



2018

Peer Review Report

Prepared by Shared Vision Consultants



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Introduction

Monterey County Child Welfare Services and Juvenile Probation hosted a four-day Peer Review beginning November 5, 2018 and ending November 8, 2018. The Peer Review is an important component of the California – Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) for Monterey County. Every five years, child welfare and juvenile probation departments across California complete a County Self-Assessment (CSA) and develop a System Improvement Plan (SIP). The Peer Review, which is embedded in the CSA, was facilitated by Shared Vision Consultants at the Monterey College of Law in Seaside, California.

Process

Prior to the Peer Review, group orientation webinars were offered for Social Workers and Probation Officers who would be interviewed about cases selected for review. The webinar included an overview of the C-CFSR, an overview of the selected focus areas and the role those interviewed would have in the Peer Review process. These orientation sessions were well attended. One-on-one webinars were offered to Social Workers who were unable to attend the group webinar.

A separate orientation webinar was provided to the peer county participants. This webinar also included an overview of the C-CFSR, an overview of selected focus areas, an introduction to the interview tools and debriefing tools, and what to expect during the week. This webinar was also well attended. One-on-one webinars were available if peer county Social Workers or Probation Officers were unable to attend the group webinar.

The Peer Review began at 12:00 pm on Monday, November 5, 2018, and concluded at 11:30 am on Thursday, November 8, 2018. Peers from six counties participated in the Peer Review: Social Workers from Imperial, Kern, Nevada, Santa Clara, and Ventura counties; and, Probation Officers from Napa, Placer and Santa Clara counties. These counties were selected because they are performing well in the identified focus areas.

The first morning of the Peer Review, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) and Shared Vision Consultants provided the Peer Review participants and Monterey County staff an understanding of how the Peer Review fits into C-CFSR and general demographics of Monterey County. The interview tools and debrief tools were also reviewed and discussed. Introductions and networking ensured the County staff felt they were in a safe environment for interviews. The peer Social Workers and Probation Officers were divided into three working teams. Team building exercises assisted the peers to become comfortable working together. Subsequently the teams of two child welfare Social Workers and one Probation Officer interviewed the County Social Workers and Probation Officers.

After reviewing the cases, peers identified trends or common themes from these interviews. Social Workers and Probation Officers who were interviewed were also given the opportunity to provide recommendations to improve services in the County or identify tools and/or training that would help them work with families in Monterey County. The peers then also provided recommendations of best practices from their respective counties. Below is a summary of trends, recommendations and promising practices.

Methodology

For the CSA, the County utilized the CWS/CMS 2018 Quarter 1 data extract from the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP), University of California at Berkeley. This data was utilized to determine the Peer Review focus areas for both Child Welfare Services (CWS) and Probation.

Child Welfare Services (CWS)

CWS chose to focus on P1: Permanency within 12 months for children entering foster care. This measure is defined as “Of all children who enter foster care in a 12-month period, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering foster care?”

At the time of the Peer Review, Monterey County CWS was achieving a 17.5% (34 children out of 194) percent permanency rate for P1 compared to the National Standard of 40.5%.

The methodology for choosing the twelve cases is as follows:

- Any case where both the Social Worker and their Social Worker supervisor were no longer with the Department, as well as sensitive cases were eliminated.
- Four age groups were created, and three cases from each age group were chosen:
 - 0 – 3
 - 4 – 6
 - 7 – 13
 - 14 - 18
- For both the 0 – 3 and 4 – 6 age groups, one case that achieved permanency in 12 months was chosen, and two that did not achieve permanency in 12 months were chosen.
- For both the 7 – 13 and 14 – 18 age groups, two cases that achieved permanency were chosen, and one that did not achieve permanency was chosen.
- The totals above equal six cases that achieved permanency in six months, and six that did not achieve permanency in six months. A secondary methodology was utilized. This included replacing some cases to ensure no Social Worker or family was chosen twice. The final selection included 7 cases that did not reach permanency and 5 cases that did reach permanency.
- A randomization function in excel was used, applying filters for age and Social Worker /Social Worker supervisor/sensitive case exclusion, to ensure a true random sampling within each age group.

This randomized function identified a case list of 197 cases. For the Social Worker interviews, CWS chose twelve cases to review.

Probation

Probation also chose to focus on P1: Permanency within 12 months for children entering foster care. “Of all children who enter foster care in a 12-month period, what percent discharged to permanency within 12 months of entering foster care?”

Prior to the Peer Review, Monterey County Probation was experiencing a 22.2% (6 children out of 27) permanency rate compared to the National Standard of 40.5%. The CDSS provided a list of cases to Probation to choose for interviews. For the interviews, six cases were chosen for review.

Peer Review Results

During the interviews, information was gathered for the following areas: Background (of Social Workers and Probation Officers); Maintaining Connections; Engagement; Assessments and Services; Placement Matching; Reunification, Concurrent Planning/Aftercare Services; and, Permanency. Peers identified trends that appeared as both strengths and challenges. An additional portion of the interviews gathered recommendations for improvements to be made by Monterey County Social Workers and Probation Officers as well as Systemic Factors identified throughout the review.

Child Welfare Services (CWS)

Social Workers who were interviewed brought a lot of experience working with children to their work. They were described by their peers as passionate about their work. They tried to be creative to offer services even when there were ~~constraints~~ limited resources available.

Background:

Strengths Trends:

- Social Worker was very well organized for the interview
- Social Worker had experience working with other agencies including community partners, etc.
- Social Worker was receptive to additional training that wasn't required.
- County does a warm handoff (Intake to Court to Ongoing) at each transition the Social Workers meet together with the family so they can introduce the new Social Worker to the family/child.
- Social Worker had extensive experience in working the types of cases that were reviewed to achieve permanency.
- Low Caseloads (< 10 cases) in the Family Resource Program unit. Adoptions unit had low caseloads as well.

Challenges Trends:

- New hire received induction training, but there was no additional training.
- Social Worker given an immediate caseload once they are hired.
- High caseloads in Family Reunification (FR) and Permanency Planning units.
- Multiple Social Workers assigned throughout the life of the case.

Historical

Strengths Trends:

- County does a warm handoff (Intake to Court to Ongoing) at each transition the Social Workers meet together with the family so they can introduce the new Social Worker to the family/child.
- Monthly Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs) for children
- Family utilized services to strengthen child's permanency at home

- Referral to MCSTART (Monterey County Screening Team for Assessment, Referral and Treatment)
- Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) worker is involved

Challenges Trends:

- Language barriers (especially indigenous Mexican languages and dialects)
- Drug and Alcohol Addiction
- Mental Health/Grief and Loss Issues unaddressed

Maintaining Connections

Strengths Trends:

- Child placed with a relative
- Family Finding occurred prior to Juris/Dispo Hearing
- Social Worker was flexible with visitation plans with parents and extended family members
- Siblings were able to maintain contact
- Child placed with siblings

Challenges Trends:

- Transportation
- Visits were minimal
- Lack of follow through with Family Finding
- Location of child's placements were a challenge
- Lack of involvement with father and father's family

Engagement

Strengths Trends:

- Social Worker had multiple contacts with family in a month
- Social Worker was bilingual and could easily engage family
- Social Worker discussed case plan with family on an ongoing basis
- Social Worker consistently discussed concurrent planning with active parent and caregiver
- Social Worker conducted ongoing safety and risk assessments.

Challenges Trends:

- Language barrier between Social Worker, parent and/or child
- Efforts to locate and/or engage a parent/father not done on an ongoing basis
- Parent was not willing to participate in services

Assessments and Services

Strengths Trends:

- MCSTART conducted assessments for mental health and development
- No gaps in services regardless of placement changes for children under five years old
- Relative caregiver was willing to participate in services
- Child Health and Disability Plan (CHDP) medical and dental, scheduled and completed on time
- Referrals made to housing services. The county has a direct system where families can get housing be prioritized for housing assistance.

Challenges Trends:

- Transportation services (public transportation, taxi vouchers)
- Parents' lack of participation in services
- Location of services (particularly the accessibility for south county)

Placement Matching

Strengths Trends:

- Child placed with relative
- Placement Unit assists in finding a placement for the child
- Youth had input on placement decisions

Challenges Trends:

- No placement matching occurred
- Placement based on availability
- Limited family finding
- Siblings not placed together
- Family Finding is done at the start of case (letters to relatives about the case), but no follow through.

Permanency/Aftercare Services

Strengths Trends:

- Adoption was achieved
- Aftercare services (i.e. therapy, Door to Hope, mentor moms, Triple P)
- MCSTART after case closed
- Safety plans were completed with the family prior to dismissal

Concurrent/Permanency Planning

Strengths Trends:

- Social Worker engaged community resources (Therapeutic Behavior Services, etc.) for the child
- Utilized community opportunities to advocate for the child.
- Had a Team Decision Making Meeting (TDM) early in the case for the child's placement.
- MSTART, regional center services were offered. Completed the developmental and behavioral assessments.
- Foster parents were supportive of reunification.
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children process was started early in the case.
- Concurrent Planning occurred. Discussions throughout the life of the case.

Challenges Trends:

- Lack of placement options. (Sibling Groups, Spanish-speaking, location, etc.). Putting children where there is availability.
- Lack of discussions regarding concurrent planning.
- When a child is in a non-concurrent home, there is no concurrent planning occurring. No discussions about placement changes.

Reunification

Strengths Trends:

- Parent participated in services and reunified within 12 months
- Mother and child were motivated to reunify
- Foster parents supported the reunification process
- Progressive visitation

Challenges Trends:

- Housing identified as a reason why family could not reunify
- No consistent policy or practice around progression or frequency of visitation

Systemic Factors

Management Information System

- SDM/SafeMeasures could be more user friendly.

Foster & Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment & Retention

- Because of RFA requirements, process took a little longer.

Staff, Caregiver & Service Provider Trainings

- Training on legal guardianship
- Parent-partner training

Agency Collaboration

- Need more collaboration with service providers

Other

- Equal hiring opportunities for males in supervisory positions.

Monterey County Social Worker Recommendations

Training

- Trauma-Informed and Attachment training
- Family Finding and Engagement
- Safety Organized Practice (SOP) Training
- Training which helps Social Workers focus on the circumstances in each family that led to department intervention
- Training on determining when a family meets minimum level of care, and then returning at that point
- More training for visitation center monitors (i.e., goals for visits, what to look for in parents, and how to communicate with Social Worker)
- Children exposed to substances
- Networking with community partners (particularly for new Social Worker coming in from out of county)
- Case plan training
- More training for new Social Workers (induction training, shadowing, etc.)

Resources

- Affordable Housing
- More resources in South County
- A guide/manual for new Social Workers, and on the job training
- Affordable housing/housing services
- Behavioral Health Connections

- Assessment by Behavioral Health even when the client is already in treatment and receiving therapy.
- More resources in Spanish and Oaxacan dialects

Policies and Procedures

- Conflict of interest (adoption within county, i.e., staff and community providers adopting children in care).
- Align County policies and procedures with State policies
- P&P should be developed to support successful outcomes

Other

- Caseloads should be equally distributed within units
- Social Workers should receive pay differentials for higher case loads
- Better communication around policy changes
- Social Worker practice varies from county to county, but all Social Workers should receive the same CORE training
- More supports for relatives
- Agreement from MCSTART clinic about expectations for Child Welfare clients.
- Lower caseloads, ability for the Social Worker to be more available to clients.

Probation

The Probation Officers in Monterey County have provided consistent services to all youth in care.

Background

Strengths Trends:

- Many training opportunities (Extension of Foster Care, Continuum Care Reform and Commercially Exploited Children, Trauma-Informed)
- Caseloads were small (10-15 cases)

Challenges Trends:

- Probation Officer changed every time the youth changed their setting/services (WRAP to local group home to out-of-state placement).

Historical

Strengths Trends:

- County does a warm handoff at each transition the probation Officers meet together with the family so they can introduce the new Probation Officer to the family/child.
- Probation Officer had numerous contacts with the family each month
- Probation Officer utilized community resources/partners.
- One placement and one PO for the case.

Challenges Trends:

- Language barriers between parents and youth and the Probation Officer
- Criminal history of the child and the family

Maintaining Connections

Strengths Trends:

- In-state and out-of-state group homes utilized.
- Programs facilitated visitation between child, parents, and siblings
- Parents regularly visited the child in the program

Challenges Trends:

- No immediate family finding.
- Limited exploration of the father's side of family

Engagement

Strengths Trends:

- Child and Family Team Meetings (CFT's) conducted monthly
- Probation Officer went to the juvenile hall to meet with the youth and engage early in the case.
- Probation Officer had multiple contacts with the children, parents, and providers.
- Probation Officer practiced multiple ways to build rapport with youth.
- Probation Officer's ability to communicate with youth in native language.

Challenges Trends:

- Lack of input from the youth and family regarding the placement.
- Placement location was a barrier for family visits.

Assessments and Services

Strengths Trends:

- Probation Officer did the MAYCI, SASSI, CSE-IT, AOD assessments
- No gaps in services (Juvenile Hall to placement)

Challenges Trends:

- No services/resources in south Monterey County.
- No transportation.
- Long drives to get to services.

Concurrent/Permanency Planning

Strengths Trends:

- Probation Officer explored numerous resources within the extended family to get the youth to reunify.

Challenges Trends:

- No discussion with the youth and family about concurrent planning.

Reunification

Strengths Trends:

- Reunification was the identified goal.
- Child was very motivated to return home.

Challenges Trends:

- Child's behavior impeded reunification efforts.
- Lack of housing
- Limited opportunities for visits due to lack of transportation.

Placement Matching

Strengths Trends:

- Inter-Agency Placement committee discussed/decided the appropriate placements for the youth, then discussed the options with the parents.

Challenges Trends:

- Limited local placements for probation youth.
- Youth's criminal history and behavioral history limits available placements.

Permanency Options/Aftercare Services

Strengths Trends:

- Youth came home with behavioral health services in the home.
- Placement provided aftercare services.

Challenges Trends:

- Limited/No aftercare services in the south County
- Limited Family Finding efforts

Systemic Factors

Management Information System

- Agency has an internal tracking tool for the Probation Officers regarding training.

Staff, Caregiver & Service Provider Trainings

- Probation Officers are encouraged to attend as many trainings as possible.

Service Array

- Language services needed for Spanish and indigenous languages. There are translators, but they end up advocating for the family instead of the just translating.
- Transportation needed for south County
- Services, in general, are needed in south County.
- Had the STOP program but is no longer available.

Other

- CCR timelines are not in line with CSEC and Juvenile Sex Offender youth.

Monterey County Probation Officer Recommendations

Training

- “Lots of trainings”

Resources

- Bring back “STOP” for transportation resources
- South County Office
- More resources in south County are needed
- For CSEC, lack of resources in south County makes it difficult for youth to call during a crisis.
- Families struggle with poverty and lack of group homes in south County, which impacts how the youth progress in care.

- Programs specifically to address to these kinds of issues for young men. Early intervention with behaviors earlier.

Promising Practices Shared by Peer Counties

Child Welfare Services (CWS)

Kern:

- Family finding trees entered into CWS/CMS can be updated with family who are interested in maintaining connections with a child, but not placement
- Taxi vouchers for transportation to access services

Nevada:

- Emphasis on ongoing family finding and engagement
- Utilizes extended family to assign with supports and transportation
- First and last month's rent to assist with housing for parents

Ventura:

- Partnership with housing services to help clients' search for housing, complete applications
- Local transitional housing supported by local churches
- Use an app called "Stratus" for on demand language translation

Recommendations from multiple counties:

- Develop county visitation policy and develop policies that will help Social Workers to increase/decrease visitation based on the progress of the case
- Use family finding to help build natural supports for children and families regardless of interest in placement
- Consider different ways to support families' efforts to secure housing (i.e. covering first and last month's rent, partnering with an entity who can assist with housing searches and application processes)
- Create a process for on-boarding new Social Workers and develop strategies to support new staff (i.e. handbooks, mentors, decreased caseloads, etc.) Also identify opportunities to decrease caseloads for lead workers to them time to mentor and to shadow new Social Workers.
- Offer guardianship as an alternative to adoption, especially for relative placements that are uncomfortable with terminating the parent's rights.

Probation

All three counties reported out (Napa, Placer, and Santa Clara):

- Place youth at home with Wraparound, but maintain a placement order for RFA and count this as one placement episode.

In Conclusion

The Monterey County Peer Review was very successful. Social Workers and Probation Officers who were interviewed felt supported and appreciated the feedback provided. Throughout the Peer Review, Monterey County Social Workers and Probation Officers had the opportunity to network and meet one-on-one and create relationships with peers from the other counties. Peers who conducted interviews appreciated the work being done in the County. All Monterey County staff and management who participated in the report-out on the final day were eager to learn trends and themes identified by the peers as well as promising practices.

Now that the Peer Review is completed along with focus groups and a large stakeholder meeting, the County Self-Assessment (CSA) will be written. The Summary of Findings in the CSA will set the foundation for the areas Monterey County CWS and Probation would like to improve in the upcoming System Improvement Plan (SIP).



Monterey County
Family and Children's Services
and
Probation Department Juvenile Division

2018 Focus Groups
and
Stakeholder Meeting Report

Prepared by Shared Vision Consultants

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Monterey County
Family and Children’s Services and Probation Department Juvenile Division
2018 Focus Groups and Stakeholder Meeting Report

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Monterey County
Family and Children's Services and Probation Department Juvenile Division
2018 Focus Groups and Stakeholder Meeting Report

Introduction

Monterey County has commenced the California Child and Family (C-CFSR) review beginning with Monterey County's County Self-Assessment (CSA). The CSA is a comprehensive review of Monterey Family and Children's Services (FCS) and the Probation Department Juvenile Division for youth in foster care. Embedded in the CSA process is a Peer Review which is intended to provide Monterey County with issue-specific, qualitative information gathered from outside peer experts. The Peer Review, which is embedded in the CSA, was facilitated by Shared Vision Consultants at the Monterey College of Law in Seaside, California November 5-8, 2018.

The CSA process also incorporates focus group and stakeholder meeting feedback from various Monterey County FCS and Juvenile Division constituents. These meetings and groups assist the County's review of the full scope of services within the County. The collection of this information helps illuminate areas of program strength as well as those in which improvement is needed, which may include, but not be limited to service gaps.

The CSA guides the County in determining areas where efforts can be expanded, and funding allocated to maximize positive outcomes for children and families. The CSA is one piece of a larger continuous quality improvement (CQI) process which relies on both qualitative and quantitative data and is the foundation of the System Improvement Plan (SIP) to lead the FCS and Juvenile Division in system changes over the next five years.

Focus Groups and Stakeholder Meetings

A series of focus groups were convened in small and large groups, and in some cases, individual interviews. Each session was facilitated by Shared Vision Consultants (SVC).

Compilation of Notes

This document is a summary of notes taken from each focus group, telephone interviews, and the stakeholder meeting. Groups and individuals were asked questions from topics tailored to their interaction or relationship with FCS or Juvenile Probation. Below are the most commonly acknowledged community challenges:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Increase in homelessness
- Lack of substance abuse treatment services and long waiting lists
- Transportation
- Child care
- Restrictions to accessing Behavioral Health treatment due to Medi-Cal restrictions
- Challenging to deliver services in a rural county, as well as recruit qualified staff
- Rural county challenges related to transportation, lack of resources

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- Gaps in services and lack of referrals to the available services
- Language barriers for less commonly spoken languages.

Stakeholders – Governance Council

A focus group was held on October 17, 2018 with partners from Education, Probation, Child Welfare, Behavioral Health (BH), and First 5.

1. In the last three to five years, what changes have you seen?
 - New leadership throughout Probation, Behavioral Health, and Child Welfare
 - Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) has been a huge change for child welfare and probation
 - As a new director: implementing new systems of care specified by CCR
 - Ability to collaborate between various partner agencies
 - BH: our community being negatively impacted by the anti-immigrant sentiment
 - Education: change in demographics in schools, increase in indigenous families to be served
 - First 5: Cannabis money to be spent on prevention but the money went to enforcement and to fill the budget gaps
 - Medi-Cal changes: It will be problematic if the Federal Government decides to reduce the amount of reimbursement for services
 - Accessing services impacting a pathway to citizenship
 - Access for non-citizen residents to health care
 - Housing and homelessness are now at the forefront of concerns for Monterey County
 - Increase in instability in families makes placement more difficult
 - BH: Clinicians spend a lot of time stabilizing relative placements
 - BH: Lack of adequate resources, politically spending money on BH is not a popular way to spend money; no general fund dollars are spent on BH; limits capacity to accommodate growth in need
 - Ability to recruit qualified employees is impeded by being a rural county
 - Shifts to an entry level staff which means becoming a training organization, which is an added burden to leadership
 - Cuts across all professions, the cost of living working in MC
 - Generational changes in workforce, the emotional cost of the work
2. What are your thoughts about the uptick in domestic violence in Monterey County?
 - Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD), economic depression, stresses on families
 - Increased awareness and reporting
 - Law Enforcement (LE) is arresting on more borderline offenses
 - Training about identifying abuse
 - Improved knowledge about investigating domestic violence and stronger referrals
 - YWCA –has been more proactive in identifying referrals
 - Still not enough domestic violence services for victims
 - Victim/Witness only provides short term individual therapy
3. What work or programs are promising for prevention of poverty?

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- Bright Futures - Cradle to Career partnerships is hosted by CSUMB but it is multidisciplinary
 - Bright Beginnings prevention work, supported by First 5
 - Funding for home visits for CalWorks participants for families with kids ages 0-3
4. What work or programs are promising for rural service delivery?
- BH has worked to expand the services available in south county
 - BH has two clinics that serve south county
 - Transportation continues to be a challenge for people living in south county
 - Religious organizations offering support
 - Developmental pediatrician from north Monterey county to assess youth in south county
 - Education: Hartnell Community College is doing more outreach in south county and other communities
 - County budget cuts impact service delivery, especially prevention
 - Family Ties: Drop-in centers for food, shelter and clothing in south county
 - BH: partnerships with Seneca have helped all the services delivered in south county, not just BH
 - Having this Governance Council makes a difference in being able to collaborate
 - There is a "Out of Home group" that meets and strategizes to address multi-disciplinary needs in the community
 - Making CFTs accessible to the community and the elimination of Family2Family
5. Other things?
- BH: clinicians available at the high schools to assist with interventions with kids in crisis
 - Education: school of origin transportation effort by one solitary staff person
 - Child care is desperately needed
 - Not being able to bridge money for child care to help bio parents either after reunification or to prevent removal
 - Partnership with the housing authority to help child welfare
 - Services to undocumented families
6. Suggestions for improvements to outcomes?
- The County has successful collaboration interdepartmentally
 - High needs kids have a huge impact on spending so more funding is needed
 - Finding families and providing the resources needed to care for these high needs children
 - Reflective practice and supervision for workers in the field
 - *High/intense number of cases with hard to place kids*
 - Too acute to go to the hospital which lead to nationwide searches for placement

Provider Focus Group

Held on December 5, 2018

1. What does collaboration look like in Monterey County?
 - Kinship/Seneca long time partnership with the county, working together to provide services for the children and families in our county
 - Positive relationship between BH and FCS to serve families and children

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- CHS – “able to pick up the phone and talk with other partners for help and guidance
 - Partners do a good job - they meet, have good relationships and are working towards a common goal”
 - Contractor's Association Meeting
 - South county meeting for providers
2. What changes have you seen in Child Welfare over the last three years?
- Lots of collaborative meetings - Child & Family Team Meetings (CFTs)
 - Rolling out CFTs to Probation went smoothly because Probation was a part of the roll out of CFTs for FCS
 - Collaboration with probation and Behavioral Health (BH) is also good
 - The roll out of CFTs have gone smoothly
 - CFTs are more organized and D2H staff attends to support parents
 - The CFT process is supportive of parents
 - Includes Wraparound providers
 - High level administrative meetings happen and the information trickles down to program managers and supervisors
 - Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) is a big change, “It would be nice for CCR to begin to settle down.”
 - Title IV-E trainings at Kinship Center
 - Intensive home-based outpatient service
 - MCSTART see children between 0-11 years of age for domestic violence and drug exposure
 - Parents as Teachers program, home visitation programs for families with Child Welfare cases
 - Prevention programs to help families avoid opening CW cases
 - Action Council administers the Pathways to Safety, along with CHS
 - CHS offers Domestic Violence (DV) classes - court mandated or elective
 - New Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) advocate - trafficked children are placed in crisis homes
 - Outpatient mental health services, including drug treatment
 - Contract for services with referrals to CHS for mental health treatment
 - Lack of referrals to CHS from BH
 - Resource Family mentoring
 - Joint coordination with Social Worker (SW) and resource specialists
 - Social workers are feeling pressure to close investigations, which means early coordination with P2S.
 - Connect with D2H for Pathways resource specialists
 - Delay in assessments in placement with relatives – up to and including Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)
 - Lack of family finding impacts long term placement options and permanency with non-relative caregivers
 - What was previously a flat system is now more hierarchical

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- Lack of DV referrals to YWCA for 10-week programs related to parent reunification
 - This is a free program that is being completely underutilized. No referrals from Child Welfare or Probation.
 - DV advocates aren't included in the CW process – “cut out of the loop” in CW and Probation process
 - Overall concern around underutilization of services – not really making referrals, “things are more fragmented and siloed.”
 - “We are hearing that county staff are overwhelmed but how do we change so they utilize our services?”
 - There has been significant turnover of staff/senior staff and no corresponding transfer of knowledge.
 - Training of new and current social workers should include focus and orientation to available services.
 - Wraparound is designed differently than across the state; “the County had a good system previously.”
 - Need more meetings “across the board”, help transfer of knowledge and support staff
 - “Last couple of years, it has gone backwards; used to be a blend of services across mild to medium risk cases, now just in crisis and severe breach.”
 - Maybe form an Interagency council?
 - Have informal conversations with social workers monthly or bimonthly
3. Biggest Challenges for families
- Gaps in services
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Language barriers (other than Spanish)
4. Providers and Services
- Low visibility of the Child Abuse Prevention Council
 - Epicenter doing a good job with LGBTIQ community but is small
 - There are no recognized tribes in the county
 - Issues around serving the Tiki population – language barriers, many different dialects, and the use of translators is challenging as they are connected to their community and can feel uncomfortable in their role.
 - There is effective collaboration with Court but “always room for improvement”
 - It is rare for attorneys to be available for children and parents before court hearing
5. Top three areas where providers can assist social workers:
- Referrals/referral processes (easy and streamlined)
 - Family planning and engagement – education in available services
 - Relationship and trust building

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Court Partners

The focus group with Court Partners was held on November 16, 2018 and the group was asked what changes have been seen in the last three years. They reflected that there seemed to be more families reunifying than in the past. Additionally, more cases are being presented to the court where reunification is being by-passed. "Trauma informed practices are more noticeable from the beginning."

1. For children that are reunified in 12 months – what are we noticing as a **trend** for those families? What is the court's role in reunifying families? What are some of the challenges with timely reunification in Monterey County?

Services: There are a lot more services available for parents of 0-5 aged children; more so than for older children. "It would also be great to see more "therapeutic visitations" for this age group, which is another way of having interactive services for families.

Insurance issues: We also see delays in services for parents that cause delays for the families. Insurance components are a challenge, as well as making sure that we have language appropriate services. It feels like an ongoing fight with behavioral health to get therapeutic services covered through Medi-Cal and the "medical necessity" component.

Treatment: There are also limitations for residential treatment availability: not enough beds, and for the residential programs that do exist, the parents can only take younger children, and so if they have teens, they can't take them into residential treatment.

Housing: Housing is also an issue – particularly for parents who don't have substance abuse issues. Housing costs and availability is problematic for families. Lack of housing also prevents overnight visits for parents hoping to reunify.

Domestic Violence: "In terms of families with DV issues, it would be good to have a mentor mom program specific for DV – restraining orders for DV on its own is not a solution, because often, one or both parents violate the order."

2. How does FCS/Probation collaborate w/the court? How would you describe that relationship? How are goals of the agencies shared with the court?

"The relationship is good – but every two years, dependency court gets a new judge, which is difficult in building sustainability in practices and process. With every new judge, we have to get a feel for what is most important to each judge, and their preferences."

"Having judges move so often in and out, is a weakness. It makes it difficult for the bench to recognize trends and up and coming issues."

"For the most part, the judge goes with the department recommendations, but the attorneys find her to still be thoughtful about her rulings and not just "rubber stamping" the County's recommendations. That said – sometimes she may be overly concerned, which can cause delays."

3. Are the SWs prepared enough when they come to court?

Yes. "95% of the time. The court reports are always done on time, it's rare when there is a continuance for the SW/Dept. not being prepared." There's really only a handful of SWs that come to mind in terms of being unprepared and non-responsive. It's also very difficult for the department to request continuances, and judges are usually pretty strict about granting continuances to the County.

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On FCS's side, the supervisors have been great about getting on the SWs to get their court reports done and in on time. Oftentimes, some of the delay is that parents don't get their court reports on time, and their attorneys will request a continuance. From County Counsel's perspective, parents are not often responsible for getting their court reports and reviewing them.

4. How is visitation for families supported? What are attorneys' and the court's roles in visitation?
 - The department makes the decision on visitations. They are liberal with their visitations, and the attorneys really don't have any concerns with how visitations are dealt with and decided.
 - Visitation guidelines are given to all parents, but often in the beginning, parents will still bring inappropriate snacks, or won't follow the guidelines. *Guidelines for visitations are now attached to orders to ensure the parents receive them.*
 - "Later on in the life of the case, families are able to have visits at the visitation center, which is nicer."

5. Are there any services missing for older children around development delays, LGBTQ?
 - Haven't heard of any specific services for LGBTQ, but more of those services may be on the horizon. There really are no services out there for LGBTQ, though it does come up often for this group, and the County isn't equipped to really meet this need.
 - "For kids who identify as gay, the department makes big strides to find them placements that are accepting of their identity."
 - Culturally sensitive issues in terms of caregivers caring for kids of different cultures who may have specific preferences with hair (i.e., African American kids with braids, native American male kids with long hair.)

6. Are there enough Independent Living Program (ILP) services? Are we giving enough resources to youth of this age to help them transition?
 - Yes, for the most part, and it's helpful to have these programs start at an earlier age. *The earlier youth start to receive ILP services, the more successful the youth may be as Non-Minor Dependents.* The department has made strides to provide services to transition-aged youth around saving money, basic life skills, job planning, etc. "The previous judge had a bit more tough love, this current judge is also a bit too easy with the youth."

7. Are there any suggestions for trainings for SWs and POs, Caregivers, service providers, and court officers?
 - **Cultural competency** for caregivers- "We always have a certain amount of tension between concurrent non-relative caregivers, in understanding the process for the relatives and placing with relatives. Relative placements also seem to be a new appellate issue. If the department doesn't educate non-related concurrent placements, it can be difficult to then (at a later time) place the child with a relative."
 - **Family Finding** for staff – "It would also be helpful for the department to have more trainings on locating relatives earlier on, because it is very difficult to remove children from a loving non-relative caregiver, and place with a relative who may pop up at the 11th hour."

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- **Findings and Orders** for attorneys- It would be helpful for the other attorneys to pay closer attention to findings and orders, to check for errors, and for the attorneys to speak up in court if they have issues with the SWs or the Sups, when they feel that they haven't made enough of an effort to identify relatives.

Child Welfare Caregivers

A small focus group was held for caregivers on December 5, 2018 after being rescheduled from November 6, 2018. This group included a group home administrator and three peer mentor caregivers. The overall discussion focused on the general disengagement that caregivers feel with the department. Relatives are being prioritized in the RFA process and for non-relatives, the process is very long. The peer mentors shared that they feel hesitant to recruit families. There are no regular talks with the department. In fact, there was a recruitment drive at a church and no staff from FCS attended.

Child Welfare Youth

There were two attempts to engage youth for interviews with no success. One focus group was scheduled for the ILP Center on November 5, 2018 and no youth attended. Free pizza, snacks and a \$25 gift card were offered, but no youth showed. A second focus group was scheduled for December 5, 2018 and again no youth showed.

Child Welfare Parents

Two focus groups were held for parents. At the first group scheduled, there were no attendees. The second focus group was held December 5, 2018 with four parents. The parents discussed the services that supported them as well as the impact of the turnover of social workers in the Department.

- The role of the church and the support provided to assist in supporting parents through kicking addictions is very helpful.
- *Daughters of Hope* is a good service; a great experience through their mentoring, support and help.
- Parent expressed that she was not getting the help she needed and outlined her view of how Child Welfare colluded with grandparents to remove her children from the state. Has made complaints but nothing has happened.
- Another parent had her services terminated – she graduated from *Daughters of Hope* but found she was not given enough time to complete all the requirements made of her.
 - “Every case is different – yet the process is the same for everybody”
- Not considering homelessness - kids are suffering the most. Should be looking at ways to make families work without separating the children.
- Give them more time to do all they need to do. A parent held up a calendar showing how many appointments were required of her. Social workers do not consider how many meetings they need to go to remain sober AA/NA). That is also very time consuming and should be considered.
- **No referrals were made on their behalf by social workers to external agencies.** Found out about *Daughters of Hope* through another agency. “Feel like they are screwed all around.”
- Vouchers for assistance – never get. In April applied for a voucher for Housing – has heard nothing.

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1. Working with Social Workers and Attorneys
 - Attorneys do advocate but **parents need to advocate for themselves.**
 - "Social workers ask you to open up about what is happening for you and then turn around and use it against you."
 - There are a couple of good social workers but now it seems *social workers are by the book and not providing support.*
 - Believe they are not heard by their social workers and must be careful what they say.
 - Social workers need to have heart or at the very least compassion – they don't feel that is the case.
 - Needs to be a better system to help social workers – maybe – how many cases go to a social worker?
 - Two out of three participants had had social worker changes and one has had five different social workers with one changing after three months.
 - Need to fix this system.
 - Stress of social workers makes it difficult to engage with them.

2. Visitation
 - Visits with children should be more than one or two hours a week. "It is like teasing a kid."
 - During contact visits, Supervisors are always in a rush as they have another case to go to.
 - They don't get the time they need with their kids.
 - Supervisors are supposed to be helping but just make trouble.
 - Want to be treated as individuals with empathy.

3. Key Challenges:
 - Homelessness and transportation
 - Do not feel involved in case planning and decision making about where their kids are.
 - Difficult to hold down a job with so much to do. Also, as part of *Daughters of Hope* program you can't work until last two weeks of program.
 - "Feel tired and overwhelmed."
 - Getting help from therapist not social worker.
 - The programs they are expected to do have been helpful and do work.
 - **CFT meetings are good and helpful.**
 - "I did the work – not my social worker."

Child Welfare Social Workers

A focus group with six social workers was held on October 17, 2018. The group was asked the following questions:

1. In the last three years, what changes have you seen in the Child Welfare system that have improved outcomes for the children and families served in Monterey County?
 - The way Case Plans are written – The use of Safety Organized Practice (SOP) Language, etc.; the Case Plan is a lot longer (14 -15 pages); they are "broken down in time frame – this is helpful to the parents. Not just about services but what they do with it."

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- More auditing by the State – Cases in Adoptions; “did not receive communications from State that there are updated forms.”
 - Transition to RFA - “sometimes has been a rough road; getting smoother”, but “feeling way in the dark.” – *How to implement?*
 - Bringing in more relatives - “a lot more relative approvals and searching for relatives has changed.”
 - Parent Search clerks run through a check to find linked relatives and then review that list with parents for possible relatives and then it is passed on to the social worker
 - Court – searching for relatives – run through a new system – to find linked relatives – send out letters; include worksheet on the process in the Dispositional reports. *New Judge – January 1, 2018.*
 - Group Home transition to STRTP – conforming to this – developing discharge plans within the month they are admitted – a lot more paperwork; want youth to stay in group homes shorter amount of time – but group home is the last stop
 - “Kids that are problematic to place make the lack of group home placement challenging”
 - IPC (Interagency Placement) meetings – SW’s feel supported on these – do referrals for wraparounds, etc.; CFT’s
 - CFT is more child focused; more transitional meetings; more children in the meetings; sometimes parents are not ready for Court meetings – “CFTs are more challenging when they are at the court stage.”
 - Some facilitated by Seneca
 - Outside facilitation makes a difference in terms of having an impartial facilitator, but the process varies from family to family
 - CFTs monthly for every case in Family Reunification cases and has increased in frequency
 - “Increase in transparency about FCS’ decision making”
 - There is collaboration; a lot of communication to prepare Seneca for facilitation
 - SW does still have the option to facilitate a meeting
 - Multiple Initiatives - The County has been responsible for a lot of initiatives and it has been difficult to keep up with everything. It is hard to make sure everyone understands what changes are occurring in the County.
 - Family finding is really important for connections. “We still have some kinks to work out, but the spirit of it is a really good process.”
 - We have a really good relationship with the County Department of Education. They have a phenomenal team that is making sure children’s educational needs are being met.
2. How do staff give input into the organization’s decision making?
- Social workers are not included in the decision-making process for the agency
 - None “on things that change day-to-day”
 - Communicates with supervisor
 - Unit meetings – supervisors will go to their meetings to discuss with management
 - There are workgroups

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3. How do you work with populations in the County whose needs have traditionally been unmet or underserved (ESL, LGBTQ, families of color, homeless families, children with disabilities (physical & mental), families living in geographically isolated areas, single fathers)? What services are available?

- LGBTQ – Epic Center = any youth
 - No specific LGBTQ Center/Agency to offer services specifically for those youth or families of them
 - No PFLAG group in county
 - There was a specific training for LGBTQ this past month
 - Need more training

What are the gaps in services?

"This county does as much as it is allowed to do to support disadvantaged and disenfranchised families. There is a lot of out of the box thinking."

4. Thinking about the various kinds of services available, such as:

- Services for children 0-5 years old and children with disabilities
- Services for families affected by abuse of alcohol and other substances
- Mental health services
- Prevention services
- Reunification services
- Services to help children achieve permanency

"When youth come to permanency planning, we have begun trying to connect youth with family. We have had some successful permanencies we are proud of this last year. There are already six legal guardianships (two pending). We looked at parents again and actually returned kids to their parents and dismissed permanency."

5. As caseworkers, how do you support the concurrent plan of Adoption or Guardianship for children and youth that are not able to reunify with their families?

- Concurrent practice seems to have taken a decline. There seems to be a lot of marking the box, but not doing the actual work.
- "There seems to be so much focus on reunification that children are not being connected to other family members. When a youth does not achieve permanency, there is no adoption or guardianship resource identified when it moves to permanency planning."

6. How do you support placement stability for children and youth in foster care? How do you select a placement that meets the needs of children and youth? (For example: matching behavioral health needs, keeping youth in their school of origin, supporting independent living). How do you work with the FFAs in your county in terms of placement stability? What is working well? What needs improvement?

"It seems like placement stability has improved in the County. We have been working hard to make good matches."

7. What **support** is available for youth ageing out of foster care? How is the Agency finding youth forever life connections?

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- There is a need for more training for youth. Other than County directed programs, there is a need for Community Based Organizations (CBOs) to provide this service.
- The County has NMD 101 which is an orientation for non-minor dependents. This includes a video and other written media to help them navigate the changes in their role as a youth to becoming an adult.
- We are using more electronic communication with youth such as surveys and the NMD 101 video.
- Incentives are given to youth when they participate in services.

8. What do you think **social workers need to know about the work** before they come to work here?

- How does County find out about new information (i.e. new forms?)
- Courts – Court System
- All County Letters – come to SW's in a link
- Analysts will read also – and update forms and processes
- Family Reunification (FR) – Barriers/Difficulties
 - Housing
 - *Do reunify if in shelters*
 - Placements for NMDs
 - Housing for families in general
 - Language Barriers – *access to services/interpreters*
 - Permanency Planning does have interpreters. There is a need for interpretation of pamphlets/handouts and other media materials.
 - Transportation to services
 - Substance Abuse
 - Relapsing of parents
 - Accessing treatment
 - Limited to two episodes per calendar year by new Medi-Cal Regulations
 - Long waitlist for a bed for “in-patient” services
 - Limited time for “in-patient” services; lose inpatient eligibility if they participate in outpatient treatment for more than 30 days.
 - They (D2H) are offering more intense aftercare services for people who are leaving rehab
 - Domestic Violence – Gap in Services
 - Difficult to access around education, classes and individual therapy – “DV group would help DV survivors”
 - Only have YWCA
 - The “Y” has certain criteria in order to be eligible
 - Majority of cases have some form of DV
 - “Hot Sheets are no longer being provided to Social Workers” which helps to know whether the services were offered to parents or not – service providers have tried to call parents and parents do not respond
 - Mental Health Services
 - Medi-Cal – requirement for meeting “medical necessity” to provide services

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- Higher caseloads for therapists
- Two assessors are assigned to BH for the court unit
- Courts – “lack of assessors = waitlist and delays”
- Waitlist to be assigned to therapists
- Using MCSTART Services now
 - Not getting the collaboration and cooperation compared to the past process with BH

- Services for children with Disabilities:
 - Early Start Services, Head Start
 - San Andreas Regional Center (SARC) – Umbrella of services
 - Challenges with teens accessing services
 - Referred to be assessed by SARC by MCSTART
 - Barrier – lack of services providers for Medi-Cal
 - Occupation Therapy
 - Speech Therapy
 - Permanency Planning has created a good working relationship with the Regional Center. They are working together to make sure youth who will be leaving the system as adults have access to services.

- Training Needs:
 - Need more diverse training – they are all similar
 - SOP – Through Bay Area Academy
 - “Been helpful; more coaching versus training”
 - “Would be helpful to get together as a Peer Group to work on consistency, get ideas from peers, etc.”
 - Lack of consistency across workers

- What do Social Workers need to know before they work here?
 - Self-care
 - Time management
 - Organization
 - Making a big commitment to the work itself
 - Maintain a healthy work time
 - Toss new people in the deep end of the pool and then “sink or swim”
 - Be proactive
 - Ask questions, “especially the dumb questions”
 - Working long hours to complete paperwork and case plans
 - Lack of onboarding process for new social workers
 - Case assignments are high for new social workers
 - The immediate assignment of cases interferes with the induction process

- Onboarding Process for New Hires:
 - Core Training but no induction process
 - CORE Training – does not happen right away

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- Depending when you come in determines your caseload
- There were some efforts to give information on implementation
- "Used to have a van that new workers took to all of the service providers." This has not been done for newer workers.
- No policy for training/orientation for new hires
 - This would be helpful
- No Agency "How To" Language/Check-lists/Policies and Procedures.
- No debrief between workers when cases are transferred to new social workers

- Area of Improvement
 - Communications between workers and units when cases are transferred; it is getting better
 - **New** – "*Starting to meet two months before taking the case/transfer of cases so that the 'unfinished business' is taken care of.*"

- Something to Change:
 - Communication between everyone
 - New employee implementation program/policy
 - Finding permanent homes for kids
 - Solidify policy and procedures across the board
 - More technology development – to make jobs versatile and improve quality of work – Technology development is continuing to make work easier for social workers
 - More support for staff – i.e. less case load = this will help with family reunification

Child Welfare Supervisors

A focus group of five supervisors was held on October 17, 2018. The group was asked "In the last three years, what changes have you seen in the Child Welfare system that have improved outcomes for the children and families served in Monterey County? "

- New initiatives – CFT meetings, CSEC protocol and documentation, SOP, Information on the GRID (information on parents) etc. "A lot to remember and track with staff."
 - Workgroups among partners, relative caregiver mentors; between the teams (on-going = court unit forward)
 - Transferring cases, what is working well, what needs to be improved
 - Family reunification – check-ins with partners (behavioral health, etc.)
1. How do staff give input into the organization's decision making?
- Usually a memo from Management Analyst (MA)
 - Usually changes made without input from Supervisors
 - Measures are monitored by Program Managers
 - "*Lots of new programs to implement and monitor*"
 - Told All County Letter (ACL) has come out – *expectations/Analysts come to meeting/rolled out*
 - Big Decisions (SOP) – Told about in Supervisors meeting, then taken to unit meetings by supervisors

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- Accountability – tracking and measuring forms are completed
 - Documented and seen by others
 - Create workgroups within supervisors to identify solutions to address problems
2. What active efforts and services are in place for Native/Tribal populations? What are some promising practices when working with tribal families? What are the gaps in services?
- No recognized tribes
 - No specific services for tribal families
 - IQWA Eligible – “Tribe would let them know; tribe not taking jurisdiction but telling CW what to do; especially in regard to safety”
 - Placing back with family on Tribe’s recommendation even though there is a safety concern
 - Documented and sent to court
3. What do you think social workers need to know about the work before they come to work here?
- Family Reunification (FR) – Problem or Slow to reunification
 - *Shame*
 - *Burned bridges* with other family members
 - Substance Abuse – “cannot go into a particular program as they have been there; takes longer to get help”
 - Housing
 - Lack of
 - “Cannot get housing because of record”
 - Parents can’t access housing due to past convictions
 - Mental Health – getting help when needed
 - Absentee parents
 - Too heavily in addition, mental health issues, etc.
 - Judicial
 - Lack of consistency from the bench (not predictable)
 - Trauma in youth
 - Placed out of county – difficult to help
 - Federal Case Review
 - Social worker engagement
 - Good relationship with social worker – better outcomes with families
 - Conversation with social worker on needs
 - Effective case management and spending time
 - Multiple social workers on a case
 - Problem/Barrier
 - High Case load
 - Because of new initiatives – “time factor” can impact social worker engagement
 - Trainings at end of the year – crunch for time to do other job duties.
 - Staff Turnover
 - Why do staff leave? *workload, lack of support needed, supervisors are carrying cases, no induction training*

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- Supervisors' workload can impact how much time they can meet with SW and be there as a support.

- Services for Mothers and Fathers:
 - More for mothers
 - New group for Fathers (Papás) – but still a gap
 - Only in English
 - Spanish-speaking wear a headset for translation
 - Different level of engagement for fathers – “they feel shame”

- Areas of County Services
 - King City, San Lucas = have to take the bus or drive
 - Bus services take time/no direct lines from Salinas to South County
 - Most services are consolidated in Salinas
 - Services in South County
 - Team Decision Making meetings (TDM's)
 - Billable hours/mental health
 - Positive – Mental Health is upstairs in Salinas
 - Program where Mental Health, therapist – see family in home or afterhours
 - Families can join if there is an opening
 - Two social workers in this program

- Rate yourselves in Concurrent Planning:
 - “Work in progress”
 - Lack of placement impacts concurrent planning
 - No concurrent homes
 - Talk to parents about concurrent planning, relatives and adoption to see if there is a relative to work with
 - Asking about ICWA right away even if we aren't removing
 - Good at finding relatives – even during a referral
 - Two social workers – that are doing family finding
 - This is a pilot program
 - Trying to do up-front
 - Not doing at back-end

- Children who do not have a relative
 - First available
 - Sibling group – home that can take all of them
 - Asked placement unit to keep eye out for specific locations
 - Use Foster Family Agencies (FFA's); Not many in FFA's right now
 - Recently – a lot of placements out of county
 - Some homes in county for teens with special needs but are full

- Training

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- Mandatory Trainings only
 - Theoretical based for SW
 - Individual work to teach specific skills
 - Lacks practical training
 - Supervisor CORE
 - For Supervisors
 - "We did Coaching Training together so feel they can go to each other if questions."
 - Training feels reactionary
 - Coaching desired
 - "Chill out room would help"
 - Other:
 - Some Supervisors were not aware of the System Improvement Plan (SIP)
 - Some Supervisors think they received it but have not read it.
 - One remembers going through the SIP in CORE
4. What is working well here and impacting Job Satisfaction in Monterey County?
- Coaching and supporting Staff
 - Ties to the community
 - Enjoy working with staff
 - Support from Program Manager
 - Mentoring from Program Manager
 - Family
 - Working one-on-one with staff
 - Collaboration built with partners and other supervisors - Teamwork
 - Training and trickling it down to the workers who work with the families
 - Colleagues and shared values
 - Being part of a workgroup/hands-on
 - Trust with colleagues
 - Support of managers
 - Knowing people in the units
 - Seeing positive changes
 - "Passionate co-workers about child welfare and children in general"
 - Hands on in creating programs, working groups
 - If something goes wrong, there are resources for support who care too
 - Collaboration between Program Managers and supervisor is above average
 - "We're small enough to know one another and be familiar."

Child Welfare Support Staff

A focus group for ten Child Welfare Support Staff was held October 17, 2018. The group was asked "In the last three years, what changes have you seen in the Child Welfare system that have improved outcomes for the children and families served in Monterey County? "

- Starting electronically filing Court Reports

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- Creating procedures for all clerical tasks
 - Binti Program implemented
 - Getting rid of physical files
 - Wi-Fi – County as a whole got Wi-Fi installed.
 - Laptops for social workers (but not for secretaries or other support staff like in other Departments)
1. How would you finish this sentence? As staff, I feel empowered (or respected) when...
- Trainings – have it relevant to them; need to remember they are not social workers. Some is relevant.
 - Cal State Monterey Bay Customer Service Training is useful.
 - *Some social workers will not do some jobs (i.e. – change toner, put gas in car) because it is not their job.*
 - Show respect for each person in each position.
 - Need to have trainings for SW's on Office and also for Social Services Aid (SSA); Important to also have training on how to put in a child safety seat properly and what the laws are regarding this.
2. What do you think social workers need to know about the work before they come to work here?
- Changes in department heads – people left or retired; do not have new program managers to date.
 - Other changes needed = *put all paperwork and forms in electronic format* (starting to work on this) and also able to do electronic signature; have all information for Resource Families on line instead of in a binder = make it more efficient, less waste;
 - Training - *Secondary Trauma Training for Support Staff and SSA; vicarious trauma coping for all staff; training on safety for support staff; basic office skills; car seat training*
 - Job Satisfaction:
 - Helping Social Workers
 - Job Security, benefits
 - Helping kids
 - Co-Workers
 - The Community is our home and we are helping our community
 - What should a social worker know about working here?
 - *There is trauma everywhere – with the children/families*
 - *Medium county but small community*
 - *Pulling kids from homes is stressful and difficult*
 - *Child Welfare is challenging work*
 - *It's hard for people with trauma history to do this work*
 - How does someone find out about Prevention in Services?
 - 211
 - Refer to RFA
 - SAM's Guide – resource for County broken down by category = on-line

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- What about people who do not have access to internet?
 - Refer to Library; most have cell phones
- What do residents of Monterey County need?
 - Money to pay rent; food security; more Behavioral Health services; housing; affordable afterschool programs (programs are either low-income or private); bus passes, gas vouchers and taxi vouchers; AOD programs, help with rent, resources for kids
- Behavioral Services:
 - Collaboration needs improvement; Work in progress = relationship between CW and Behavioral Health
 - Denying that BH services are needed by families
 - BH "has cancelled at the last minute, which results in expenses for our department"
 - Need certified medical interpretation instead of using service aides
 - "Behavioral Health act like they are in charge."
 - Not enough Behavioral Health Services
 - Space - Need CFT's and only have two conference rooms and difficult to set up meetings with lack of meeting space
 - SW coordinates with Support Staff to set up meeting and get room and Support Staff works with Behavioral Health
 - Outside facilitated by Seneca – they set up the meeting and get the meeting room.
- Problem with Translation Services – if Behavioral Health cancels a meeting CW still has to pay for translation services
 - Office Assistants do certain translating and SSA's do others
- Reunification Obstacles
 - Transportation:
 - Offer bus passes
 - Gas Vouchers
 - Taxi Vouchers
 - More bus routes
 - County busses
- Issues:
 - *More homelessness*
 - *More drug issues – AOD resources*
 - *Expensive county*
 - *Lack of employment*
- Services needed to help with reunification
 - Housing - Families can be reunified even if the parents do not have stable housing.
 - Treatment/Therapy that is needed (drug, etc....)
 - Life-Skills for our parents (CWES as a resource)
 - Parenting Classes

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3. What's One Change you'd like to see?
 - Make the support staff feel more appreciated
 - Increase sanitation of the tools and the rooms
 - Sinks near visitation rooms
 - Upgraded mobile device
 - Restroom downstairs is broken; and needs to be cleaned
 - Fix Wi-Fi
 - Changing table in restroom upstairs
 - Secondary Trauma training
 - Equality – County is very diverse – people in all categories treated equally and with respect (as a professional and as a person)
 - Access to resources for clerical; database of resources for anyone in the County
 - Building is not safe
 - Building: *no storage; lack of conference rooms; we are outgrowing the building and it is falling apart.*
 - *Need Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA)*

Probation Youth

Three individual interviews were conducted with Probation youth on October 18, 2018 by telephone.

1. Frequency of meetings with Probation Officer
 - Monthly
 - “We talk about my progress here and I ask her questions about who I can have contact with; ask her to tell the people at the group home. We talk about how I am doing in school too.”
 - “I talk with her about family stuff and they can approve some people for them to let visit me...”
 - Talk about school
 - Probation officer checks on grades
2. Rate the relationship – 1 being the lowest and 5 being the highest
 - “She is a 5...From the time I am under her caseload, we have built a relationship and she taught me how to advocate and work together to get support and not on my own.”
 - “She’s a 5, she has done a really good job and she is fair, supportive, and helpful. She doesn’t try to scare me, she is just real with me.”
 - “She’s like a 5, she is a 5 because she gives me ideas for when I graduate program and how not be back in the Hall.”
 - “She wants good things for me.”
3. Types of Services
 - Therapy (individual and family), mentoring, tutoring
 - “I am getting therapy and feel like I have a really good therapist here. My therapist is good and whenever we talk she notices things about me...like my body language.”

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- ILP "...but they need to step up their game. They are embarrassing...learning how to tie string to a fishing pole."
 - "I got to ILSP and I like them *kinda* because I learn how to do things on my own."
4. Extra-curricular activities
- Not much
 - "not really, we play basketball and soccer against each other, but we don't go out with other schools."
 - "I play soccer in the placement outside on the lawn. I like that. It's fun because it's a sport I like to do. It gets my energy out of me."
5. What would you like to have changed or provided for your family?
- Less isolation in placement "The program is supposed to be about rebuilding relationships with your family but how do we do that if we are isolated from the community and our own family."
 - "What should be done is they re-plan the structure of how they want their residents to reconnect with their families while they stay here."
6. Connection with culture and community
- No connection with culture or community due to isolation
 - "Yes, they don't ever take those things away. If you want a Bible or something, they will get it for you. If you are into sports, they let you stay connected with that..."
 - "I am able to stay connected with my family."
 - "Sometimes I am able to cook some foods I like on holidays like Christmas. I am making tamales."
7. How would you like to improve foster/probation care system?
- "I think they need to change the decision makers to half and half, like people who have experience with being into group homes advocating for changes partnered with someone who does and have a say in what's going on, so it is balanced."
 - "Just listen to us..."
 - "And making the group homes a shorter stay for the kids is better because I have been in and out for four years and they are all bad, they have some good but all bad."
 - Placement closer to home
 - "I would try to make my life easier back home or different. I would do things like try to be a different person and not do anything bad."
8. Visits with Family
- Once a month "...it sucks we only get one per month."
 - One phone call per week
 - "We only get one visit a month and we have a phone list, so you can have as many people as you want, and you get ten minutes a person on Friday, Saturday and Sunday."

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Probation Parents

Two Focus Groups were held, one for English-speaking and one for Spanish-speaking Probation parents, on October 18, 2018.

1. How is your relationship with your child's probation officer?
 - "Good."
 - "I feel satisfied with relationship."
 - "Good, my probation officer will ask me if I need anything."
2. In thinking about your conversations with your social work child's probation officer, what has been most helpful? What helps you to feel hopeful and motivated?
 - "Talking."
 - "I am motivated by talking and getting lots of information on services and making changes to improve the case plan."
3. How have you been involved with the decision about where your child would be living?
 - "I had no say as to where my son was going; in fact, I was told I was an accomplice, I could not defend my son or myself."
 - "I made the decision. We were given many options, but my son wasn't making a decision, so I made it for him, and I did what I thought was best for him."
 - "I was informed at first, then no one was telling me anything until the very end. I wanted a place of rehabilitation for my son, not placement."
 - "I did not know where my son was for almost one and a half months. No one would tell me anything."
4. Let's discuss your families' case plan. A case plan is the document that lays out what services are needed. It also lays out what the County will do. How did you have a say about what was in the case plan?
 - "I was given a plan and told to follow the steps."
 - "I was kept informed. I felt I did have a voice and vote."
5. How well did you understand the process?
 - "I understood ok."
6. What would have made that a better process for you?
 - "I'm satisfied."
7. How helpful were the services you or your child participated in or received?
 - "Very helpful."
 - "My worker is very nice and patient."
 - "I would have liked more parent education classes."
8. What are the challenges to getting these services?
 - "Language, sometimes I didn't understand."

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- "Not enough information about drug abuse."
9. What else could the Agency offer that would be helpful?
- "More information about substance abuse issues, especially Marijuana use."
 - "TV commercials about the harm marijuana does to you. Commercials can be used for prevention in teen addiction."
 - "Educational classes in substance abuse."
10. When thinking about your child coming home, is there anything that could be done to help you and your family prepare? What type of services do you think you will continue to use after Probation is no longer involved with your child?
- "I would like my son to have a mentor."
 - "More parenting classes on how to implement rules at home; it's tougher as kids grow."
 - "We need more preparation as parents; it's going to be hard to have them home."
11. How has the Agency assisted you with visiting your child? How is that working? What are some of the challenges, if any, with visiting your child? How could visitation be improved?
- "I was assisted with transportation only once."
 - "It was difficult to get gas money for visits."
 - "I had financial hardship because I had to pay child support."
 - "Positive experience, my child had a better attitude with me during visits."
 - "More help with transportation would be good."
12. What supports could be provided in Monterey County to help youth avoid entering the Probation system?
- "Substance abuse education."
 - "Extra-curricular activities after school."
 - "Mentors."
 - "Counseling."
 - "Therapy."
 - "Educating parents on how to discipline our youth."
13. How is drug abuse affecting families in Monterey County?
- "Impacts entire family."
 - "Trauma."
 - "Excessive worrying."
14. What are some of the greatest issues facing families in Monterey County? (For example, poverty, unemployment, alcohol, other drugs).
- "Poverty."
 - "Parent's lack of education."
 - "Lack of psychologists."
 - "Lack of counselors."
 - "Marijuana."

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- "Lack of discipline at home."

15. How could the Agency better serve families and children in Monterey County?

- "More kindness and compassion from Probation officers toward the families. Children and their parents should not be called criminals. Some of the things PO's have said to me were very offensive. They make me more nervous and I don't know how to defend myself, and I don't know what to do; things can get very confusing. POs don't know how I live at home, and the struggles I go through. I felt the POs were punishing me by not telling me where my son was going when he was arrested."
- "Better counselors at schools. The ones that are there now don't work."
- "Probation officers need to be more sensitive and educated in dealing with families; show more patience and respect."
- "Drug addiction education."
- "Male counselors for our sons."
- "Big brother program."

Probation Staff

A focus group for Probation staff was held October 19, 2018.

1. In the last three years, what changes have you seen in the Child Welfare system that have improved outcomes for the children and families served in Monterey County?
 - Doing Child and Family Team Meetings (CFT's). "CFTs have been helpful. We are getting more insight into that; we're hearing from the families and natural supports."
 - "We used to leave kids in care as much as possible, but now we're trying to get them home quicker."
 - "It's also hard to get an order for placement now."
 - In 2012, we developed a risk assessment tool.
 - But now have been focusing on medical necessity.
 - Placement committee has been focusing on the appropriate placements. "We now have to assess the case BEFORE we put it on the placement committee list. We need to utilize local resources before placement committee."
 - "We're going to start doing CFT's through the Field Unit. Very new, just had one yesterday."
 - Commercially Sexually Exploited Children (CSEC) is new since the last peer review. We're going to be setting some protocols and training.
 - *We're focusing more on gradual sanctions*
 - We're collaborating more with the crisis center for our CSEC youth.
 - *We're working with Child Welfare Services to do MDT's. Collaborating with Behavioral Health to find services for these youths.*
 - Youth always want to work with Probation and not CWS because the CWS have such high caseloads. We have lower caseloads and can work with the youth more than a social worker.
 - We had one of the lowest caseloads based on conversations with other county PO's.
 - We have a low turnover rate for PO's.

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2. How do staff give input into the organization's decision making?
 - *Work a lot with my boss a lot.*
 - *Like to ask my peers for input on things.*
 - *Staffing with one another because we often know each other's caseload.*

3. Thinking about the various kinds of services available, such as:
 - Services for children 0-5 years old and children with disabilities
 - Services for families affected by abuse of alcohol and other substances
 - Mental health services
 - Prevention services
 - Reunification services
 - Services to help children achieve permanency
 - Services to support adoptive families and guardians of former foster children

What services are working well? Where are the challenges or gaps in services? What suggestions do you have?

 - We have the Epicenter. They really work hard to make this the youth's program. It addresses all communities; initially it was only for former foster youth. They also have community human services. They have a SAFE home and individual counseling. They have an outpatient program and housing for outpatient.

4. What active efforts and services are in place for Native/Tribal populations? What are some promising practices when working with tribal families? What are the gaps in services?
 - *NO, there are no tribal based services in this community. We've had 1 ICWA case.*

5. What efforts and services are in place for non-English speaking populations? What are some promising practices when working with these families? What are the gaps in services?
 - *Almost all the services we have are bi-lingual.*
 - *Tiki is starting to have an impact on us. Sometimes the families will also just speak Spanish.*

6. As caseworkers, how do you support the concurrent plan of Adoption or Guardianship for children and youth that are not able to reunify with their families?
 - We don't have any adoptions in this county.
 - *Sex offenders and youth who fail out of placement are the youth that take longer than 12 months to return home.*
 - CSEC youth are not going to finish or be ready for treatment. The clinician is working with them BEFORE they go to treatment. They still have to work on testifying.
 - Children that come from DSS that parental rights are terminated or have no family also end up in placement for a long time.
 - Delays in placement because of WRAP and placement orders.
 - We have kids that have history in DSS.
 - Substance abuse treatment effectively needs to take more than 6 months.
 - "Youth sometimes just don't want services."

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7. How are your training needs evaluated and met in the County?
 - *We get more than enough training*
 - *We feel like we're getting a training needs met.*

8. What aspects of working for Monterey County gives you the most job satisfaction?
 - *"Greg buys us chocolate."*
 - Biggest stressor is housing.
 - Also lack of services in South County. Even Gonzalez doesn't have services.
 - Another Gap is transportation. It could take all day to get to and from a place.
 - But they do have some services. Education is providing services in Soledad and King City.
 - *"Things are working towards bringing services to South County. "*
 - *Biggest stressors for youth are gangs and drugs. Large gang problem in the county. Lack of aftercare school services/sports. Families do not have the money to pay. A lot of families are very poor and work in agriculture. They have a lot of time away from the home.*
 - We don't have a contact with the School-based services. But have contact with the therapist through Behavioral Health. Sometimes they will be seen by both.
 - Kids have to earn incentives (phone minutes) in the hall by their behaviors and their advocacy.
 - Lack of communication in regard to the incentive.
 - Programming in Juvenile Hall: Planned parenthood, Strengthening Families, Take the Lead (SPCA), Journaling program. *There are a lot of programs in Juvenile Hall.*
 - It helps when placements and families are both local. Can be able to work with the families more.
 - Over the years, the relationship between DSS and Probation has improved immensely.
 - I would like to improve collaboration with Education. *It's a need. "They need to identify them if they need special education needs. It's ridiculous to get them to get an IEP or assessment for the youth. We have to advocate for the families to get the services for the youth".*
 - *Justin from Alternative Ed to help with our families. A lot of our placement kids are in Alternative Ed. and not mainstream.*
 - Having a MCOE placed with Probation has been a huge help. MCOE is a help, but the schools are difficult to work with once Schools find out that a kid was on Probation, then the schools want them out.
 - *"Earl is a great person to have at your IEPS. He's super helpful and knows a lot of things."*

Job Satisfaction:

- Reward is knowing that we were helping a youth even though this youth had a difficult background.
- We have a good team at this place.
- *"I see the officers develop a relationship with each and every kid. Like a parent role for the youth."*
- Making a positive impact on people's lives. Really good kids, they just need some guidance and supports.
- Working with the family to get out of the gang ties.
- Seeing kids' accomplishments and successes.

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- Supervisor is really supportive because he's been a PO too.
- Paying it forward. The PO's have such passion for these kids.
- A lot of stigma with law enforcement. "But it nice that kids like their PO's. We're not just the big-bad PO. We're their parents, their support, their friends."

Conclusion

Soliciting and gathering input from stakeholders is invaluable and improves the respect and connection between the Department and its partners. It can affirm the processes that are working well, identify strengths that can be leveraged and built upon, and demonstrate change and improvement from earlier periods; however, input can also be challenging to hear when it highlights the system's weak points and problems. Yet, this is the most valuable qualitative data needed to build a strong and focused County Self-Assessment and System Improvement Plan (SIP).

A summary of positive trends as well as challenges to be considered in planning for the SIP is below.

Positive Trends

- Overall commitment and connection of the staff to the Monterey community and passion for working with families to improve their circumstances.
- Overall positive relationship with partners such as Seneca, Behavioral Health, Office of Education and the Court System.
- History of strong County collaboration.
- Desire by stakeholders and community partners to collaborate with FCS and Probation to improve the system for children and families as well as to improve support for staff.
- Increasing engagement of families due to implementation of Child and Family Team meetings (CFTs).
- Family Finding and Relative searches are strong.
- Strong assessment process utilizing MCSTART for mental health and Regional Center clients.
- Use of Safety Organized Practice in Child Welfare.
- Satisfied Probation staff
- High regard by youth for Probation Officers.
- Improved relationship between FCS and Probation
- Improved use of technology to support FCS staff including distribution of laptops to social workers, electronically filing reports, and eliminating paper files.

System Challenges

- Lack of referrals to service providers. Providers report that there are serious gaps in knowledge about services by Child Welfare and Probation staff. Many of the gaps in knowledge may be related to the turnover of staff at all levels. Many groups mentioned a loss in institutional knowledge due to the turnover, as well as an increase in hierarchy.
- Limited resources and services in South Monterey County.

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- Lack of engagement of youth in Child Welfare. As noted in the report, youth did not participate in the focus groups despite the monetary incentives.
- Lack of engagement of stakeholders. The partners that did participate in focus groups noted feeling disconnected and disengaged from the Department.
- FCS Leadership has changed recently. Some note the leadership seems more hierarchal and lacking institutional knowledge.
- Caregivers are disengaged from Department. The caregivers who participated were peer mentors and shared feeling disengaged from the Department, which was negatively impacting their desire to refer new families to become approved for placement.
- Resource Family Approval (RFA) process is long and non-relatives feel disenfranchised from recruiting others to become families. Placements are lacking as a result.
- High turnover in social workers. Parents discussed having multiple social workers while in the reunification process and felt it negatively impacted them.
- Inadequate induction training for social workers. All new social workers receive CORE training through the Bay Area Training Academy per California requirements; however, the focus groups as well as the Peer Review revealed that a County-specific new worker Induction training was not provided. New social workers are assigned cases upon starting their new positions.
- Inadequate ongoing training for current staff. Training is generally just mandatory or focused in topic, such as for SOP. Training related to trauma was widely desired for all staff.
- Staff, including social workers and support staff, do not feel included in decision making in FCS.
- Transition of cases between social workers is inconsistent, when transferred to new social workers.
- Placement location is a barrier to reunification for Probation families and youth as it negatively impacts the ability to visit and can be isolating for some youth.