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Children and Family Services

Issue

The 2002-2003 Grand Jury and, subsequently, two other investigating bodies investigated and made recommendations regarding the administration of San Mateo County's Child Welfare Services. Have those recommendations been implemented?

Summary

The death of a baby in foster care, during unsupervised visitation with his abusive father in December 2002, was attributed principally to a failure in communication between the court and Child Welfare Services. Subsequently, the San Mateo County Child Welfare Services, now known as Children and Family Services (CFS) was the subject of three internal reviews and a reform process, a public hearing and report from the Juvenile Court, a Grand Jury investigation, a Blue Ribbon Commission, and an investigation commissioned by the Board of Supervisors. Recommendations were made and issued from each of these investigations. This Grand Jury addresses those recommendations pertaining to morale; communication; supervision and training of staff; location of services; foster parent organization and support; relationships with court, social agencies, and medical resources; and agency oversight.

The 2004-2005 Grand Jury investigated the CFS responses to the recommendations made relative to its staffing policies, procedures and evaluation, its foster care system, and its staff training and interaction with the court system. The Grand Jury interviewed administration and staff, including case workers and court workers; met with a representative of the Foster Parents Association; conducted a survey of Children and Family Services social workers; reviewed various state-mandated reports; and attended a meeting of social workers and foster parents.

While improvements have been made, the 2004-2005 Grand Jury found that many CFS staff members reported continuing problems with regionalization of services, time consumed by data entry, changes in management policies, and training they rated fair to poor. Staff rated the new program of court training as useful. However, agency support to the foster parent system has been slow to develop and needs improvement.

Recommendations by the Grand Jury to the Human Services Agency include strengthening initial training for CFS workers; providing staff with additional clerical help and technological support; conducting regular annual personnel evaluations; centralizing child welfare services; and continuing improvement in relationships with court, other social service agencies, medical professionals, and foster parents. To provide needed oversight of CFS operation, the Grand Jury recommends that the agency seek accreditation by the Child Welfare League by 2006.

Recommendations to support and strengthen the foster parent system include completing the Foster Parents' Manual and the Foster Parents' Bill of Rights by September 1, 2005. To enable foster parents to do their job well, CFS must assure that they receive the information needed to enroll children in school and in the Medi-Cal program within 30 days of placement. The Grand Jury further recommends that the Foster Parent Liaison, an office within the agency, be empowered to provide effective service to foster parents and children in a private setting.



Children and Family Services

Issue

The 2002-2003 Grand Jury and, subsequently, two other investigating bodies investigated and made recommendations regarding the administration of San Mateo County's Child Welfare Services. Have those recommendations been implemented?

Background

A baby in foster care died during unsupervised visitation with his father in December 2002. Since then, under the Human Services Agency (HSA), the San Mateo County Child Welfare Services, now known as Children and Family Services (CFS), has been the subject of three internal formal reviews and a CFS process of reform involving changes in staffing, policies, procedures, and evaluation. Following a public hearing and report from the Juvenile Court in April 2003, the 2002-2003 Grand Jury investigated Children and Family Services, as did a specially convened Blue Ribbon Commission, reporting in February 2004. Additionally, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors commissioned Charlene Chase, a highly qualified and experienced administrator, to conduct a two-stage investigation for the County. The recommendations pertaining to morale, communication, supervision, and training of staff, location of services, foster parent organization and support, relationships with court, social agencies, medical resources, and agency oversight had much in common.

The 2004-2005 Grand Jury determined that an investigation following up on the CFS response to those recommendations was important. To that end, the Grand Jury interviewed administration and staff at Human Services, court personnel, and a representative of the Foster Parents Association; conducted a survey of social workers at Children and Family Services; reviewed various state mandated reports, and attended a meeting of social workers and foster parents. The results presented here include issues relevant to the previous recommendations and additional areas of concern. Findings are presented in two sections: Children and Family Services, and Foster Parents.

Findings

Children and Family Services

Management. For the last two years, Children and Family Services (CFS) has reorganized to address issues concerning accessibility to supervisors and management, and methods to increase accountability. A newly established position, Director of Children and Family Services, created a center of authority for social workers. In addition, CFS increased the number of supervisors and added a Human Services Manager. Children and Family Services also addressed the previous criticisms alleging poor communication by emphasizing its “open door” policy, adding additional supervisory level meetings, and reinforcing the requirement for annual personnel evaluations. Newly instituted monthly department head meetings were established to give staff direct access to the Director, and quarterly sectional meetings with all Child Welfare staff were designed to enable discussions of new policies, procedures, current issues, and staff needs.

Staff. Given the high level of stress associated with the social worker position and the resulting turnover, adequate staffing is a continuing concern. In 2004, more than 20 people were hired and trained, replacing workers who retired or moved to another position. CFS hired a Child Welfare Court Officer, bringing that number to three, increasing support for social workers who need to prepare for court appearances.

The Grand Jury survey indicated that a substantial amount of social worker’s time is spent on documentation and report writing, citing percentages between 30 % and 40 %. A few replies stated that half their time was spent on reports. The Grand Jury recognizes that there is mandated reporting but found that the reporting burden could affect negatively the time available for direct services to families. Respondents to the survey requested improved staff access to technological support already available in the county. The survey further indicated a need for additional county services, including transportation for clients and staff for services or court appearances.

Children and Family Services policy is that social workers meet with the child and family at least once a month. CFS has made improvements in this area, from 74.4% compliance in July 2003 to 95.3% compliance in March 2004. This exceeds the state-required level of compliance. Additionally, CFS caseloads are lower, compared to other counties, although higher than caseloads set out in state or accreditation standards. Social workers reported that personnel performance evaluations are still not being done regularly, although there is evidence that meeting the goal of annual evaluations is improving.

Training. CFS has the following training programs in place:

1. Social workers are required to attend an initial ten-week, 100-hour training program covering policy, law, and procedures in the Child Welfare system. In our survey social workers rated this program as “average” to “poor”. Ongoing training is provided by the Bay Area Training Academy, but is not required and CFS provides no incentives or disincentives regarding attendance. Since November 2004, they *are* required to attend court training classes, a need identified in the surveys describing workers’ discomfort with court procedures. These classes were put into place by CFS in direct response to the findings of all the previous investigating bodies. When in full operation, the 22-hour training will include courtroom testimony, report writing, legal standards, information gathering, investigative techniques, and overviews of code changes. The County Counsel’s office, as of November 1, 2004, is providing training through classes and a moot court.
2. Supervisors have a mandated ten-class training program to improve supervisory skills and competencies. Most supervisors and managers do attend.
3. New foster parents receive at least twelve hours of training over a period of six weeks. As part of their training by CFS, foster parents are given a class on how the court operates. This class should help clear up confusion concerning the use of the JV290 form used by foster parents to provide information about the child to the court.

Regionalization. CFS is located in several different areas of the County. Currently, there are three regional offices: North, South and Central, but there are a number of other office sites. The advantages of regionalization include easy accessibility to clients and to community resources. However, as documented in the Blue Ribbon Report and the Court/Board of Supervisors’ investigator’s recent assessment, the disadvantages are many. Multiple locations reduce accessibility to colleagues and supervisors, and create frequent staffing challenges. Communication breakdown results among and between social workers as well as service providers, other agencies and County departments that provide support and services. Multiple smaller offices often result in poor communication and isolation causing concerns about staff and client security. The regionalized structure approach impedes the provision of ongoing training, whether offered by HSA or others.

Accreditation. HSA is working toward accreditation. The Grand Jury recognizes this is a worthwhile albeit resource-intensive pursuit that can provide an objective review of HSA. Accreditation with a national accreditation agency such as the Child Welfare League would provide the oversight recommended by the Blue Ribbon panel.

Team Decision Making. The new Director instituted the “TDM” meeting, held for all placement decisions for children in the Child Welfare system, and created a TDM unit within CFS. Members of the team can include parents, foster parents, caseworkers, agency management, extended family members, and other relevant agency representatives. Sometimes the team can become quite large. The TDM meeting can be

called to handle an emergency placement and/or at any time after CFS has taken jurisdiction of the child and a new placement is being considered. Some social workers complained about time required for these meetings and some foster parents felt there was lack of enough notice, but, in general, this new process appears to be working well.

Collaborative Efforts. Consultants recommended monthly meetings of the department heads of Human Services Agency, Public Health, Mental Health, Probation, and Child Support. These meetings have not been held consistently every month.

Foster Parents

Although most of the original recommendations did not address the needs of foster parents directly, CFS has nevertheless become more aware of the importance of its relationship with foster parents. The Grand Jury describes here some of the actions taken to enhance CFS's relationship with foster parents as well as some of the steps that remain to be taken.

Recruitment. CFS is engaged in an ongoing effort to recruit new foster parents. One result of the shortage of foster parents is that over half of foster children in San Mateo County are placed outside county lines. There are currently 144 foster parents in San Mateo County, many of who wish to adopt.

Foster Parent Liaison. CFS established a new position, the Foster Parent Liaison, whose job is to help foster parents with issues that arise as part of their responsibilities in caring for foster children. Through interviews, the Grand Jury found that this position, set up to assist foster parents, has been unsuccessful in meeting their needs. There are several reasons for this:

- The position has no official job description nor is there any real authority to solve problems.
- The liaison is located physically within an agency office that provides no privacy for confidential conversations.
- Neither CFS staff nor the foster parents see this position as independent.
- When a foster parent is summoned to an administrative review and requests that the Foster Parent Liaison assist, that request has been resisted or denied.

Foster Parents Association. Foster parents, with the assistance of CFS, have formed a Foster Parents Association in an attempt to improve communication among foster parents and with CFS. In the past, foster parents had difficulty obtaining the names of other foster parents due to confidentiality laws. This association allows them to meet, exchange names, get advice, and air grievances. About thirty parents usually attend the monthly meetings.

Foster Parent Advocate. Children and Family Services agreed to fund a part-time position of Foster Parent Advocate selected by The Foster Parent Association. This position has not been filled.

Documentation. Foster parents experience problems enrolling a child in school, obtaining a Medi-Cal card for a child, and obtaining other documents in a timely manner. CFS explains that there are multiple reasons for Medi-Cal denials and delays, some of which are out of their control. Under the Welfare and Institutions Code, foster parents are entitled to receive a Health and Education Passport within 30 days of the child's placement, but this timetable is not always met. This "passport" includes information such as school records, medical records, and birth certificate. The Grand Jury also found that a current physical and mental health assessment should be made of each foster child at the time of placement. This assessment plus contact with a former foster parent or family member would enable the foster parents to understand and better address each child's problems.

Strengthening Partnerships Meetings. CFS and the Foster Parents Association have established the Strengthening Partnerships series of joint conferences. At the first meeting in September 2004, CFS agreed to work with the Association to develop a Foster Parent Bill of Rights and to revise a 10-year-old Foster Parent Procedure and Policy Manual. The Bill of Rights is in final draft form, but the revised policy manual had not been drafted for preliminary review by the scheduled completion date of January 5, 2005. Foster parents need the pages containing addresses and telephone numbers of resources, and directions on how to do their day-to-day job and to handle emergencies. In the interim this information comes to them by mail from the Foster Parent Liaison.

LAPP. Attorneys, former judges, and former Judicial Council members, who have a special interest in foster family law, have formed the not-for-profit agency, Legal Access to Permanent Parenting (LAPP). This agency is located in San Mateo County and the Grand Jury found it to be an excellent resource. The published materials from this agency cover all aspects of foster parenting, from requirements to become a foster parent through working with child placement agencies and courts. The materials contain citations to California governing code sections and information gleaned from national and other state resources.

Communication. In an effort to improve communication and keep foster parents informed, the agency sends out a quarterly foster parent newsletter.

Conclusions

Human Services Agency is to be commended for the many changes adopted over the past two years that have improved inter- and intra-agency communication. Professional leadership and staffing of Children's and Family Services, a division of the Human Services Agency, has been expanded and strengthened. Communication is improving due to the open-door policy instituted by the highest level of administration, but could be further improved by centralizing the CFS office as is set out below.

County Counsel's office is to be commended for developing a training program for social workers and foster parents to familiarize them with the Court process, including writing reports, completing court forms, and court appearances.

The mandatory initial training a social worker receives has not been satisfactory. This is a concern as it is the only formal agency training a social worker is required to attend other than court training.

Foster parents have become active, formed an association, and meet with Children and Family Services, social workers and leadership in Strengthening Partnerships conferences. The association has become proactive in dealing with CFS on critical issues such as developing a Foster Parent's Bill of Rights, and facilitating school and Medi-Cal enrollment for foster children. The Grand Jury commends CFS for taking positive action toward exchanging ideas with foster parents and organizing the meetings with them. But, with a critical shortage of foster parents in this county, CFS must make a continuing effort to address their concerns. This effort would be enhanced by stronger support by CFS for the existing foster parent families, making them ambassadors for foster care in the county.

The Foster Parents' Policy and Procedures Manual has not been updated in more than ten years. CFS is behind schedule in completing this important document. Sections pertaining to emergency and procedural information should be immediately available; additions can be made within a six-month time frame. Efforts should be focused on the completion of the manual.

Foster Parents need to be provided more information on each child placed with them at the earliest possible date, including access to previous caregivers. The Health and Education passport should be provided within 30 days of the child's placement, as required. If that passport does not include a physical and mental health assessment made at time of placement, that assessment should be made and provided to the Foster Parents to enable them to better care for and meet the special needs of each child.

The Foster Parents Liaison has no separate office in a neutral place. Foster parents are reluctant to come to CFS with a complaint or a concern and might be more likely to seek assistance at a specifically assigned office unconnected to CFS sites. In addition, there is no well-defined description of authority and, until recently, no written job description.

CFS is operating from many sites. HSA should reevaluate its regional model for the Children and Family Services Program. Services can be delivered in communities, while administration, executive leadership, and staffing are provided centrally. Regionalization for community-based prevention services can be maintained, but all child welfare services from investigation to determination and implementation should be centralized. Consultation between social worker, supervisor, and management would be facilitated. Staff morale and security would be improved and efficiency would be increased.

CFS is doing a good job in meeting monthly with families and keeping caseloads down but more improvement must be made to meet accreditation standards.

Performance evaluations of staff are being done with more regularity but room for improvement exists.

The Board of Supervisors is to be commended for providing funds needed to enable CFS to restructure in order to implement the recommendations for improved services.

CFS should consult with Legal Access to Permanent Parenting (LAPP), located in San Mateo. The guidelines being published by LAPP are excellent for foster parents. Written in simple English, they could constitute a manual that would be most useful both for practicing foster parents and for soliciting those who are interested in caring for children as foster parents and want to know what is involved, what resources are available, and what protections and support are provided.

Recommendations

The Board of Supervisors should direct the Human Services Agency Director to direct:

1.0 The management of CFS to increase support for foster parents by:

- 1.1 Completing the Foster Parent Bill of Rights by September 1, 2005
- 1.2 Completing the Foster Parents' Manual by September 1, 2005
- 1.3 Providing foster parents with a Health and Education passport for each foster child within 30 days of placement.
- 1.4 Assuring each foster child has had a physical and mental health assessment at the time of placement.

2.0 The management of CFS to work with the Foster Parent Liaison to:

- 2.1 Provide a working environment with additional privacy to enable the Liaison to speak openly and fairly to all.
- 2.2 Develop a carefully crafted official job description that delineates the Liaison's responsibilities and authority and grants real authority to act on behalf of foster parents.
- 2.3 Identify neutral areas away from CFS, such as an independent office and private places in schools, churches or community centers, where the Liaison can meet with foster parents.

- 2.4 Upgrade the CFS quarterly newsletter to foster parents to a monthly newsletter which would communicate important information, clarify areas of confusion, suggest solutions to common problems, encourage greater participation in the Foster Parents Association.
- 3.0 The management of CFS to explore possibilities for eliminating or simplifying the steps involved in writing social workers' reports and thereby decrease the time spent on those reports. Suggestions include additional clerical help and use of handheld electronic devices.
- 4.0 The management of CFS to:
 - 4.1 Evaluate and strengthen the initial training program for social workers.
 - 4.2 Become accredited by October 1, 2006. Reports should be made to the Grand Jury on progress toward accreditation every quarter commencing September 30, 2005.
 - 4.3 Reevaluate its regional model as regards CFS. Regionalization for community-based prevention services could be maintained, but all child welfare services should be centralized.
 - 4.4 Monitor frequency and thoroughness of personnel evaluations to ensure that all professional staff is evaluated annually.
 - 4.5 Take full advantage of existing technology, such as electronic transmission of reports, acceptance of electronic signatures, and any other support services within the County.
 - 4.6 Meet, or continue to meet, regularly with other community resources, such as LAPP, Family Service Agency, San Mateo Medical Center pediatricians and others to improve the relationship of CFS with the court, social service agencies, medical professionals, foster parents and associations.



COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
Inter-Departmental Correspondence

County Manager's Office

DATE: September 2, 2005
BOARD MEETING DATE: September 13, 2005
SPECIAL NOTICE: None
VOTE REQUIRED: None

TO: Honorable Board of Supervisors
FROM: John L. Maltbie, County Manager
SUBJECT: 2004-05 Grand Jury Response

Recommendation

Accept this report containing the County's responses to the following 2004-05 Grand Jury reports: Proposition 36, Children and Family Services, and Integrating Emancipated Foster Youth into Society.

VISION ALIGNMENT:

Commitment: Responsive, effective and collaborative government.

Goal 20: Government decisions are based on careful consideration of future impact, rather than temporary relief or immediate gain.

This activity contributes to the goal by ensuring that all Grand Jury findings and recommendations are thoroughly reviewed by the appropriate County departments and that, when appropriate, process improvements are made to improve the quality and efficiency of services provided to the public and other agencies.

Discussion

The County is mandated to respond to the Grand Jury within 90 days from the date that reports are filed with the County Clerk and Elected Officials are mandated to respond within 60 days. It is also the County's policy to provide periodic updates to the Board and the Grand Jury on the progress of past Grand Jury recommendations requiring ongoing or further action. To that end, attached is the County's responses to the Grand Jury's reports on Proposition 36 issued June 14, 2005, Children and Family Services issued June 16, 2005, and Integrating Emancipated Foster Youth into Society issued June 30, 2005.

Children and Family Services

Findings:

Staff is in general agreement with the Grand Jury's findings. The Grand Jury recognized many improvements that Children and Family Services (CFS) has made in the last few years, and staff continues to work toward further improving services to the children and families of San Mateo County.

Recommendations:

The Board of Supervisors should direct the Human Services Agency Director to direct:

1.0 The management of CFS to increase support for foster parents by:

1.1 Completing the Foster Parent Bill of Rights by September 1, 2005.

Response: Agree. The Foster Parents Bill of Rights has been completed and was reviewed by the Foster Parent Association as well as Human Services Agency (HSA) staff. It will be submitted to the Board of Supervisors in September.

1.2 Completing the Foster Parents' Manual by September 1, 2005.

Response: Agree. Following review by the Board of the Foster Parents' Association and HSA staff, the Foster Parent's Handbook was completed August 22, 2005. It is anticipated that the Handbook will be distributed in early October, with the information online by January 2006.

1.3 Providing foster parents with a Health and Education passport for each foster child within 30 days of placement.

Response: Agree. CFS policy is to provide a Health and Education Passport (HEP) to the resource parent, group home, FFA, etc. as soon as possible but no later than 30 days after initial placement of a child into foster care, in accordance with the Welfare and Institutions Code. This policy has been followed in the Family Reunification and Permanent Placement units. Recent process improvements to further reinforce this policy include development of a Health Passport Interview Form to be used by Social Workers as a template for obtaining health care information for children coming into foster care and inclusion in the HEP, and requesting Supervisors to remind their staff of the policy and to monitor adherence. In the Court Investigations unit, this policy had not been followed since most children in this unit are not technically "placed," but rather are in sometimes lengthy periods of shelter care awaiting Court jurisdiction and disposition including possible placement in an ongoing home. The Court Investigations unit has now been instructed to provide parents with an HEP within 30 days of the child's placement in shelter care.

1.4 Assuring each foster child has had a physical and mental health assessment at the time of placement.

Response: Agree. Every child entering a shelter care home receives a physical exam prior to admission. Further, every child receives a Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) exam within 30 days of a Court dispositional order for placement. Many children are referred for a psychological evaluation as a part of the Court jurisdiction/disposition process. All children who are in out of home placement are referred to the San Mateo County Child Abuse Treatment Program for mental and physical health assessment and treatment services. The Child Abuse Treatment Program collaborates with Partners for Safe and Healthy Children (PSHC), the Edgewood Center for Children and Families, and Youth and Family Enrichment Services (YFES). PSHC is a multidisciplinary team formed in 2005 with members from County Public Health Services, Mental Health Services, Alcohol and Drug, and CFS to provide services for children 0-5 years and their families. Edgewood Center and YFES provides services for children ages 6-18 years and their families.

2.0 The management of CFS to work with the Foster Parent Liaison to:

2.1 Provide a working environment with additional privacy to enable the Liaison to speak openly and fairly to all.

2.2 Develop a carefully crafted official job description that delineates the Liaison's responsibilities and authority and grants real authority to act on behalf of foster parents.

2.3 Identify neutral areas away from CFS, such as an independent office and private places in schools, churches or community centers, where the Liaison can meet with foster parents.

Response: Agree with recommendations 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3. CFS has worked with the Foster Parent Association Board over the last year to improve the effectiveness of the Liaison. The job description and responsibilities have been upgraded. Conversion of the Liaison to a supervisory level position, reporting to the Director of CFS, will be recommended in the September budget revisions. Following the hiring process, which will include input from the Foster Parent Association, the Liaison will be relocated by November 2005 to an offsite office in the community that will be accessible to the foster parents.

2.4 Upgrade the CFS quarterly newsletter to foster parents to a monthly newsletter which would communicate important information, clarify areas of confusion, suggest solutions to common problems, encourage greater participation in the Foster Parents Association.

Response: Agree in part. Beginning in September 2005, the CFS newsletter to foster parents will be sent out every other month instead of quarterly. It will

focus on changes in policy and procedure, Agency changes, and clarification of any current issues. Updates to the Foster Parent Handbook will be included in the mailings. Any time-sensitive information between issues will be distributed in special mailings.

3.0 The management of CFS to explore possibilities for eliminating or simplifying the steps involved in writing social workers' reports and thereby decrease the time spent on those reports. Suggestions include additional clerical help and use of handheld electronic devices.

Response: Agree. All staff have been provided with a QuickPad, a portable word processing keyboard device that allows for the recording of contacts, draft reports, etc. in the field for later transmission to their desktop applications. The possibility of filing petitions and other Court documents electronically is being explored with the Juvenile Court. Other technological advances are considered as new devices become available. A specific clerical person in each region has been designated to format and/or finalize court reports when requested. An additional clerical position was added in the June budget revisions to support staff and the court process, and another clerical position will be requested in the September budget revise to help facilitate the out of home placement and payment process.

4.0 The management of CFS to:

4.1 Evaluate and strengthen the initial training program for social workers.

Response: Agree. The curriculum for induction training will be revised by the end of the year to reflect new best practices, with emphasis given to the role of Resource Parents as a support resource for Social Workers, as well as an ongoing source of information about the children that they care for. Starting with the next induction training, one day will be designated as "A Day in the Life of a Resource Parent," at which Resource Parent representatives will address the trainees on issues and challenges they face with children in their care and with Social Worker staff. Another new component of the training is the "buddy system," in which Social Worker trainees are paired with experienced Social Workers two days a week for three weeks, first in an emergency response unit and later in a family maintenance/family reunification unit.

4.2 Become accredited by October 1, 2006. Reports should be made to the Grand Jury on progress toward accreditation every quarter commencing September 30, 2005.

Response: Agree. HSA has started the accreditation process in response to previous Grand Jury reports, as a top priority project of the new Planning and Evaluation Manager. A consultant has been hired to review a number of Agency polices, procedures, and protocols and prepare for the Council on Accreditation (COA) review process. Following implementation plan

development, the COA process takes approximately 18 months, with full accreditation expected by Spring 2008. Interim progress reports will be provided to the Grand Jury through the County Manager's Office.

4.3 Reevaluate its regional model as regards CFS. Regionalization for community-based prevention services could be maintained, but all child welfare services should be centralized.

Response: Disagree. In response to the Blue Ribbon Committee and several previous Grand Jury reports, CFS has moved toward more centralized management and administration. In 2004, a Director with sole responsibility for all CFS programs was appointed and several program managers/staff and programs were relocated to the Central office. In addition, a Labor Management Committee (LM) was established to evaluate the effectiveness of regionalization and make recommendations; further changes in organizational structure resulted from completion of several staff surveys in early 2005. However, a key component of effective community-based multidisciplinary services is a strong community presence. The placement of intake and ongoing staff in the regions working with partner organizations allows CFS to better serve families and be seen as part of the community. An LM subcommittee is looking at additional support for the regional CFS staff, to ensure adequate resources to serve the community. The Child Welfare Systems Improvement Plan has a strong emphasis on community-based service; enhancement of this system is an ongoing concern. CFS and the LM Committee continue to look for additional ways to support staff in the regional offices.

4.4 Monitor frequency and thoroughness of personnel evaluations to ensure that all professional staff is evaluated annually.

Response: Agree in part. The County requires that employee performance evaluations be completed for probationary employees, either three or six months from the initial date of hire. Regular performance evaluations are completed for full time, permanent employees every two years as required by MOU agreements. Starting in 2004, CFS management received and reviewed regular quarterly reports on all past due performance evaluations. By December 2004, CFS was in substantial compliance with the performance evaluation criteria; continued compliance is being monitored.

4.5 Take full advantage of existing technology, such as electronic transmission of reports, acceptance of electronic signatures, and any other support services within the County.

Response: Agree. As noted in our response to recommendation 3.0, the possibility of filing petitions and other Court documents electronically is being explored with the Juvenile Court and other technological advances are being considered as they become available. However, the transmission of electronic reports and acceptance of electronic signatures is a complex issue, as some documents and attachments filed with the Juvenile Court require original

signatures. However, CFS will continue to work with the Juvenile Court and service providers to establish processes leading to expanded use of technology.

4.6 Meet, or continue to meet, regularly with other community resources, such as LAPP, Family Service Agency, San Mateo Medical Center pediatricians and others to improve the relationship of CFS with the court, social service agencies, medical professionals, foster parents and associations.

Response: Agree. As a part of the Human Services Agency, CFS embraces the spirit of community involvement and collaboration. CFS staff participate in numerous community meetings with schools, private community-based agencies and other community organizations to support our community partnerships working to develop additional resources at the community level to support protection, prevention, and permanence for children. This involves a interaction with a wide variety of programs, as follows:

Children and Youth System of Care (CYSOC): weekly meetings with the directors of CFS, Juvenile Probation, and Mental Health that focus on children in out of home placements.

Pediatric Death Review: monthly meetings with staff from San Mateo Medical Center, Health Department, CFS, District Attorney, and law enforcement agencies to review deaths of minors and identify needs for preventive services.

Partners for Safe and Healthy Children (PSHC): collaborative partnership of San Mateo County Mental Health, Public Health Services, Alcohol and Drug Services, and CFS that meets on a weekly basis to coordinate treatment services for children who are receiving services from CFS due to abuse and/or neglect.

Family Services Agency: although the Family Services Agency no longer holds the therapy contract, CFS staff does meet with FSA staff on a regular basis to coordinate services at the Visitation Center.

Foster Parent Association Board: the CFS Director and Centralized Child Welfare Services staff meet with the Board Members of the Foster Parent Association on a monthly basis.

Legal Advocates for Permanent Parenting (LAPP): the Centralized Child Welfare Services Manager meets with LAPP on a regular basis to plan joint training programs for CFS staff and foster parents.

Adolescent Collaborative Action Team (ACAT): the CFS Adolescent Services Manager co-chairs this group, which meets monthly to develop and coordinate services for adolescents including the comprehensive strategic plan that looks at seven critical areas.

Court Roundtables: the CFS Director meets with the two Juvenile Court Judges, County Counsel, representatives from the Private Defenders Panel, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs), Juvenile Probation, Mental Health, and other court-related staff on a quarterly basis to discuss pertinent Court-related issues.

Child Welfare Services System Improvement Plan (SIP) Oversight Committee: community stakeholders from both public and private agencies meet on a quarterly basis to review and participate in the SIP for provision of prevention, protection, and permanence services for children in San Mateo County.

Citizens Review Panel: mandated by the State Department of Social Services, this group of citizens and agencies meets monthly to review CFS operations, policies, and procedures. A review of 37 youth who had reentered the foster care system in less than 12 months was recently completed. San Mateo County is one of only three counties that have a functioning CRP.

Fatherhood Collaborative: the Fatherhood Collaborative Governing Board consists of 15 County and community partners meet that monthly to provide oversight for the Fatherhood Project and looking at ways to better engage partners in the CW system. HSA/CFS is a member of the Governing Board and provides support to this collaborative.

Housing Our People Effectively (HOPE): Centralized Child Welfare Services staff participate on the leadership committee of this countywide collaborative of representatives from public and private agencies, with the mission of ending homelessness in San Mateo County.

Interagency Placement Review Committee (IPRC): CFS staff participate on this interagency committee composed of representatives from San Mateo County Mental Health, Juvenile Probation, and County Office of Education to consider requests for placement of children at levels above that of a Foster Family Home.

Youth Campus Planning Committee: the CFS Director participates on the committee with representatives from Juvenile Probation and the Juvenile Court to plan for the new Youth Services Center that is presently under construction. Additionally, CFS staff in the regional offices participate in numerous community meetings with schools, private community based agencies, and other community organizations to support community partnerships working to develop additional resources at the community level to support protection, prevention, and permanence for children.