



24-4327

DATE: February 6, 2024 (Item No. 28)

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.

This report was originally scheduled for presentation to the Children, Seniors, and Families Committee in December, however, on December 12, 2023, the Board approved the removal of all DFCS items from CSFC.

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 temporary shelter care facility program in Santa Clara County. This program provides temporary and short-term care for children, and is licensed by California Department of Social Services (CDSS). It is 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.

Location

In conjunction with SSA's Central Services and the County's Facilities and Fleet Department's Real Estate team, DFCS is continuing to review potential properties that may be suitable for the DFCS Welcoming Center for future recommendation to the County Space Committee.

Transition Timeline

The transition timeline for DFCS to assume operational oversight of the Welcoming Center has been impacted by the Transitional Shelter Care Facility (TSCF) license application and review process. DFCS submitted its application for a TSCF license to the CDSS – Community Care Licensing (CCL) Division on June 14, 2023. Since then, CCL reviewed the application and sent it back to DFCS on October 13, 2023, with requested revisions. Subsequently, CCL forwarded DFCS additional recommended revisions on November 13, 2023.

September –December 2023

- Finalize licensure process
 - DFCS has been meeting with CDSS – CCL representatives to discuss application progress. At the last meeting on November 13, 2023, there was discussion to provide technical assistance around recommended revisions and TSCF operating standards. DFCS is also requesting a 10-day waiver for the licensed stay requirements in lieu of the 3-day requirement, and CCL will follow up with their program office to determine approval.
- Onboard and train current staff
 - DFCS is interviewing for social services program manager (SSPM) I/II and management analyst (MA) positions. The SSPM I/II position will complete the group home administrator certification and be a part of the team providing operational oversight of the Welcoming Center. The MA position will complete the Facility Manager training.
 - All participants in the September and October Therapeutic Crisis Intervention (TCI) Certification and Re-Certification trainings completed all requirements and their certifications remain valid until March of 2024.
- Complete any possible facility updates
 - A fire inspection was completed by the San Jose Fire Department on November 28, 2023.

- The fire clearance was completed for TWC, and subsequently forwarded to and received by CDSS as a requirement of the licensure process. The building was approved for 15 children, at a given time.

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 allow for assessing programmatic successes and challenges over time, both when comparing outputs before and after the Welcoming Center was established. Children who entered foster care from April 1 – June 30 in quarter 2 of 2022 (Baseline 1) and July 1 – September 30 in quarter 3 (Baseline 2) are compared to those who entered the same time period in quarter 2 of 2023 (Cohort 1) and quarter 3 of 2023 (Cohort 2). The evaluation focuses on children who entered care during these periods and does not include children who were already in foster care. For both the Baseline and Cohort groups, data were analyzed for one month after entering care. See Attachment A – Continuum of Care Annual Report December 2023 for full results.

Evaluation Updates

While there were, on average, more placements in the Cohort group (1.9) compared to the Baseline group (1.6), the proportion of relative/non-relative extended family member (NREFM) and guardian placements was 3.5 times higher among the Cohort group one month after children entered care, showing that a higher percentage of children recently coming into care are remaining with families and/or NREFM while in out-of-home care (Figure 1). For the Baseline group, 18% of the children experienced overstay awaiting placement. In the Cohort group, 29% of the children experienced overstay.

Figure 1 – Percentage of Children Placed with Relatives/NREFMs or Guardians

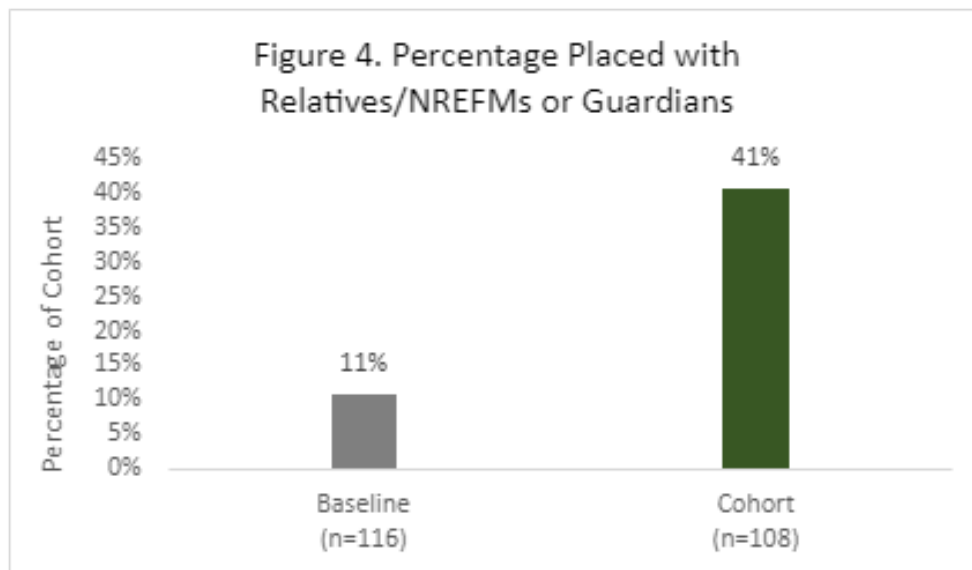
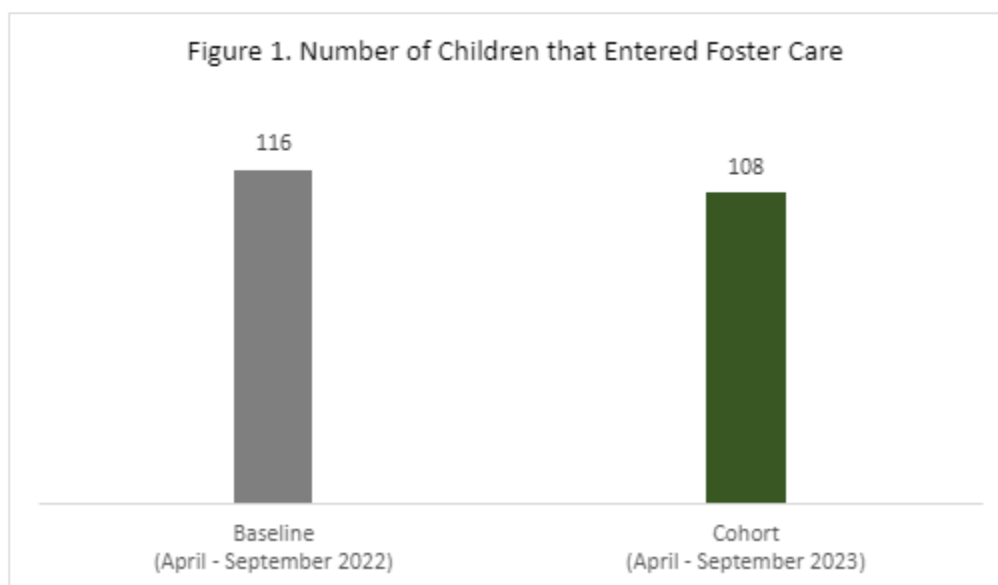


Figure 2 – Comparisons between the Welcoming Center Baseline and Cohort Groups

Figure 3. Comparisons between the Welcoming Center Baseline and Cohort Groups		
	Baseline (Welcoming Center)	Cohort (Welcoming Center)
Children/Youth		
Total number of children who stayed in the facility	49 children	48 children
Overstay in the Facility		
Percentage of children who overstayed	18%	29%

Similar to findings in previous quarterly evaluations, the number of children who were removed from their family and entered foster care has continued to decline (Figure 3), with the average age of the Cohort group (9.9 years) being one year older compared to the Baseline (8.6 years) group.

Figure 3 – Number of Children that Entered Foster Care



Programmatic Context

The complexity of supporting families with whom DFCS must intervene requires engagement with families, multiple system partners, and the larger community to access family-based and therapeutic treatments in a robust continuum of care. DFCS must continue working with the Intensive Services Foster Care Plus (ISFC+) providers to achieve its goal of 33 ISFC+ beds for children. Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs) must be established to meet the high-level needs of youth by ensuring an integrated delivery of specialty mental health services in a home-like setting with trained professional staff. Children and youth will have a robust assessment to determine their needs prior to specialized placement, ensuring the appropriate level of individualized support.

This also supports the work happening around specific needs of children including those that are considered at risk of commercial sexual exploitation. The provision of trauma-informed care is particularly important for children and youth who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC). Welcoming Center staff are trained and supervised to recognize both the symptoms of trauma exhibited and the coping mechanisms used by youth involved in CSEC. In addition, they are trained in the Stages of Change Model, a framework for understanding how individuals move through a series of stages—pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance—in the adoption of healthy behaviors or cessation of unhealthy ones. Staff are also trained in the Harm Reduction Model and to recognize the symptoms of trauma bonding in the behavior of CSEC youth.

Seneca also administers the Commercial Sexual Exploitation Identification Tool (CSE-IT) – version 2.0 for all youth age 10 or older at intake. If an immediate response is needed, Seneca also calls Community Solutions’ emergency CSEC hotline for a referral to their program. If youth score in the “Clear Concern” category, Seneca sends the completed tool to the Transformation Team and reports this information to the Child Abuse Neglect Center (CANC) hotline. The DFCS Transformation Team provides CSEC services for at-risk and identified youth with either DFCS or Probation involvement. The Transformation Team is comprised of a coordinator, social worker, public health nurse, licensed marriage and family therapist and probation youth also have an occupational therapist, probation officer and probation supervisor. From June 2023 to November 2023, the Transformation Team assessed, consulted, and/or provided service linkages for 22 DFCS or Probation youth.

The continuum requires identification and delivery of aftercare services to better support a youth’s timely transition into a family-based setting. DFCS has engaged providers to support youth stepping down to lower levels of care. Programs like wraparound can support youth and their caregivers, allowing for family-driven therapeutic treatment that includes the extended family and larger community. Wraparound provides family finding, identifying family members to be part of the child and family team to support safety, well-being, placement, and permanency. Through the child and family teaming process, families are brought together with natural supports, service providers, and community members with the goal of providing safety and stability for children, youth, and families.

Next Steps

DFCS will continue to expand the crisis continuum, including working through the Children Youth System of Care partnership (AB 2083) to rethink the STRTP Model. DFCS leadership has had several meetings with Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD) and community partner organizations to look at the current crisis continuum and opportunities to expand. DFCS has partnered with BHSD in determining the viability of at a County-run STRTP model, leveraging various funding sources to identify effective and sustainable crisis programming for complex needs youth.

On October 19, 2023, DFCS and BHSD leadership had a discussion with the administration of a Monterey county-run STRTP, Canyon Oaks. On October 24, 2023, DFCS and BHSD visited Canyon Oaks to see its daily operations and talk with frontline management and staff. DFCS has had conversations with community-based organizations (CBOs) to discuss the complex needs of youth and the opportunities around California licensing standards. CBOs were encouraged to look at creative solutions with DFCS and BHSD, including engaging in the STRTP process as identified in All County Letters (ACL) 21-143 and 22-21 regarding complex care funding and rate requests for innovative models of care.

DFCS and current providers are collaborating on the utilization of the homes to ensure children or youth who have a higher acuity and distinct needs have the opportunity to go into an ISFC+ home. The current census of the ISFC+ program is: 1) Seneca – four homes (all homes are full), 2) Pacific Clinics – nine homes (seven active; two caregivers on extended breaks), 3) Rebekah Children’s Services – six homes (four active; two have children not meeting ISFC+ criteria).

DFCS continues the licensing process of scattered site homes as TSCFs. DFCS re-submitted applications for all scattered sites on November 7, 2023, and had a conversation with CDSS on November 13, 2023, regarding additional revisions not previously suggested. DFCS scattered site staff are currently completing the required Guardian background process. The DFCS director visited Orangewood Children and Family Center on October 10, 2023, to further understand daily operations of a TSCF. On October 10, 2023, the DFCS director participated in a forum with County Welfare Director’s Association (CWDA) and other California counties in looking at the TSCF model and sharing best practices, specifically identifying challenges and solutions in serving complex need youth in shelters.

The best plan for any child must be determined in partnership with the family, thus the child and family team (CFT) process is critical. DFCS continues to prioritize the need for CFTs to happen as early as possible in establishing a safety plan and hearing directly from the family’s safety network. DFCS has expanded capacity to have CFTs where and when needed to link families to services and supports tailored to their strengths and delivered in a family-based environment. DFCS is building internal capacity to support the completion of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strength (CANS) tool for children and has identified specific staff who will complete the CANS training and take the certification test.

DFCS plans to have a crisis continuum expansion plan in calendar year (CY) 2024. The most immediate aspects of the crisis continuum will be communicated to CSFC and CDSS – CCL. A revised and comprehensive plan to be provided later will include capacity building funding, the Mockingbird foster care model, and upfront family finding.

Moving forward, the continuum of care evaluation will focus on children who entered foster care for eight days or longer in CYs 2012, 2017 and 2022. Data will be analyzed 12 months out from the child's initial entry into foster care. The sample will exclude children discharged to adoption who reentered foster care within 12 months, initial placement episodes that were open for less than eight days, and children who entered or exited foster care at age 18.

The overarching goal of the study is to explore whether the continuum of care achieved its outcomes of increasing home-based family care, decreasing congregate care placement and expediting paths to permanency. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore associations among demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, location, pre-intervention characteristics such as abuse history and parental factors) and child welfare variables (e.g. receipt of specialized services, such as Immediate Stabilization Services and Wraparound and case severity) in relation to anticipated continuum of care outcomes (e.g. placement stability, relative/NREFM placements and foster care exit).

Analyzing data from different entry years (2012, 2017, 2022) allows for a longitudinal perspective examining how associations have evolved over time. By studying multiple cohorts, the study will compare the associations among demographic and child welfare variables and anticipated outcomes across these cohorts. This approach can help identify temporal patterns and differences. See Attachment B – Continuum of Care Evaluation Proposal for the full proposal.

The County is dedicated to protecting children who have experienced abuse and/or neglect, and to preventing children who are at risk of abuse and/or neglect from entering into the child welfare system. DFCS, along with its County and local partners, envisions a community where all children are safe and secure, families thrive, and every child and family is on a path to reaching their unique potential.

On November 5, 2019, the Board issued a referral to Administration to consider a range of options concerning the closure of DFCS's Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Center (RAIC) located at 2300 Enborg Lane in San Jose. Based on this referral, and input and support from the Board, DFCS has seized the opportunity to improve upon its continuum of care for children who have been removed from their families, and to strengthen services and supports available to families who provide safe, supportive, and loving homes for children. DFCS provided the Board with updates on changes to its continuum of care at the Board's November 19, 2019, December 10, 2019, January 14, 2020, February 25, 2020, May 5, 2020, June 2, 2020, July 21, 2020, September 1, 2020, December 15, 2020 February 23, 2021, April 20, 2021, August 31, 2021, October 19, 2021, April 19, 2022, October 18, 2022, and April 18, 2023 meetings (Item Nos. 19, 8, 12, 9, 8, 17, 12, 21, 22, 22, 19, 38, 27, 48, 30, and 30 respectively). The RAIC was closed on December 31, 2019.

Additionally, on June 24, 2021, CSFC requested that DFCS provide information regarding the components in the continuum of care evaluation relating to the Welcoming Center, and steps for the Welcoming Center to be operated by County staff. These reports would allow CSFC members to fully evaluate the Welcoming Center, identify barriers that may limit access to services, and provide feedback on how DFCS could further improve its policies and practices.

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 report will not be received.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

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

ATTACHMENTS:

- Attachment A – Continuum of Care Annual Report December 2023
- Attachment B - Continuum of Care Evaluation Proposal
- Welcoming Center Update Presentation