously typically a service only available when children were in the court process. PSS and ISS are also contracted services to help families in the short-term. All three above-mentioned services provide therapeutic support to children and families in addressing trauma and strengthening the family.

More analysis is needed to determine if further strategies, including outside of the family placement, are necessary to increase safety for older youth. DFCS will provide more information on this data analysis in the next quarterly report.

¹ Retrieved April 6, 2024 from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDD)

https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/ersbdb/emergencyresponsecard_29750022.html

² Wraparound is an alternative to residential placement whereby a wide array of services are provided to children and their caretakers in less restrictive community settings -- parents' homes, foster homes, and group homes. Wraparound is a family-centered, strengths-based approach to developing an individualized service plan that allows a child to live in a normalized setting outside of residential care.

³ PSS provides stabilization services by offering individual, intensive, short-term therapeutic treatment and crisis stabilization to children, youth and non-minor dependents ages 0-21 who are either living at the Welcoming Center (a licensed transitional care shelter facility) or one of DFCS' satellite homes, at risk of entering the Welcoming Center, at risk of losing their home placement, or for individuals who may need additional help finding a placement that is a good fit for their behavioral needs.

⁴ Immediate Stabilization Services (ISS) supports young people and their families in times of crisis and high need to reduce the likelihood of placement disruption. These prevention and stabilization services are available 24 hours a day, with the goal of improving youth safety and well-being. Families enrolled in ISS will work with an assigned mental health clinician and a team of counselors to provide individualized interventions.