

**CALIFORNIA CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES REVIEW
VENTURA COUNTY SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN
2007 – 2010**

Prepared by the
Ventura County Human Services Agency
Department of Children and Family Services
and
Ventura County Probation Agency
Juvenile Commitment Services Division



Submitted to the California Department of Human Services
Children and Family Services Division

February 28, 2007

BOARD MINUTES
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS, COUNTY OF VENTURA, STATE OF
CALIFORNIA

SUPERVISORS STEVE BENNETT, LINDA PARKS,
KATHY I. LONG, PETER C. FOY AND JOHN K. FLYNN
February 27, 2007 at 8:30 a.m.

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HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY - Approval of the Ventura County System Improvement Plan (SIP) for Child Welfare Services and Authorization for the Human Services Agency Director and Probation Agency Director to Sign and Submit the Plan to the California Department of Social Services.

- (X) All board members are present, except Supervisor Long.
- (X) The following person is heard: Judy Rivera.
- (X) Upon motion of Supervisor Bennett, seconded by Supervisor Flynn, and duly carried, the Board hereby approves the attached staff recommendation.

By: Kathryn Price
Deputy Clerk of the Board

CLERK'S CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that the annexed instrument
is a true and correct copy of the document
which is on file in this office.
JOHN F. JOHNSTON, Clerk of the Board of Supervisors,
County of Ventura, State of California.

Dated: 2-28-07

By: Kathryn Price
Deputy Clerk of the Board



Item 38
2/27/07

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COUNTY OF VENTURA HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

Ted Myers
Director

February 27, 2007

Board of Supervisors
County of Ventura
800 South Victoria Avenue
Ventura, CA 93009

Melissa Livingston
Deputy Director
Administrative Services

Joan Smith
Deputy Director
Adult & Family Services

Lauri Flack
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Business & Employment
Services

Judy Rivera
Deputy Director
Children & Family Services

Curtis Updike
Deputy Director
Transitional Assistance

**SUBJECT: APPROVAL OF THE VENTURA COUNTY SYSTEM
IMPROVEMENT PLAN (SIP) FOR CHILD WELFARE SERVICES
AND AUTHORIZATION OF ITS SUBMISSION TO THE
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES (COPY OF
PLAN ON FILE WITH THE CLERK OF THE BOARD)**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that your Board approve the Ventura County System Improvement Plan (SIP) for child welfare services, authorize the Human Services Agency Director and Probation Agency Director to sign the SIP and any necessary documents, and authorize its submission to the California Department of Social Services.

FISCAL/MANDATES IMPACT:

With the exception of a small allocation of Child Welfare Services Outcome Improvement Project (CWSOIP) funds already included in our adopted budget, there are no new additional funds to carry out changes as mandated under child welfare services redesign efforts as discussed below. HSA will utilize existing resources to create efficiencies within its programs and services to meet State requirements.

DISCUSSION:

The Human Services Agency (HSA) Children and Family Services (CFS) along with the Ventura County Probation Agency (a core partner in child welfare system reform) and other local agencies and stakeholders, have been engaged

in an ongoing statewide process to address federal and state mandates aimed at improving child welfare services and establishing a system of accountability for achieving performance and system improvement in certain areas.

These requirements are the result of federal legislation under the Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) approved in 1997, which provided the framework for the development of a set of outcome measures (Child and Family Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being) for state performance in operating child welfare services. Subsequently, California adopted AB 636 (Chapter 678, Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act of 2001) to address the federal compliance requirements. To achieve the objectives of AB 636, the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) has established a systematic process to review each county's progress in meeting requirements.

The process is the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR), which consists of a 3-year cycle in which the performance of each of California's 58 counties is reviewed in five outcome domains: (a) protection of children from abuse and neglect; (b) safety of children not removed from their homes; (c) permanence and stability for children in foster care; (d) maintenance of a child's family relationships and connections; and (e) preparation of youth for transition to adulthood. Performance in these areas is reviewed at the beginning of the 3-year period by completion of two assessments; a qualitatively focused Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) and a quantitatively focused Self-Assessment (SA).

The results of both assessments are then used to support the development of a System Improvement Plan (SIP) that specifies measurable goals for system improvement and presents strategies for achieving those goals. Counties are required to submit an annual update to CDSS of the SIP addressing progress achieved or changes needed. Ongoing monitoring of system improvement efforts is conducted using quarterly reports of relevant data extracted from the statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS).

The recommendation before you today seeks approval of Ventura County's SIP and authorization of its submission to CDSS. We have complied with the necessary process and requirements to develop the SIP in the format and content required by the state. This process has included a comprehensive planning phase among various agencies, partners and stakeholders in the child welfare services arena, completion of the PQCR in April 2006 and SA in October 2006 and submittal of both assessments to CDSS, incorporation of findings and recommendations that support the need for system change, and inclusion of the identified components of the plan including the performance outcome that is targeted for improvement and the most recent performance levels of that outcome, the improvement goals to be achieved, and the strategies and milestones that upon completion will result in improvement in the target.

The SIP consists of two sections describing: I) the planning process and findings of the SA and PQCR assessments and, II) the detail components of the targets and outcomes. Briefly, seven target areas were identified where improvement is needed. The agencies involved-HSA CWS and/or Probation, and the year the target will be initiated - 2007 or 2008 is also specified below:

- Safety (CWS only, 2007)
- Placement Stability (CWS and Probation, 2007)
- Relative Placements (CWS only, 2007)
- Reunification (Probation only, 2007)
- Adoption (CWS only, 2008)
- Reentry (CWS and Probation, 2008)
- Sibling Group Placements (CWS only, 2008)

A complete copy of the SIP is on file with the Clerk of the Board, if needed, for further review. CDSS requires that the SIP be submitted by February 28, 2007 and that your Board approve it prior to its submittal to the State. CDSS retains ultimate approval authority for the contents of the SIP. HSA is on track in meeting the requirements necessary for compliance with the CDSS directive on completion of the SIP and recommends approval. Your Board's approval of the recommended action will continue Ventura County's efforts to improve child welfare services by making positive changes in the system that will result in outcome improvements for children and their families in accordance with federal and state requirements. Under the new system referred to as "Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System" we will continue to operate on a philosophy of continuous quality improvement, interagency partnerships, community involvement and public reporting of outcomes.

With the approval of the SIP, HSA will be a step closer in meeting mandated requirements under the child welfare services redesign goal of creating "shared outcomes with shared responsibilities" for Child and Family Safety, Permanency and Well-Being.

This letter has been reviewed by the County Executive Office, the Auditor-Controller's Office, County Counsel, and Ventura County Probation Agency. If you have any questions, please contact me at 477-5301 or Judy Rivera, Deputy Director-HSA Children Family Services, at 477-5311.

Respectfully submitted,



TED MYERS
Director

Introduction

Assembly Bill 636 (Chapter 678, The Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act of 2001) established the Child Welfare Outcomes and Accountability System to improve child welfare outcomes for children and their families in California. The process for achieving this goal is the **California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR)**. The review occurs in 3-year cycles during which the performance of each of the state's 58 counties is monitored regularly in five outcome domains: (a) protection of children from abuse and neglect; (b) safety of children not removed from their home; (c) permanence and stability for children in foster care; (d) maintenance of a child's family relationships and connections; and (e) preparation of youth for transition to adulthood. An initial assessment consisting of a qualitatively focused **Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR)** and a quantitatively focused **Self-Assessment (SA)** begins each cycle. The results of both reviews are used to support the development of a **System Improvement Plan (SIP)** that specifies measurable goals for system improvement and presents strategies for achieving those goals. Process and outcome data extracted from the statewide Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS) are contained in **Quarterly County Data Reports** and used to monitor the results of system improvement efforts. Using this information, counties submit a yearly update that indicates goals, strategies and milestones that have been accomplished, need revision or need to be added.

The PQCR and SA that support this Plan were conducted in 2006. Staff interviews for the PQCR were conducted during the week of January 30, 2006 and focused on issues related to the C-CFSR placement stability outcome. The final PQCR report was submitted to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) April 3, 2006. The SA was based on results that were presented in the C-CFSR Quarterly Data Report for July 2006. These data generally covered the period January 2000 through December 2005. The SA was submitted to CDSS October 31, 2006. Data that have become available since the submission of the County's SA are contained in the most recent Quarterly Data Report (January 2007) and are summarized in the current performance section for each of the targets presented in this Plan.

The Plan consists of two sections. Section I presents a narrative that describes the SIP planning process and discusses findings from the PQCR and SA that support the need for system improvement. Section II presents the components of the plan including each performance outcome or systemic factor that is targeted for improvement, the most recent performance level for that target, the improvement goals to be achieved, and the strategies and milestones whose completion will result in improvement in the target.

I. Narrative

A. Local Planning Bodies

The County Children's Services System Oversight Committee functioned as hub for planning the PQCR, SA and SIP. The Oversight Committee includes representatives

from a number of County Agencies/Departments: Department of Children and Family Services (CFS), Probation Agency, Public Health Department, Behavioral Health Department, Alcohol and Drug Programs, Office of Education, Juvenile Dependency Court, and Community College Foster and Kinship Care Education Program. Private nonprofit providers of services for children and families also participate on the Oversight Committee: Aspira Foster Family Agency, Casa Pacifica, Coalition to End Family Violence, Interface Children Family Services, Kids & Families Together, and Tri-Counties Regional Center.

Development of the Plan began in December 2006 with a series of brainstorming sessions to prepare the initial draft of the SIP. The process included a review of the results of the Self-Assessment with a focus on findings that indicated a need for improvement in particular areas of the child welfare/foster care system. Personnel from CFS and the Probation Agency participated in this stage of the Plan's development. The CFS Operations Team consisting of Regional Managers and administrative staff worked on drafting improvement goals, strategies and milestones for the six child welfare targets in the Plan. In addition, the Manager and Supervising Deputy Probation Officer for the Probation Agency Juvenile Commitment Services Division worked with members of the Operations Team to draft the plan components for the three probation targets.

Upon completion, the draft was presented to the Children's Oversight Committee and the CFS Supervisor/Manager Group (described below) in January 2007 for feedback. In addition, the draft was presented to representatives of community agencies for input. Presentations were made to the Ventura County Partnership for Safe Families and Communities and the County Parent Leadership Group in January 2007. The former group is the designated child abuse prevention council for Ventura County and includes a membership of more than four-dozen family-serving organizations and institutions and dozens of individuals. The Parent Leadership Group is an advocacy organization of former clients who have successfully completed their case plans and retained custody of their children.

B. Findings that Support Planned Change: Peer Quality Care Review

1. Peer Quality Case Review Process

Structured interviews were developed to gather information from CFS Social Workers, Probation Officers and their Supervisors regarding specific factors that affect the **stability of placements** for children in out-of-home care. Factors included (a) characteristics of the children themselves and their families, (b) services and supports needed and provided to maintain placements, (c) decision-making regarding placement change, (d) ongoing visits with children, their families and caregivers by Social Workers and Probation Officers, and (e) worker training regarding placement stability issues. Interviews were conducted during the week of January 30, 2006. Two three-person teams conducted the interviews with the Social Workers and Probation Officers. A third three-person team conducted the interviews with Supervisors. Interview teams included

staff from San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties and CDSS. Team members participated in a one-day training session one week prior to the start of the interviews.

At the conclusion of each interview, the team met for 20-30 minutes to identify themes that were evident in the just-concluded interview. A theme was defined as a common idea or issue reflected in the comments of several interviewees, e.g., “high caseloads”, “need more specialized placements”, “too many changes at once.” Themes were grouped using categories developed by CDSS. These included practice strengths, barriers and challenges, training needs, need for systemic/policy change, resource needs, and areas for state technical assistance. Following the completion of all interviews, the teams participated in a final 3-hour theme-building session to identify, summarize and prioritize the themes that they heard over the entire week.

2. Peer Quality Case Review Findings

A number of themes emerged from the interviews regarding factors that workers and Supervisors identified as having a positive effect on the stability of out-of-home placements. These themes included: (a) specific services, supports and process including the Team Decisionmaking (TDM) process; (b) collaboration and teamwork among individuals involved in a case; and (c) placement practices and the availability of specific placement resources.

Interviews also identified barriers and challenges related to maintaining placement stability. Those identified by workers included: (a) high-risk behaviors of children and mental health and alcohol/drug issues of parents; (b) inconsistent delivery of specific services and absence of placements/services for children with special needs; (c) restrictions on the delivery of services such as wraparound to children in placements other than group homes; and (d) limitations on case work resulting from large caseloads. Supervisors identified additional challenges including the impact of numerous staffing and program changes and a general lack of parent involvement in service planning and delivery.

Workers and Supervisors also noted additional barriers and challenges posed by the need for training for workers and caregivers and limited availability of program resources and funding. In the latter regard, limited funding for child care, respite services and transportation and the limited availability of local specialized placement resources were mentioned.

3. Summary of Ventura County Peer Quality Case Review

Recommendations from the PQCR are presented in Section V of the County Peer Quality Case Review submitted to the California Department of Social Services on April 3, 2006 (see Appendix A). In summary, recommendations were made for improvements in child welfare related to (a) placement of children with “best-matched” caregivers, (b) implementation of the TDM process for placement changes, (c) clerical

and support staff, and (d) supervisor practice. Recommendations for improvement in probation-supervised foster care focused on worker and supervisor practices, training for Probation Officers and resource availability.

C. Findings that Support Planned Change: Self-Assessment

1. Self-Assessment Process

The self-assessment process involved gathering results for C-CFSR outcome indicators that were presented in the July 2006 C-CFSR Quarterly County Data Report. This information was augmented with data from the website of the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR) at the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) and data extracted locally from the CWS/CMS database. Aggregates for 12-month periods were retrieved beginning with the data for Calendar Year 2000 and graphs of the trends for each indicator were prepared and distributed initially to the CFS Operations Team. Serving as in-house experts, the Team met during June and July 2006 to review the compiled data, identify the systemic factors that were most likely associated with the observed trends in specific indicators and determine which of these factors could be considered strengths of the local child welfare system and which were areas needing improvement. The findings resulting from this review are summarized below.

Following the initial review by managers and administrators, the process was repeated with the CFS Supervisor/Manager Group. The group meets monthly and provides a forum in which all Supervisors and Managers discuss program, staffing, and policy items arising at their respective levels. The group was presented with the graphs and asked to comment on factors that were possibly associated with the observed trends. Feedback from the Supervisor/Manager Group was reported back to the Operations Team and incorporated into the factor analysis.

In mid-August 2006, the graphics and results of the in-house reviews were presented to the Children's Oversight Committee acting as the County's Self-Assessment Team. Input was invited regarding areas of strength and areas needing improvement as well as the specific areas to be targeted in the System Improvement Plan.

2. Self-Assessment Findings

The Self-Assessment identified seven outcomes where improvement was needed. Plan components to address these targets will be implemented in two phases across the three years of the Plan (see Table below).

Plan activities for four outcomes will be initiated during 2007, the first year of the Plan. First, recurrence of abuse for children who are not removed from their home following the initial abuse referral (State Measure 2A) will be targeted only for children referred for child abuse/neglect. Second, placement stability for children placed in out-of-home care will be targeted for both child welfare and probation-supervised placements (Federal Measure 3B and State Measure 3C [child welfare only]). Third, placement of children in

relative homes as their initial and predominant out-of-home placements (State Measures 4B-1a and 4B-2a) will be targeted only for children in child welfare supervised placements. Finally, the reunification of children within 12 months of entry (Federal Measure 3E) will be targeted only for probation-supervised children in foster care.

Plan components for three additional targets will be initiated in 2008, the second year of the Plan. First, adoption within 24 months of entry (Federal Measure 3D and State Measure 3A-2) will be targeted only for children in child welfare supervised placements. Second, re-entry to foster care will be targeted for both children in child welfare and probation-supervised placements (Federal Measure 3F and State Measure 3G [child welfare only]). Finally, placement of siblings together in out-of-home care will be targeted only for children in child welfare supervised placements (State Measure 4A-2).

Plan components for Targets that are initiated in 2007 will continue to 2010. Similarly, plan components for Targets that are initiated in 2008 will continue to 2010.

Target Area	Year Initiated	Agency/ies Involved
Safety 2A	2007	Child Welfare Only
Placement Stability 3B and 3C	2007	Child Welfare and Probation (Measure 3B only)
Relative Placements 4B-1a and 4B-2a	2007	Child Welfare Only
Reunification 3E	2007	Probation Only
Adoption 3D and 3A-2	2008	Child Welfare Only
Reentry 3F and 3G	2008	Child Welfare and Probation (Measure 3F only)
Sibling Group Placements 4A-2	2008	Child Welfare Only

Targets Initiated in 2007 (Phase 1)

a. Recurrence of Abuse/Neglect for Referred Children Not Removed From Home Following Referral: Child Welfare Only

This measure reports the recurrence of substantiated abuse within 12-months of an initial substantiated or inconclusive referral for children who were not removed from their home following the initial referral (State-defined Safety Outcome Measure 2A). The “base” (i.e., denominator) for this measure includes (a) children with an open Family Maintenance case and (b) children for whom a case was not opened following the Emergency Response (ER) investigation. Measure 2A was targeted in the County’s initial and current System Improvement Plans.

Performance levels for this outcome increased from 8.2% for Jan-Dec 03 to 7.9% for Jan-Dec 04. This followed a period during which levels increased from 6.6% (Jan-Dec 02) to 8.2% (Jan-Dec 03). In addition, levels remained below the overall statewide level for all periods for which data have been reported since Jul 01-Jun 02.

Factors that are contributing to this improvement include the initial implementation of the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tools in March 2005 and resulting improved decision-making regarding the need (a) to open a case following an ER investigation, (b) to remove a child following an investigation when a case is opened and (c) to plan services for children and families in FM cases. Other factors that impact Measure 2A include social worker visits with children in Family Maintenance (FM) cases, treatment and support services received by parents in FM cases, and continuing development of county-wide efforts to prevent child maltreatment. In the latter regard, efforts to strengthen community partnerships to serve children and families for whom a case is not opened but who are at high-risk for child welfare involvement are considered a priority.

b. Stability of Foster Care Placements: Child Welfare and Probation

Placement stability is measured in two ways. Federally defined Stability Outcome Measure 3B is the percent of in care less than 12 months who had no more than two placements during that period. State-defined Measure 3C is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort who had no more than two placements in the 12 months following entry. Measure 3C was targeted in the County's initial and current System Improvement Plans.

Child welfare supervised placements.

- Performance levels for Measure 3B decreased over six periods from Apr 03-Mar 04 (86%) to Jul 04-Jun 05 (81%). Subsequently performance increased over the next two periods to 83% (Jan-Dec 05) (the National Standard for Measure 3B is 86.7% or higher). In addition, the County's performance for Measure 3B was below overall statewide levels for the five most recent report periods.
- Performance for Measure 3C improved significantly between Oct 01-Sep 02 (53%) and Jul 03-Jun 04 (69%). The County's performance was 11% below the statewide level at the beginning of this period and 3% above the statewide level at the end. Levels declined however, in the two most recent report periods (65% for Oct 03-Sep 04 and 58% for Jan-Dec 04). As a result, the County's performance has again fallen below statewide levels.

While it is clear that (a) positive reasons account for a significant number of placement changes and (b) performance has improved for Federal and State stability measures, further improvement in levels of stability for child welfare supervised placements can be expected on several accounts. Improvement in implementing the TDM process and initiating an improved process for matching children needing out-of-home care with caregivers supporting those placements is expected to improve performance for this outcome. In addition, strengthening supports to all caregivers including relatives is seen as having high priority. In this regard, increasing the scope of activities of the Foster Care Ombudsman should be considered. Third, with the addition of a second recruiter

position, continued progress in recruitment of foster homes and development and support of foster parents based on strategies developed by the CFS Recruitment, Development and Support (RDS) Team will help to improve initial placement of children as placement stability levels. Finally, routine efforts to maintain child visits at the highest levels need to continue. To this end, monitoring, feedback and supervision for all required visits by individual workers must be routine.

Probation-supervised placements.

- Performance levels are available for Fed Measure 3B only. These decreased from 92% (Jan-Dec 04) to 77% (Apr 05-Mar 06). These compare with the national standard of 86.7% or higher and the statewide average of 95% for the period Apr 05-Mar 06.

The stability of probation-supervised placements is affected by a variety of factors. Among these are an increase in the number of probation youth with behavioral challenges which affect program adjustment and runaway, a reduction in the number of delinquent conduct disorder youth entering placement due to improved screening of youths entering placement and the opening of more local group homes has allowed the Probation Agency to place youth closer to home and involve the families more intensively. The implementation of several new activities has also helped to improve placement stability. These include regular inspections of group home activities, monthly visits focused on treatment plans, family-centered work in preparation for reunification, and maintenance of youth contacts with his family.

c. Placement in Relative Homes: Child Welfare Only

The restrictiveness of foster care placements reflects the extent to which the placement provides and supports normal activities of daily living for children in a community-based, family setting. Placement in relative homes is one of four settings for which restrictiveness is reported. The data are reported for children in 12-month first entry cohorts in terms of each child's initial placement (State-defined Well-Being Outcome Measure 4B-1) and predominant placement for the 12 months following entry (Measure 4B-2).

- Performance levels for relative homes (Measure 4B-1a) as the initial placement for first-entering children increased slightly over the last seven report periods from 5.4% (Jul 03-Jun 04) to 9.2% (Jan-Dec 05). This reversed a decreasing trend that began in Apr 01-Mar 02 when 19.7% of the cohort were initially placed in a relative home. In January 2003, a major statewide change occurred in the relative approval process that accelerated the downward trend through Jul 03-Jun 04.

In terms of numbers of children involved, first-entering children who were initially placed with a relative form the smallest group among the four placement types. For the seven report periods from Jul 03-Jun 04 through Jan-Dec 05, an average of 18 children per 12-month period were initially placed in a relative home.

Levels for Measure 4B-1a for Ventura County have remained below statewide levels for the last 12 report periods (beginning Apr 02-Mar 03).

- Levels for relative homes (Measure 4B-2a) as the predominant placement increased from 28% (Jan-Dec 03) to 35% (Jan-Dec 04) and have decreased slightly since then to 32% (Jan-Dec 05). Previously, the trend had been sharply downward beginning in the Jan-Dec 02 period when a relative's home was the predominant placement for 46% of first entries. As noted above regarding initial placements in relative homes, the latter decrease coincided with a major statewide change in the relative approval process that occurred in January 2003.

In absolute terms, the number of children for whom a relative home was the predominant placement following entry was the largest for the four placement types. An average of 78 first-entering children per year resided in a relative's home as their predominant placement over the last six report periods (beginning with the Oct 03-Sep 04 period).

Performance for Measure 4B-2a was below statewide levels for the last 10 periods beginning with the Oct 02-Sep 03 period.

In general, the use of more restrictive settings as a child's initial placement has decreased and the use of less restrictive settings has increased since 2003. The current decreasing trend for institutional shelter placement for first entries began in the Jan-Dec 03 period. In contrast, current trends for initial placement in relative, foster family, and FFA homes are increasing. The trends for relative, foster family and FFA homes began in the Jul 03-Jun 04, Jul 02-Jun 03, and Jul 01-Jun 02 periods respectively. While these results are encouraging, the Department's goal is to achieve higher levels for initial placements in the less restrictive settings, particularly for relative placements.

Initial placement in relative homes has been impacted by improvements in emergency relative approval process. Recent efforts to strengthen the existing approval process for emergency placements will allow more children to be placed initially with a relative(s). These efforts have focused on (a) freeing up staff in the CFS Relative Approval Unit to respond to Social Worker requests for relative approval during dayshift hours and (b) training the nightshift and a backup team to complete emergency relative approvals during nights and weekends.

Further improvements are expected as the TDM process for children about to enter care becomes more established. TDM meetings are currently being held for children in ER investigations prior to their being removed (imminent-risk TDMs) as well as within 48 hours of removal when immediate removal is required (emergency placement TDMs). Among other things, those meetings present an opportunity for families to identify relatives who may be willing to accept a child who needs to be removed.

d. Reunification: Probation Only

Results for probation-supervised placements are available for Federally defined Measure 3E only. This is the percent of all children exiting to reunification in a 12-month period whose reunification occurred within 12 months of entering care.

Performance levels for Measure 3E increased from 14% (Jan-Dec 04) to 67% (Apr 05-Mar 06). This follows a period in which levels decreased from 72% (Jan-Dec 03) to 14% (Jan-Dec 04). These levels compare with the National Standard of 76.2% and the California statewide average of 48% for Apr 05-Mar 06.

Factors that impact reunification for probation-supervised youth include (a) “best-matched” placements enhance the ability to reunify the child and the family, (b) the Probation Agency’s philosophy is that the placement process should be guided by the goal of reunification, (c) the Probation Agency is placing children closer to their homes to encourage family involvement in treatment, thereby enhancing the chances for reunification, and (d) the County’s SB 163 Wraparound Program which seeks to keep children, who would otherwise be placed in group homes, at-home and in their own communities.

Targets Initiated in 2008 (Phase 2)**e. Adoption: Child Welfare Only**

Federally defined Permanency Measure 3D is the percent of children who exited to adoption in a 12-month period whose adoption was finalized in 24 months following entry to care. State-defined Permanency Measure 3A-2 is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort whose adoption was finalized in 24 months following entry to care.

- Levels for Measure 3D decreased over the last five report periods from 43% for Jan-Dec 04 (24 of 56 children) to 23% for Jan-Dec 05 (14 of 62 children). During this interval, the number of adoptions however actually increased over the five periods from 56 to 62 (average = 59.6). It should also be noted that (a) the trend preceding the Jan-Dec 04 point (43%) had increased from 27% (Jan-Dec 01) and (b) the County’s performance exceeded the National Standard for Measure 3D (32% or higher) in seven consecutive periods between Oct 02-Sep 03 and Apr 04-Mar 05.

The local levels for Measure 3D exceeded and in one case equaled the overall statewide level in all 13 periods preceding the most recent Jan-Dec 05 period.

- Similar results occurred for Measure 3A-2. Over the six most recent report periods, performance levels decreased over the first five points from 12.4% (Oct 01-Sep 02) to 7.3% (Oct 02-Sep 03) and then increased to 8.2% (Jan-Dec 03). Prior to this, performance levels had increased from 7.3% (Oct 00-Sep 01) to 12.4% (Oct 01-Sep 02).

The County's performance has exceeded overall statewide levels for all 12 cohorts reviewed.

A variety of factors have affected local adoption results to date. Among these are (a) the impact of staffing in the CFS Adoptions Unit on adoption planning, (b) factors related to the timely completion of home studies, (c) coordination between ongoing and adoption workers to integrate reunification and permanency planning, and (d) recruitment of potential adoptive placements. Improvement in adoptions outcomes can be expected to result from operational improvements that lead to more effective and efficient implementation of the current adoption system.

f. Reentry to Out-of-Home Care: Child Welfare and Probation

Federally defined Permanency Measure 3F is the percent of children who entered care in a 12-month period whose previous case was closed in the preceding 12 months. State-defined Permanency Measure 3G is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort who were reunified in 12 months and then re-entered care in the 12 months following their reunification.

Child welfare supervised placements.

- Levels for Measure 3F increased over the last four report periods from 7.2% (Apr 04-Mar 05) to 12.6% (Jan-Dec 05) (the National Standard for Measure 3F is 8.6% or lower and the Jan-Dec 05 point exceeded the overall statewide level for the first time in five consecutive periods). Previously, re-entry levels had decreased from 12.4% (Apr 03-Mar 04) to the Apr 04-Mar 05 result (7.2%).
- Levels for Measure 3G increased from 4.7% (Jan-Dec 01) to 17.6% (16 of 91 children) for Jul 02-Jun 03 and subsequently decreased to 15.4% (14 of 91) for Jan-Dec 03. Performance for this measure exceeded the statewide level for the last six report periods.

Regarding factors that impact child welfare reentry, the recent increases in levels of both re-entry indicators suggest the need to focus on improving reunification services in general and on exploring relapse issues in the Dependency Drug Court program in particular. For example, attention may focus on strengthening post-reunification services both before and after a case is closed. This appears to be particularly important for participants in the DDC program.

Probation-supervised placements.

Results are available for Federal Measure 3F only. Performance decreased from 20% (Apr 04-Mar 05) to 10% (Apr 05-Mar 06). Previously, levels had increased from 6% (Apr 03-Mar 04) to the Apr 04-Mar 05 point. These levels compare with the National

Standard of greater than or equal to 8.6% and the California statewide average of 13% for the Apr 05-Mar 06 period.

The Probation Agency has recently initiated several programs designed not only to prevent youths from entering placement to begin with but also to help prevent youths and families from reentering placement once they are discharged. These programs include: (a) Adelante! Juvenile Mental Health Court that provides supportive and integrated probation, mental health and juvenile court services to the target population to reduce recidivism rates and decrease the amount of time spent in more restrictive environments, such as juvenile custodial facilities and psychiatric hospitals; (b) the Day Reporting Program which teams a probation officer with community-based service providers to case manage youth and resolve issues related to family, peers, education, employment and substance abuse prior to , and upon release from commitment or return from group home; (c) the Healthy Returns Program which is an integrated component of the Juvenile Facilities that provides a system of collaborative services to meet mental health, probation, public health and intervention needs of the youth released in to the community and to build self-sufficiency in the youth and their families who are referred to community support systems; and (d) the Repeat Offender Prevention Program (ROPP) which links probation officers with a therapist and/or substance abuse specialist in intensive home-based monitoring and treatment interventions.

g. Placement of Siblings Together in Out-of-Home Care: Child Welfare Only

The placement of sibling groups in foster care is reported in two ways: (a) the percent of children with a sibling(s) in care who are placed with all of their siblings (Well Being Measure 4A-1) and (b) the percent of children with a sibling(s) in care who are placed with some or all of their siblings (Measure 4A-2). Both measures are state-defined and are reported for the foster care caseload on the first day of the report month (point-in-time).

- Results for Measure 4A-1 decreased from 48% (Jul 04) to 41% (Jan 06). During this period, performance was recently as low as 34% (Jul 05). In addition, performance for Measure 4A-1 was below statewide levels for the last five report periods beginning Jan 05. In contrast, the County's performance exceeded the statewide level in eight of the nine periods before Jul 04.
- Levels for Measure 4A-2 decreased from 66% (Jan 03) to 60% (Jan 06). During this period, performance was recently as low as 56% (Jul 05). In addition, levels were below statewide levels for the last 13 report periods beginning with the Jan 03 result.

Current efforts to place sibling groups together should be reviewed in light of the County's inconsistent performance in this area. Analysis of the results for Measure 4A suggests that (a) effective recruitment of caregivers, relatives in particular, who are willing to accept and are capable of caring for sibling groups, (b) developing additional supports for caregivers who are willing to accept sibling placements, and (c) correcting

problems with documentation in CWS/CMS of the placement of sibling groups are areas that may be considered for strengthening performance for this outcome. In conjunction with this review, the importance of placing siblings together in the local child welfare system should be emphasized.

3. Summary of Ventura County Self-Assessment

The summary (Section V) of the County Self-Assessment submitted to the California Department of Social Services on October 31, 2006 is shown in Appendix B.

II. Plan Components

As noted above, the Plan includes seven targets that will be implemented in two phases. Timeframes for the initiation and completion of the **Strategies** and related **Milestones** for each **Improvement Goal** are shown in Appendix C.

TARGETS FOR PHASE 1

TARGET 1: Decrease the recurrence of abuse/neglect following a substantiated or inconclusive referral for children not removed from their home. (Child Welfare Only – State Safety Measure 2A)

Current Performance

As noted above, Measure 2A reports, for children who were not removed from their home following the referral, the recurrence of substantiated abuse/neglect during the 12 months following the child’s initial substantiated or inconclusive referral.

More recent performance levels have been reported for this measure since completion of the Self-Assessment. The last level reported there was 7.9% for the period Jan-Dec 2004. The two additional points reported since then were 7.0% (Apr 04-Mar 05) and 7.6% (Jul 04-Jun 05). The County’s performance for the latter periods remained below the overall statewide level for those periods (8.1% for Apr 04-Mar 05 and 8.3% for Jul 04-Jun 05).

Improvement Goal 1.1: Revise and/or develop new policies and procedures for use and supervision of all SDM tools and implement those policies/procedures.

STRATEGY 1.1.1: Develop and implement protocol for initial and ongoing refresher training of Social Workers in use of SDM tools for Safety Assessment, Risk Assessment, Family Strengths and Needs Assessment, Risk Reassessment, and Reunification Reassessment.

RATIONALE: Improved use of these tools will result in improved decision-making regarding child removals, case openings, service planning for FM cases, and family reunification.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Arrange with Children’s Research Center (CRC) to conduct a one-	June 2007	Manager, Ventura

time training for Ongoing Social Workers in use of all SDM tools.		Region
2. Arrange with CRC to conduct regular refresher training for ER and Ongoing Social Workers and Supervisors in use of all SDM tools.	June 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
<p>STRATEGY 1.1.2: Develop and implement protocol for supervision of Social Workers' completion and use of SDM tools for Safety Assessment, Risk Assessment, Family Strengths and Needs Assessment, Risk Reassessment, and Reunification Reassessment.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Improved supervision of the process will improve Social Workers' use of SDM tools and consequently lead to improved safety and other outcomes.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Form workgroup to develop written protocol. Protocol will include use of SafeMeasures to monitor Social Workers' use of SDM tools.	September 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
2. Obtain input from Supervisors.	September 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
3. Track use of all SDM tools across all regional offices in monthly Balanced Scorecard Ledger review.	September 2007	Manager, Ventura Region

Improvement Goal 1.2: Develop and implement protocol for Differential Response Paths 1 and 2.

Differential Response (DR) is an approach to ensuring child safety by expanding the ability of child welfare agencies to respond to reports of abuse and neglect, thereby preventing recurrence of child abuse/neglect in referred families that are at low to moderate risk for subsequent abuse/neglect. The services and supports received by such families are provided by community agencies and CFS Social Workers. The approach helps to ensure child safety by increasing the ability of child welfare agencies to respond earlier to reports of child abuse and neglect. Its focus includes a broader set of responses for working with families at the first signs of difficulty, including innovative partnerships with community based organizations that can help support families that are in need and before additional problems develop.

Achievement of this goal is expected to impact Measure 2A because the “base” (i.e., denominator) for this measure includes not only children with an open Family Maintenance case but also children for whom a case was not opened following the ER investigation.

<p>STRATEGY 1.2.1: Plan and conduct a quantitative assessment to determine characteristics of children and families in inconclusive or substantiated referrals in which a case is not opened and referrals in which a voluntary Family Maintenance case is opened.</p>		
<p>RATIONALE: Understanding the characteristics of the children and families to be served is necessary to build system of services and supports to address their needs and thus reduce the likelihood of future abuse/neglect.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Form workgroup to plan and oversee development and implementation of all DR activities.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
2. Develop list of characteristics to be reviewed for target population. Characteristics will include geographic location, allegation(s), family history, current family stressors, family composition, family’s current community engagement, etc.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
3. Collect, analyze and report assessment data to the DR planning/oversight workgroup.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
<p>STRATEGY 1.2.2: Develop a matrix that lists treatment and non-treatment services and supports, by type, that are currently available to children and families in such referrals.</p>		
<p>RATIONALE: Information about currently available services and supports to which families in Paths 1 and 2 can be referred is necessary to develop the process for making referrals. In addition, the matrix comprises a database that can be updated as resources in the referral network change over time.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Collaborate with the Human Services Agency Integrated Services Design Team (ISDT) to develop a countywide resource list.	June 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
2. Incorporate the CFS Training Unit resource list into the ISDT list.	June 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
3. Develop a process for the CFS Training Unit to maintain and update the resources list on a quarterly basis.	June 2007	Manager, Ventura Region

STRATEGY 1.2.3: Develop an organizational plan for improved screening, assessment, service and support planning and follow-up for children and families in such referrals.

RATIONALE: Development of a plan for coordinating up-front assessment and that streamlines client access to services will help to reduce the risk of recurrence of abuse for children for whom a case is not opened following the closing of their referral.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Consult with California counties that have well-functioning DR systems to determine lessons learned with DR planning, development and implementation.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
2. Establish a DR Community Workgroup to assist in development and completion of the activities described above.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region
3. Review and revise current Hotline practices regarding risk assessment and referrals to services.	December 2007	Manager, Ventura Region

TARGET 2: Increase the percent of children who have no more than two placements following their entry to out-of-home care for federal and state report periods. (Child Welfare and Probation – Federal Stability Measure 3B and Child Welfare – State Stability Measure 3C)

Current Performance

Federal Stability Measure 3B is the percent of children in care less than 12 months who had no more than two placements during that period. State Stability Measure 3C on the other hand is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort who had no more than two placements in the 12 months following entry.

The Self-Assessment reviewed performance for **child welfare supervised placements** through Jan-Dec 05 for Federal Measure 3B and through Jan-Dec 04 for State Measure 3C. Two additional points have been reported for each measure since those respective end points.

The last data point reviewed for Federal Measure 3B was 83% for Jan-Dec 05. Subsequent levels were 82% for Apr 05-Mar 06 and 85% for Jul 05-Jun 06. These levels compare with (a) the National Standard for Measure 3B of 86.7% or higher and (b) an overall statewide level of 85% for all three of these periods.

The last point reviewed for State Measure 3C was 58% for the cohort that entered foster care between Jan-Dec 04. Subsequent points were 58% for the Apr 04-Mar 05 cohort and 55% for the Jul 04-Jun 05 cohort. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 67% for all three periods.

For **Probation-supervised placements**, the Self-Assessment reported results for Measure 3B only. The last point reported in the SA was 77.1% (Apr 05-Mar 06). An additional point has been reported since then: 90.7% for the period Jul 05-Jun 06. The overall statewide level for this period was 94.1% for Probation-supervised placements.

Improvement Goal 2.1: Develop best-match process: Increase the number of licensed foster family homes available to accept placement of children following an ER investigation or exit from shelter care.

The “best-match” process is one in which a child in need of out-of-home care is placed with the available caregiver who can, with the delivery of appropriate services and supports, best meet the identified needs of the child and his/her birth family. The process focuses specifically on children entering foster care either immediately following an Emergency Response investigation or from a shelter care placement. The goal of matching child and caregiver in this way is to reduce the likelihood that the post-shelter placement will subsequently fail.

To date, development of the best-match process has focused on improving multidisciplinary processes for assessing youths, their families and the caregivers who serve them. The current SIP seeks to further develop the process by achieving four basic goals: (1) increasing the number of placement resources including foster and relative homes that are available to place a child leaving shelter care; (2) increasing services and supports available to and received by caregivers in foster family homes following the match; (3) incorporating relative placements into the best-match process; and (4) developing a procedure for documenting and tracking matches over time.

STRATEGY 2.1.1: Develop and implement a process of “**targeted recruitment**” to increase the number of new county foster family homes.

RATIONALE: The goal of targeted recruitment is to increase the number of available county foster homes in designated

communities by (a) identifying potential community partners with a commitment to recruit new foster homes in a specified community and (b) developing, implementing and evaluating strategies for achieving this outcome.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Reassess geographical target needs based upon current data and greatest amount of removals.	September 2007	Manager, Central Programs
2. Develop recruitment plan based on the characteristics of children removed and their families and the demographics of the community.	September 2007	Manager, Central Programs
3. Identify potential community partners to assist in recruitment.	September 2007	Manager, Central Programs

Improvement Goal 2.2: Develop best-match process: Increase the number of cases in which the existing best-match process is applied when a child needs an out-of-home placement.

STRATEGY 2.2.1: Develop and implement a procedure for documenting, tracking and each evaluating best-matched placement over time.		
RATIONALE: Determining the implementation and effectiveness of existing matching procedures will require the collection, analysis and reporting of quantitative information for placements that are made using the best-match process.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop and implement a protocol for documenting the specific factors (e.g., child needs, caregiver characteristics, family circumstances, supports available, etc.) that are used in making each best-matched placement.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Develop a database that captures information on factors used in making each best-matched placement.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
3. Track each best-matched placement over time to determine (a) each placement change following the initial best-matched placement and (b) the reason(s) for each placement change.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs

4. Develop a procedure for regularly reviewing best-matched placements and reporting results of each review.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
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Improvement Goal 2.3: Develop best-match process: Identify, review, revise and implement administrative procedures that impact the stability of out-of-home placements.

<p>STRATEGY 2.3.1: Identify, review, revise and implement procedures for changing caseload assignments among Social Workers to minimize changes in caseloads.</p>		
<p>RATIONALE: Frequent changes in the Social Worker who has primary assignment for a case can adversely affect children, their families and caregivers and therefore should be minimized.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Identify factors that affect changes in a Social Worker’s caseload and ultimately placement stability.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Determine the extent to which cases are reassigned across Social Workers over time.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
3. Develop guiding principles for case assignments with the least amount of disruption to clients and staff.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.3.2: Review, revise and implement procedures for providing clinical supervision to Social Workers regarding their management of individual cases.</p>		
<p>RATIONALE: Personal bias influences case decisions. Regular and routine clinical supervision requires staff to examine conflicting beliefs and values between staff and clients that impact relationships and outcomes for clients. The opportunity to ventilate the known difficulties of working in child welfare setting a productive manner provides emotional support to staff.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Form workgroup to identify areas in existing procedures where revision is needed.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Prepare draft of revised procedures and distribute to Supervisors for	June 2008	Manager, Central

feedback.		Programs
3. Incorporate feedback into tools and standards to assist in the supervision of staff.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.3.3: Develop a “peer-to-peer” process for maintaining the integrity of program values, policies and procedures related to out-of-home placement, Team Decision making, and the best-match concept.</p> <p>RATIONALE: The peer-to-peer model is a Departmental process for providing direction and support among Social Workers, Supervisors and Managers to maintain the integrity of program values, policies and procedures (e.g., Family to Family strategies) and to prevent drift in these elements of the system.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Research current best practices in the social services literature regarding the Peer-to-Peer support model.	September 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Develop a prototype peer-to-peer support process for CFS with emphasis on a statement of the outcomes that expected to result from its use.	September 2008	Manager, Central Programs
3. Train Social Workers and Supervisors in use of the prototype.	September 2008	Manager, Central Programs
4. Implement the prototype and monitor the impact of its use.	September 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.3.4: For Probation-supervised placements, enhance intra-departmental relationship with the Probation Agency Juvenile Investigations Unit (JINV) by providing on-going training to unit investigators in the area of relative placements.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Data indicate youth are more successful and feel more secure when they are placed with relatives who are able to care for them.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Work with JINV to develop a process and tool for identifying the services and supports needed by relatives who are willing to be a	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment

youth’s caregiver.		Services
2. Field test the process with JINV staff and revise as needed.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
3. Train JINV staff in the process and use of the tool as needed.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

Improvement Goal 2.4: Develop best-match process: Increase the availability and receipt of services and supports needed by caregivers in foster family homes to maintain a best-matched placement.

<p>STRATEGY 2.4.1: Identify gaps in services and supports currently available to caregivers in foster family homes and arrange services and/or supports to fill those gaps.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Caregivers must receive services and supports that have been identified as necessary to maintain the best-matched child in their home. To achieve this, the availability of services and supports needed must be determined and processes for connecting caregivers with those services and supports must be developed and implemented.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop list of services and supports currently available to caregivers in foster family homes based on review of (a) current service provider contracts for services to children and their families (note: these are services that child and family may receive following best-matched placement) and (b) <u>Resource Services List Dec 2006</u> (see ‘Services’ folder on F-Drive).	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Identify additional services and supports that are needed but not currently available , to enable initial placement and achieve predominant placement in foster family homes. Process will involve review of needs of caregiver compared to needs of child in existing child-specific retention plans (see Strategy 2.4.2 below).	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs

3. Develop plan to make available those services which are not currently available to caregivers in foster family homes through partnerships or contracts.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.4.2: Develop and implement a process for creating a “retention plan” for each child to be implemented following his/her best-matched placement. The retention plan will identify the needs of caregiver for support and needs of child that need to be met to achieve stable placement.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Following assessment of needs of individual foster parent and child in best-matched placement, retention plan will specific services and supports needed to maintain that placement.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop retention plan format for linking child's needs and caregiver support needs.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Develop protocols/procedures/process that connects initial assessment including the Child Needs and Services Plan to support the caregiver/child retention plan(s) and roles of the Ongoing Social Worker and retention staff.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
3. Identify roles and responsibilities of Foster Care Ombudsmen in retention planning.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs
4. Build capacity in recruitment and retention program staff to implement retention plans.	March 2008	Manager, Central Programs

Improvement Goal 2.5: **Develop best-match process: Extend the best-match process to placements with relatives. (NOTE: This goal is aligned with the plan components for Target 3 below that focuses on increasing initial and predominant placements in relative homes.)**

<p>STRATEGY 2.5.1: Determine the stability of placements with relatives and compare with placement stability for county foster homes and foster family agency homes.</p> <p>RATIONALE: The best-match process has previously focused on the placement of children in county foster homes. This strategy will extend the process to placement of children with relatives. This is important too because the SIP targets</p>
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initial and predominant placement in relative homes (Target 3 below). The stability of relative placements is currently unknown.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop routine for extracting data from CWS/CMS for changes in placements in relative homes, county foster family homes and FFA-certified homes.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
2. Extract, analyze and report results to determine common reasons for placement change as well as comparison rates for stability.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.5.2: Develop and implement process for matching child with a relative caregiver using best match process.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Processes for identifying the relative (a) who can best meet the identified needs of the child and his/her family and (b) who is agreeable to accepting placement need to be refined to help maintain the stability of out-of-home placements.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop a process for integrating the TDM meeting for emergency placements and related best match processes that focus on improving placement stability.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.5.3: Identify gaps in services and supports currently available to, and received by, relative caregivers and develop services and/or supports to fill those gaps.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Relative caregivers must receive services and supports that have been identified as necessary to maintain the best-matched child in their home. To achieve this, the availability of services and supports needed by relatives must be determined and processes for connecting relatives with those services and supports must be developed and implemented.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Using the list of services and supports for caregivers in foster family homes developed in Strategy 1.2.1 above, identify the services and supports that are currently available to relative caregivers.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs

2. For those services that are not available to relatives, develop the needed programs through partnerships and/or contracts.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
3. Integrate services from Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) into relative caregiver retention plan that outlines services and supports needed by the caregiver.	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
4. Develop and conduct a focus group with relative caregivers to determine their perspective of support needs (this focus group is described further in Strategy 3.1.2, Strategy 3.2.1 and Strategy 3.3.1)	June 2008	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.5.4: For Probation-supervised placements, develop process for finding relative homes for youths needing placement at the front end. If there is a potential relative that may take the youth, request that proceedings be continued for further contacts and discussions with this relative.</p> <p>RATIONALE: The stability of placements for Probation-supervised youths will be improved in environments maintained by a relative.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Consolidate and improve the relative approval process in collaboration with partnering agencies.	March 2008	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Educate and train the Juvenile Investigation unit on finding appropriate relatives prior to the youth being ordered into foster care and placed in a group home.	March 2008	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

Improvement Goal 2.6: Develop best-match process: Extend the best-match process to Probation-supervised placements.

STRATEGY 2.6.1: In conjunction with CFS and Behavioral Health, develop tools for screening individual youths and group homes to determine the home that is best able to meet the needs of youths supervised by the Probation Agency.

RATIONALE: Youth feel more secure and connected if they are placed in an environment that is suited to address

individualized needs and interests.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop an interview process that yields information on needs and characteristics of youths awaiting placement.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Establish a system for early identification of youths who are a higher risk of fleeing a group home placement and take more time to find and secure placement facilities that have the resources and staff that will connect effectively with the youth.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
<p>STRATEGY 2.6.2: Develop and implement a process for early intervention in a Probation-supervised placement to prevent the termination of the placement due to disruptive activity.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Youth are more receptive and open to therapeutic interventions and programming if those involved are willing to remain working with them even in the difficult stages. Youth improve and are more successful if they feel those who are there to assist them do not give up on them.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Solicit assistance and expertise from partnering agencies. Critical Case Reviews were recently implemented, in which the schools, Behavioral Health and Probation meet to discuss the needs of each critical case.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Develop a process for intervening quickly to incidents at placements.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
3. Ensure placements are meeting the treatment needs of probation youth.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

Improvement Goal 2.7: Continue development of the Team Decisionmaking process for placement changes.

The TDM process involves a child’s family and community in the decision-making process regarding (a) removing the child from the family home following an initial referral, (b) changing the child’s current placement, (c) reunifying the child with his/her family or (d) initiating a permanency plan for adoption, guardianship or long-term foster care when reunification is no longer a viable option. The County began implementation of the Team Decisionmaking strategy for placement change in October 2005. While achieving that which is in the best interest of the child and his/her family is always paramount, TDM also seeks to prevent placement change whenever that is appropriate by arranging new supports for children and their families and caretakers that might safely maintain the current placement. In the latter regard, TDM can help to achieve placement stability as well as eventual reunification or other permanent placement.

STRATEGY 2.7.1: Plan and conduct formal evaluation of the outcomes and processes related to implementation of the TDM process for placement change.

RATIONALE: Ongoing review and analysis of the TDM process for placement change will help to increase its effectiveness as a strategy for increasing the stability of out-of-home placements.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop an evaluation plan for examining quantitative and qualitative data regarding placement change TDM meetings and their outcomes. Outcomes include placement decisions and recommendations for meetings, stability of placements following meetings, and frequency of placement change during the child’s current placement episode.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
2. Identify barriers and challenges to program implementation and develop strategies that address these barriers/challenges to improve outcomes. This process will be achieved by (a) reviewing quantitative and qualitative program data and (b) conducting a focus group with CFS staff, families, public agency and community partners.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
3. Gather and analyze process and outcome data according to the plan and prepare written report including recommendations.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs

STRATEGY 2.7.2: Develop and implement an accountability protocol for monitoring placement change TDMs that is based on the Department’s (CFS) existing Balanced Scorecard process.

RATIONALE: Regular review of processes and outcomes for the placement change TDMs is necessary to develop the

process and improve its outcomes.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Utilize the existing TDM Strategy Group to identify areas where continued building of commitment is needed to support staff in their follow-through of activities outlined in the “action plan” devised in the TDM meeting.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
2. Prepare a draft of supplemental procedures that outline the roles and responsibilities of CFS Supervisors, including their role in monitoring implementation of TDM action plans.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
3. Distribute draft of procedures for feedback.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
4. Incorporate feedback into standards for casework practices.	June 2007	Manager, Central Programs
<p>STRATEGY 2.7.3: Implement and evaluate results of change(s) in TDM process for placement change based on recommendations from TDM evaluation, ongoing Balanced Scorecard reviews and the Department’s TDM Strategy Group.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Continued development of the TDM process is expected to improve its effectiveness in increasing performance levels for the placement stability target. The development process includes implementation and evaluation of changes in the TDM process that designed to improve performance.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Review results and recommendations of TDM evaluation (Strategy 2.7.1) with CFS Operations Team, CFS Social Work Supervisors and TDM Strategy Group. Formulate specific change(s) based on recommendations and establish process for evaluating effect of change(s).	December 2009	Manager, Central Programs
2. Implement change(s) and monitor effect using designed evaluation process.	December 2009	Manager, Central Programs

3. Review results with groups in Milestone 1 above to assess effects of change(s) in place and need for additional modification.	December 2009	Manager, Central Programs
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TARGET 3: Increase the percent of children placed initially in relative homes and the percent of children for whom a relative home is the child’s predominant placement. (Child Welfare Only – State Family Relations and Connections Measures 4B-1a and 4B-2a)

Current Performance:

Performance for relative placements is reported for children in 12-month first entry cohorts in terms of each child’s initial placement (State Measure 4B-1a) and predominant placement for the 12 months following entry (State Measure 4B-2a).

The Self-Assessment reviewed the County’s performance through Jan-Dec 05 for both initial and predominant relative placements. The last data point reviewed for **initial placement** was 9% for Jan-Dec 05. Two additional points have been reported since then: 8% for Apr 05-Mar 06 and 7% for Jul 05-Jun 06. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 20% for Jan-Dec 05 and 21% for Apr 05-Mar 06 and Jul 05-Jun 06.

The last point reviewed for **predominant placement** was 32% for Jan-Dec 05. Subsequent points were 31% for Apr 04-Mar 05 and 26% for Jul 04-Jun 05. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 39% for Jan-Dec 05, 41% for Apr 04-Mar 05, and 39% for Jul 04-Jun 05.

Improvement Goal 3.1: Identify barriers in existing processes that impede or prevent placement of dependent children in relative homes. Processes include: (a) the identification in the ER process of relatives who may be possible placements; (b) implementation of imminent risk and emergency placement TDM meetings; (c) the Department’s relative approval process; and (d) identifying relatives for possible placement in the process of preparing a court report.

<p>STRATEGY 3.1.1: Collect, analyze and report quantitative data to identify factors in the above processes that impede or prevent initial and ongoing placement with relatives.</p>
<p>RATIONALE: Data will help to identify problems/barriers in each process that impede or prevent relative placements.</p>

Identification of impediments/barriers to relative placement will enable development and implementation of strategies to increase recruitment and support for initial relative placements and relative placement for children already in foster care.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Under the supervision of Sponsor for Target 3, form workgroup that will be responsible for achieving and monitoring progress for improvement goals related to this target.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Develop list of questions and related data regarding potential barriers to relative placement in each of the above processes. These include the number of removed children who are initially placed in a relative home in the last six months, the number of referrals for relative approval that are approved, the duration from request for relative approval to disposition of the request, the number of imminent risk TDM meetings that result in a recommendation to place with a relative, and the number of TDM meetings that result in the child’s entering guardianship.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Develop routines to extracting the requested data from CWS/CMS and the TDM CA database.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Compile and report data to Target 3 workgroup.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
5. Review and analyze data to identify factors that affect initial placement of children in relative homes and, among these, the factors that impede such placement. Factors will include (a) identification and engagement of any relative who might be a potential caregiver during the Emergency Response process and (b) the availability of service, support, and financial resources to maintain the placement over time.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
6. Review and analyze data to identify factors that affect and may impede placement in a relative’s home for children already in foster care .	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
7. Develop protocols to address problem areas and remove identified barriers.	June 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

STRATEGY 3.1.2: Collect **qualitative** data on factors that impede or prevent relative placements by conducting **relative caregivers focus group** comprised of relatives with a dependent child(ren) currently in their home. The relatives group will identify factors that impede/prevent relative placement for children needing placement **following an ER investigation** and for children **already in foster care** (the focus group is referenced also in **Strategy 2.5.3**). Goals of the group process will include: (a) identification of services needed to support a relative placement; (b) assessment of the current availability of those support services; (c) identification of incentives that can be provided to encourage relatives to accept placement.

RATIONALE: A focus group comprised of current relative caregivers can greatly assist in the process of developing a structured program for recruiting potential relative caregivers and in supporting relatives currently caring for dependent children.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop a structure and agenda for the focus group process and a process for documenting and reporting results of the process. The structure should specify the topics that will be explored by the focus group including (a) personal issues that confront relatives considering accepting placement of a dependent child, (b) facts about the dependency process that caregivers need to be aware of, and (c) age-appropriate resources that can help to support a relative caregiver.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Identify and select candidates for focus group.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Conduct focus group.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Compile and report results to Target 3 workgroup.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

Improvement Goal 3.2: **Develop and implement processes for engaging relatives to become caregivers for court dependents.**

STRATEGY 3.2.1: Use the findings from **Strategy 3.1.1** and **Strategy 3.1.2** to develop a structured program designed to

increase the proportion of relatives who accept placement of court dependents.

RATIONALE: Structured program to recruit potential caregivers can (a) provide relative placement for children in currently in non-relative placements and (b) increase the likelihood that relatives will accept placement of children who become dependents in the future.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop and field test a process for identifying and locating relatives who may be a possible placement for each child who needs foster care.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Develop a list of all documents that are given to relatives who accept placement of a dependent child. Review list and, as appropriate, modify the document sharing process to simplify the information provided to relative caregivers.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Develop a “cheat sheet” which lists the things relatives need to know about fostering a dependent child. The list should include information regarding (a) eligibility for and receipt of financial support for relative caregivers, (b) monthly child visits, (c) participation in case planning process, (d) participation in needs and service planning, and (e) meeting child’s needs for health, mental health and education services.	September 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

Improvement Goal 3.3: Increase resources to support and stabilize placement of children in relative homes.

STRATEGY 3.3.1: Use the findings from the relative caregivers focus group in **Strategy 3.1.2** to identify resources (a) currently available and (b) not currently available but needed to support continuing placement of children in relative homes.

RATIONALE: Identifying and making resources available to relative caregivers will help in the recruitment of relatives and support stability of existing relative placements.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
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<p>1. Integrate results from the relatives focus group with findings from Strategy 2.4.1 above. (Note: Strategy 2.4.1 identifies gaps in services and supports currently available to caregivers in <u>foster family homes</u> and arranges services and supports to fill those gaps.)</p>	<p>September 2007</p>	<p>Manager, Casa Pacifica Office</p>
<p>2. Determine which services and supports are currently available and which are not.</p>	<p>September 2007</p>	<p>Manager, Casa Pacifica Office</p>
<p>STRATEGY 3.3.2: Develop and implement processes and procedures to fill the gaps in resources available to support continuing placement of children in relative homes.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Services and supports received by a relative caregiver will help to maintain a child’s placement with the relative over time and thus increase the likelihood that it will be the child’s predominant placement during the report period.</p>		
<p>Milestones</p>	<p>Timeframes</p>	<p>Assignments</p>
<p>1. Assess current contract services with regard to the services and supports they provide to relative caregivers.</p>	<p>December 2007</p>	<p>Manager, Casa Pacifica Office</p>
<p>2. Identify community agencies and organizations that currently provide specified services and supports.</p>	<p>December 2007</p>	<p>Manager, Casa Pacifica Office</p>
<p>3. Develop a strategic work plan for building partnerships with community agencies and organizations to provide services and supports that are needed but not currently available to retain relative placements.</p>	<p>December 2007</p>	<p>Manager, Casa Pacifica Office</p>

TARGET 4: Increase the percent of children who are reunified with their families within 12 months of entering foster care. (Probation Only – Federal Reunification Measure 3E)

Current Performance:

Federal Measure 3E is the percent of all children exiting to reunification in a 12-month period whose reunification occurred within 12 months of entering care.

The last point reported in the Self-Assessment for Probation-supervised placements was 66.7% for the period Apr 05-Mar 06. An additional point has been reported since then: 66.7% (Jul 05-Jun 06). The latter compares with the overall statewide percent of 46.7% for the same period.

Improvement Goal 4.1: Implement and enhance family involvement in individualized treatment plans for probation youth.

STRATEGY 4.1.1: Find and utilize more local group home placements.		
RATIONALE: Data indicate that probation youth are more likely to succeed at home with the establishment of community and natural resources.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop a collaborative placement agency work group that will focus on finding additional group home providers in Ventura County and ensure the quality of care.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. The placement agency work group will also communicate County needs to the group home providers.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
STRATEGY 4.1.2: Improve implementation of Correctional Offender Management Profiling for Alternative Sanction (COMPAS) case planning process with parents.		
RATIONALE: Parental involvement enhances the opportunity for a successful reunification.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Encourage more parental involvement during monthly meeting with parent.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Review placement Individual Treatment Plans to ensure parents are taking an active part in treatment.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

3. Consider parental input for changes in the treatment plan.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
4. Work with the Juvenile Court to develop interventions that address the problem of non-participating parents.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
<p>STRATEGY 4.1.3: Increase the number of probation youth who are enrolled in the County’s SB 163 Wraparound Program.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Youth who remain in the home with natural supports and are provided assistance for all involved, the youth, the parents, and other family members are more likely to remain in the home.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop a protocol where youth ordered into suitable placement, who have an appropriate family member to reside with, are automatically referred to and screened for the Wraparound program.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Utilize Wraparound as a step down for youth returning home from a facility with a Residential Care Level (RCL) 12 or higher.	December 2007	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

TARGETS FOR PHASE 2

TARGET 5: Increase percent of adoptions finalized within 24 months of entry for federal and state report periods. (Child Welfare Only – Federal Adoption Measure 3D and State Adoption Measure 3A-2)

Current Performance:

The adoption outcome is reported in two ways. Federally defined Measure 3D is the percent of children who exited to adoption in a 12-month period whose adoption was finalized within 24 months following entry to care. State-defined Measure 3A-2 is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort whose adoption was finalized in 24 months following entry to care.

The County’s Self-Assessment reviewed the County’s performance through Jan-Dec 05 for Federal Measure 3D and through Jan-Dec 03 for State Measure 3A-2. Two additional points have been reported for each measure since those respective end points.

The last data point reviewed for **Federal Measure 3D** was 22% for Jan-Dec 05 and subsequent levels increased to 23% for Apr 05-Mar 06 and 31% for Jul 05-Jun 06. These levels compare with (a) the National Standard for Measure 3D of 32.0% or higher and (b) overall statewide levels of 29% for Jan-Dec 05 and Apr 05-Mar 06 and 30% for Jul 05-Jun 06,

The last point reviewed for **State Measure 3A-2** was 8.4% for the cohort that entered foster care between Jan-Dec 03. Subsequent points decreased slightly to 8.1% for the Apr 03-Mar 04 cohort and 8.2% for the Jul 03-Jun 04 cohort. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 7.0% for the Jan-Dec 03 and Apr 03-Mar 04 cohorts and 7.1% for the Jul 03-Jun 04 cohort.

Improvement Goal 5.1: Develop and implement procedures for expediting adoption planning as part of the concurrent planning process.

STRATEGY 5.1.1: Develop, implement and evaluate procedures for initiating adoption planning earlier in the concurrent planning process and systematically implementing the concurrent plan.

RATIONALE: This improvement goal will allow children in the dependency system to have an earlier start towards adoption finalization. This would also assign an Adoption Social Worker earlier and begin the adoption home study sooner.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Extract data from CWS/CMS to determine the number of children with open case for whom adoption is the concurrent plan goal and for whom a concurrent planning staffing was held within 60 days of their first status review hearing.	December 2008	Manager, Oxnard Region
2. Develop policy and procedures for concurrent planning and integrate these into CFS policy and procedures manual.	December 2008	Manager, Oxnard Region
3. Create concurrent planning referral form.	December 2008	Manager, Oxnard Region

4. Develop a procedure for alerting the Ongoing Social Worker to schedule a concurrent planning staffing 60-days prior to the first status review hearing.	December 2008	Manager, Oxnard Region
STRATEGY 5.1.2: Develop, implement and evaluate procedures for completing an unmatched home study for every currently licensed foster parent.		
RATIONALE: Completion of a home study for all current foster parents will increase the number of potential adoptive homes and expedite the process of finalizing the adoption of children with an adoption goal.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Identify currently licensed foster parents who are interested in adopting a child(ren).	December 2009	Manager, Oxnard Region
2. The CFS Adoption Unit shall conduct an adoption orientation for existing Foster parents who want to adopt children.	December 2009	Manager, Oxnard Region
3. Establish a workgroup that includes CFS Central Programs staff to coordinate approved adoptive home studies to ensure children are being placed in approved adoptive homes as part of their concurrent plan.	December 2009	Manager, Oxnard Region

TARGET 6: Decrease (a) the percent of children who reenter foster care within 12 months of previous case closure (Child Welfare and Probation – Federal Reentry Measure 3F) and (b) the percent of first entries reunified within 12 months of entry who reenter foster care within 12 months of reunification (Child Welfare Only – State Reentry Measure 3G).

Current Performance:

Federal Measure 3F is the percent of children who entered care in a 12-month period whose previous case was closed during the preceding 12 months. State Measure 3G is the percent of children in a 12-month first entry cohort who were reunified within 12 months of entering care and then re-entered care in the 12 months following their reunification.

For **child welfare supervised placements**, the Self-Assessment reviewed the County’s performance through Jan-Dec 05 for Federal Measure 3F and through Jan-Dec 03 for State Measure 3G. Two additional points have been reported for each measure since those respective end points.

The last data point reviewed for Federal Measure 3F was 12.1% for Jan-Dec 05 and subsequent levels increased to 12.4% for Apr 05-Mar 06 and 10.4% for Jul 05-Jun 06. These levels compare with (a) the National Standard for Measure 3D of 8.6% or lower and (b) overall statewide levels of 9.9% for Jan-Dec 05, 10.3% for Apr 05-Mar 06, and 10.7% for Jul 05-Jun 06,

The last point reviewed for State Measure 3G was 15.4% for the cohort that entered foster care between Jan-Dec 03. Subsequent points decreased slightly to 14.6% for the Apr 03-Mar 04 cohort and 11.2% for the Jul 03-Jun 04 cohort. These levels compare with increasing overall statewide levels of 11.8% for the Jan-Dec 03 cohort, 12.3% for the Apr 03-Mar 04 cohort, and 12.7% for the Jul 03-Jun 04 cohort.

For **probation-supervised placements**, the last data point reported in the Self-Assessment for Federal Measure 3F was 10% for the period Apr 05-Mar 06. Since then, the County’s performance level increased markedly to 19% (Jul 05-Jun 06). This compares with an overall statewide rate of 13% for the same period.

Improvement Goal 6.1: Increase the consistency with which the processes for SDM Risk Reassessment and Reunification Reassessment are implemented to guide decisions regarding reunification and case closure. (NOTE: This goal is aligned with Improvement Goal 1.1 above that focuses on improving use and supervision of all SDM tools.)

<p>STRATEGY 6.1.1: Develop and implement process for (a) providing training to Ongoing Social Workers in use of both Risk Reassessment and Reunification Reassessment tools and (b) monitoring and supervision of their use by Supervisors.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Improved decision-making by Social Workers regarding risk, reunification and case closure will help to reduce the risk of reentry following reunification and subsequent closure of the case.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Determine SDM training schedules and perform scheduled trainings.	December 2008	Manager, East County Region

2. Monitor implementation of training through Supervisors' qualitative and quantitative reports.	December 2008	Manager, East County Region
3. Review and revise management protocols regarding case supervision as it relates to SDM. This includes protocols for (a) monitoring use of SDM tools by Program Managers and (b) direct supervision of Social Workers related to their use of the SDM tools.	December 2008	Manager, East County Region
4. Educate County Counsel on use of SDM.	December 2008	Manager, East County Region
5. Determine best practices in other counties using SDM.	December 2008	Manager, East County Region

Improvement Goal 6.2: Implement TDM process for children exiting from out-of-home care.

STRATEGY 6.2.1: Develop policies and procedures for conducting TDM meetings for children exiting out-of-home care (the implementation of “exit TDMs” comprises the third and final phase of TDM rollout in the County).

RATIONALE: The TDM process will involve family, community members, caregivers and agency staff in decision making for children exiting from out of home care. The process will result in an after-care placement that is more strongly supported and consequently less likely to result in reentry.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Establish workgroup to develop plan for implementing TDM meetings for children exiting foster care. Plan will include polices and procedures for deciding the after-care placement and related processes and supports.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region
2. Completed plan is reviewed and formally approved by CFS Operations Team.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region

STRATEGY 6.2.2: Assess staffing need for TDM Facilitator(s) and recruit and train additional Facilitators as needed.

RATIONALE: With the addition of exit TDM meetings, the Department’s need for TDM Facilitators could increase.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. The exit TDM workgroup will collect data to estimate the number of TDMs anticipated in Phase III.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region
2. The workgroup will review the data to determine the need for additional TDM Facilitators. If additional TDM Facilitators are needed, Central Programs will develop a plan to recruit and hire Facilitator(s).	June 2008	Manager, East County Region
3. New Facilitators will attend the one-week TDM Facilitator Training Course and continue to receive training from their Supervisor.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region
<p>STRATEGY 6.2.3: Develop and implement orientation training regarding exit TDMs for Ongoing Social Workers, Adoption Unit staff, Dependency Court personnel, and public agency and community partners.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Completion of orientation training for all staff regarding the purposes of and processes employed in exit TDMs will help to ensure a successful rollout.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. The exit TDM workgroup will develop a plan for conducting TDM orientations for all regions and staff. The plan will include target group/audience, presentation content and format, presenter(s), training location, and training dates.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region
2. All staff will receive a copy of the protocol for exit TDM meetings and will indicate that they understand and will comply with the protocol.	June 2008	Manager, East County Region

Improvement Goal 6.3: Develop and implement the process for assessing reunification of Probation-supervised youth with their families to improve the decisions regarding reunification and risk.

STRATEGY 6.3.1: Develop and implement ongoing training of Deputy Probation Officers and probation placement staff regarding reunification including assessing readiness for reunification, involving families in reunification planning, etc.

RATIONALE: If all parties involved are educated and understand the philosophy of successful reunification, the youth has a better chance of success during transition and reunification.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Review and revise current standards for reunification of probation youths with their families.	June 2009	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Develop training curriculum for reunification assessment, planning and implementation.	June 2009	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
3. Develop training schedules for the staff.	June 2009	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
4. Establish Supervisor oversight and monitoring of the training.	June 2009	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
<p>STRATEGY 6.3.2: Provide enhanced linkages to community-based organizations and other local support services,</p> <p>RATIONALE: Data indicate youth returning home from placement are more successful in the community if returned when both the youth and the family are ready and they are linked to support services.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Educate families, other County agencies and the placement providers regarding the Probation Agency’s philosophy of reunification and family-centered treatment.	September 2008	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services
2. Enroll youths in existing Probation Agency collaborative programs designed to prevent youths from reentering placement (i.e., Adelante! Juvenile Mental Health Court, Day Reporting, Repeat Offender Prevention Program, Healthy Returns, and Wraparound).	September 2008	Manager, Juvenile Commitment Services

TARGET 7: Increase the percent of child welfare supervised children in out-of-home care who are placed with some or all of their siblings. (Child Welfare Only – State Family Relations and Connections Measure 4A-2)

Current Performance:

Point-in-time results for placement of siblings together in out-of-home care are reported in two ways: (a) the percent of children with a sibling(s) in care who are placed with all of their siblings (Measure 4A-1) and (b) the percent of children with a sibling(s) in care who are placed with some or all of their siblings (Measure 4A-2). The first day of the report month is used as the point-in-time for both measures.

The Self-Assessment reviewed the County’s performance through the Jan 06 point for both measures. Two additional points have been reported for each measure since those respective end points.

The last data point reviewed for **all siblings** placed together was 43% for Jan 06. Subsequent levels were 39% for Apr 06 and 43% for Jul 06. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 46% for Jan 06 and 47% for Apr 06 and Jul 06.

The last point reviewed for **some or all siblings** placed together was 61% for Jan 06. Subsequent points were 58% for Apr 06 and 61% for Jul 06. These levels compare with overall statewide levels of 69% for all three points.

Improvement Goal 7.1: Increase the number of relative and non-relative homes that can accommodate sibling groups.

<p>STRATEGY 7.1.1: Collect, analyze and report data that describe selected characteristics of sibling groups currently in placement. Specific characteristics will include the size of sibling groups, the presence of a child(ren) with special needs in sibling groups, and the communities from which sibling groups are removed.</p>		
<p>RATIONALE: This process will (a) aid in understanding the characteristics of the current population of sibling groups, (b) help to identify barriers to placing siblings together, and (c) suggest strategies for overcoming those barriers.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Under the supervision of Sponsor for Target 7, form workgroup that will be responsible for achieving and monitoring progress for improvement goals related to this target.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Develop a list of specific characteristics of sibling groups that affect	December 2007	Manager, Casa

their placement together.		Pacifica Office
3. Extract data from CWS/CMS that provide this information for sibling groups that are currently in placement.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Review these data to (a) identify children who are not placed with at least one of their siblings and (b) identify the reason(s) that they were not placed with a sibling.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
5. Report the results of the review to Target 7 workgroup.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
<p>STRATEGY 7.1.2: Identify (a) major barriers to serving and supporting placement of sibling groups that confront relative and non-relative caregivers and (b) key circumstances and conditions that, when in place, will allow caregivers to foster sibling groups effectively.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Understanding the circumstances that enable caregivers to foster sibling groups and the kinds of support they need to do so will aid development of recruitment and retention strategies designed to support sibling placements.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Extract data from CWS/CMS to identify relative and non-relative caregivers who currently have one or more siblings in their homes or, if not, are willing to accept sibling placements. These data will also be used to identify the caregivers who are and who are not fostering sibling groups.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. From this pool of caregivers, select a focus group that will be asked to share information on the experiences, attitudes, and skills that caregivers should possess to foster sibling groups effectively.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Identify the factors including any special needs of children in sibling groups that impact the caregiver’s capacity to provide care for them. This information will be used to develop the focus group agenda/process.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Develop the process for conducting the focus group and reporting its findings.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

5. Conduct the focus group and report the results to the Target 7 workgroup.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
<p>STRATEGY 7.1.3: Using information collected in Strategy 2.4.1 and Strategy 2.5.3, develop, implement and monitor a plan for recruiting new homes that are available to accept sibling groups of different sizes and with different needs.</p> <p>RATIONALE: A detailed recruitment plan will facilitate implementation of recruitment activities and help to identify the activities that contribute to achievement of Improvement Goal 2.1 and Improvement Goal 2.5.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Identify resources including the CFS Central Programs RDS Team to develop, implement and monitor the recruitment plan.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Identify and develop partnerships with entities in the community willing to promote the placement of sibling groups. These entities might include churches whose parishioners are willing to “adopt” a child/sibling group. (“one church/one child” notion).	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Initiate contact with the media to develop awareness around sibling groups by featuring stories of siblings placed together.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Communicate the need to secure placements for sibling groups in Caregiver Orientation and Foster Parent Networking events. One message is that “children come in as sibling groups and our goal is to place them together.”	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
5. Incorporate into the recruitment plan a process for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the plan.	December 2007	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
<p>STRATEGY 7.1.4: Develop, implement and monitor a plan to expand the capacity of existing homes to accept sibling groups of different sizes and different needs.</p> <p>RATIONALE: Working with existing caregivers who are not currently serving sibling groups can increase their capacity to foster sibling groups.</p>		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments

1. Identify current foster homes that can place sibling groups but do not have siblings in placement at the moment.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Develop a plan for working with current caregivers to increase their capacity to serve sibling groups.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Implement and monitor the plan.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

Improvement Goal 7.2: Increase resources to support and retain relative and non-relative caregivers who foster sibling groups.

STRATEGY 7.2.1: Develop and provide incentives for caregivers who are willing to accept sibling groups.		
RATIONALE: The availability of incentives that are meaningful to caregivers will support efforts to recruit and retain homes willing to accept sibling groups.		
Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop and implement a protocol that allows monthly visits with siblings cared for by one caregiver to be made by one Social Worker (“one visit/one social worker” idea).	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Evaluate the capacity of existing resources such as community workers and FFAs to determine whether they can assist caregivers with visits and other identified needs. Develop and implement a protocol based on findings of the evaluation.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Evaluate the feasibility of contracting to provide certain services to caregivers. The availability of financial resources to implement this needs to be determined.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Develop and implement a protocol for providing basic services such as food and clothing when the sibling group is initially placed. Collaborate with community organizations and businesses to achieve this result.	March 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
STRATEGY 7.2.2: Develop and implement program of targeted services, training and support for caregivers who foster		

sibling groups.

RATIONALE: Providing services, training and support to caregivers is needed to maintain the stability of sibling placements and promote the well-being of children in care.

Milestones	Timeframes	Assignments
1. Develop and implement a protocol for pairing each caregiver with a respite provider at time of initial placement. Related to this is need to develop financial resources for respite program.	June 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
2. Develop and implement a curriculum to train caregivers on sibling group issues such as schedule management, dynamics, etc.	June 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
3. Utilize the current centralized service staffing to identify mental health, educational and other issues for sibling groups.	June 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
4. Develop and implement an individualized service plan, which incorporates mental health services and training.	June 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office
5. Identify sibling groups in the Permanency Planning caseload and determine the suitability and possibility for adoption for the identified groups.	June 2008	Manager, Casa Pacifica Office

Appendix A

**Recommendations from the Ventura County Peer Quality Case Review
Submitted to the California Department of Social Services April 3, 2006
In Completion of the County's California Child and Family Services Review**

Ventura County PQCR Recommendations

An advantage of conducting the PQCR is that recommendations for improvement are made by the staff who are directly working with children and families. The recommendations may relate to training, systemic/policy changes and/or needed State technical assistance. The recommendations for CWS and Juvenile Probation are set forth below.

Child Welfare

The recommendations made by the social workers and child welfare supervisors were prioritized to parallel the key social work practices, factors and challenges/barriers that impact achieving stable placements as identified in the Summary of Practice (see Section III).

Recommendations regarding worker and supervisor practices in the child welfare system are listed below and will be prioritized for integration in the County's System Improvement Plan.

1. Best Match Project Implementation

The county continues to plan and develop the Best Match Project which is one of the strategies in the county's current SIP. The overall goal of this strategy is to increase the stability of foster care placements by placing individual children with caregivers who are the most well-suited to meet the needs of the child and his/her family. To achieve this goal, the project includes the following components.

- a. Develop separate tools to assess children and caregivers that provide information needed to establish best match.
- b. Develop a process for deciding which potential caregiver is the best match for an individual child.
- c. Develop a process for good "hand-off" from current placement to new placement.
- d. Provide ongoing support new placement once the change has been made.
- e. Track pre- and post-placement activities to assess the extent to which the matching process in results in stable placements.

The following are specific recommendations for the continued development and implementation of the Best Match Project that were obtained in the worker and supervisor interviews.

Training

Recommendations for training needed to support the implementation of Best Match include the following.

- Strengthen training for foster parents to improve their understanding of the special needs of children in foster care and their ability to effectively meet those needs.
- Strengthen training for social workers regarding clinical issues related to children in foster care and techniques for managing child behavior, so they can train caregivers to address the problems of children in their care,

System/Policy Change

Recommendations for system and policy changes that are needed to support the implementation of Best Match include the following.

- Strengthen pre-placement assessment of child needs. Implementation of the Best Match Project to date has resulted in the development of tools for assessing (a) children whose placement is about to change and (b) foster parents who are potential caregivers for these children. The purpose of the child assessment tool is to gather information about the needs and preferences of the child. The foster parent assessment gathers information on the strengths and weaknesses of the parent. The implementation of Best Match will involve continuing assessment of children and caregivers using these tools, evaluation of their usefulness, and modification based on this evaluation.
- Evaluate current rate structure for foster care payments. It was noted that foster care rates have not kept up with needs of children in care and that specialized rate level for foster homes needs to be fluid and less arbitrary.

Resources

Recommendations for developing the resources and processes needed to implement the Best Match project include the following.

- Increase the number of foster homes and other placement resources including relative placements. Implementation of the Recruitment, Development and Support strategy in the county's Family-to-Family Initiative is currently recruiting foster parents in targeted areas of the county. These efforts may well focus on prospective caregivers with interests in serving children with special needs and with backgrounds that are culturally and ethnically compatible with children needing placement.
- Increase the number and range of support services for families and caregivers in existing placements. These include respite care for caregivers, transportation for birth parents and caregivers, etc.
- Increase use of the Foster Parent Ombudsman position. Worker feedback suggests the ombudsman position is underutilized.

- Strengthen use of the Placement Coordinator position. Suggestions focused on (a) improving dialogue between Coordinator and caseworker, supervisor and regional manager, and (b) increasing the number of Coordinators (one for each region or at least a separate Coordinator for group homes).
- Strengthen the use of the Licensing Approval Unit in both the placement and relative/non-relative approval processes. This could increase placement options and improve the likelihood that the match will be the best one for the child and family.
- Strengthen communication between social worker and child, birth parents, resource family and providers. Workers and supervisors noted the importance of ongoing communication in identifying and resolving issues before they become major problems.

Related to strengthening communication is the point made by social workers that having reduced caseloads and additional clerical support to perform “desk functions” would free them to spend more time in contact with clients.

State Technical Assistance

The following are recommendations for state technical assistance needed to facilitate implementation of the Best Match project.

- State assistance is needed to implement changes in the current rate structure for foster care payments.

2. TDM Implementation

TDM is a process for making decisions about a child’s current placement. A key aspect of the process is that it involves the participation of the child (as appropriate), his/her family and extended family, caregiver, service providers and community. The practice of holding a TDM meeting for a possible placement change for children already in placement has been in place locally since October 17, 2005. Planning is in progress to implement the process for new cases who may enter out-of-home care and, eventually, for children who exit foster care to a permanent placement.

Training

Recommendations for training needed to support the implementation of TDM include the following.

- Improve training for workers regarding services and resources in the local community.

System/Policy Change

Recommendations for system/policy changes need to support the continued implementation of TDM are the following.

- Improve the timeliness with which TDMs are held. According to the existing CFS TDM Protocol, a TDM meeting is held before a child is moved from his/her current placement or, in cases of imminent risk, on the next workday and always **before** the initial court hearing in cases of removal. Compliance with this requirement needs to be assured.
- Improve linkages between family and caregiver. The link between birth parent and foster parent is one of several important elements in the TDM process and is addressed in the TDM Protocol. Compliance with the “icebreaker” family team meeting procedure needs to be assured.
- Strengthen ongoing consultation among participants in TDM process. The TDM meeting involves the participation of parent and family, foster parent, service providers, social worker and supervisor in the decision to change the child’s placement or to remove the child. It is suggested that ongoing consultation among these individuals can help to maintain the child’s current placement.

Resources

The following are recommendations for resource development needed to support TDM implementation.

- Increase services and supports available in all communities. TDMs are currently held for placement changes and will be implemented next for entries to foster care, i.e., in connection with possible removals during emergency response investigations. The extent to which these TDMs will allow children to remain safely in their own homes will depend in part on the availability of services and supports in their local communities. Currently, the Building Community Partnerships strategy is focusing on identifying local services and supports that can be used in connection with TDMs.

State Technical Assistance

No recommendations for state technical assistance to support TDM implementation were given.

3. Clerical and Support Staff Improvements

Workers and supervisors commented that caseloads are too high and discussed the impacts that workers’ performing caseload-related clerical tasks have on their hands-on work with clients in the field. These comments were accompanied by

recommendations for increased support to do these case-related clerical and support tasks. In this view, increasing clerical and/or staff support for these tasks would increase the capacity of workers to do more field work and assessment work.

Training

In the area of training, the following recommendations are suggested to support the increased use of clerical and support staff.

- It was suggested that when clerical and support vacant staff positions are filled, individuals who are knowledgeable about or trained in that program be hired.

System/Policy Change

Recommendations for system/policy change to support the strengthening of clerical and support staff are as follows.

- Comments focused on tasks that generate “paperwork” and suggestions were that these tasks be reduced or eliminated to reduce the amount of paperwork that workers are required to do that, again, reduces their time to do fieldwork.

Resources

The addition of the following resources is recommended to help support the strengthening of clerical and support staff.

- It was suggested that more community workers be added to help with conducting visits, making field contacts, and giving notices.

State Technical Assistance

Regarding the addition of clerical and support staff, it is recommended that state technical assistance focus on achieving the following.

- No recommendations were given in this area.

4. Supervisor Practice Improvements

Supervisors made a number of comments regarding improvements that are needed in supervisor practice. A primary rationale for the need for stronger supervisor practice is that supervision guides and improves worker practices that can lead to improvements in placement stability.

Training

In the area of training, the following recommendations are suggested to support improvements in supervisor practice.

- Increase the delivery of ongoing coaching and training support for new social workers. This recommendation is underscored by reference to “chronic staff reassignments”.
- It was also suggested that supervisors need to find time to stay current with their own training.

System/Policy Change

Recommendations for system/policy change to support improvements in supervisor practice are as follows.

- Encourage the development of supervisory routines that allow supervisors more time to meet with their workers. Key objectives in this regard relate to: (a) having a consistent time to meet with workers; (b) providing more regular supervision to staff than the mandated one time every two weeks; (c) designating a time to meet with staff and keep to that time to allow for consultation whether case specific or professional issues.
- Reduce the number of meetings for supervisors. Meetings interfere with supervisors’ ability to spend time with their workers.
- Improve the organization and structure of meetings that supervisors have with their workers. Meetings need to have a focus and time limit.
- In supervision with workers, demonstrate creativity in identifying possible placement resources. Supervisors can assist their workers by engaging in “outside-the-norm” thinking in identifying relatives and other resources who might possibly provide out-of-home care.

Resources

No recommendations were suggested to help support the strengthening of supervisor practice.

State Technical Assistance

No recommendations were given in this area.

Juvenile Probation

The recommendations made by the deputy probation officers, senior deputy probation officers, and supervising deputy probation officer were prioritized to parallel the

probation practices, factors, and challenges/barriers that impact achieving stable placements as identified in the Summary of Practice (see Section III).

Worker and Supervisor Practices

Recommendations regarding worker and supervisor practices in the Probation system are listed below and will be prioritized for integration in the County's System Improvement Plan.

1. Increased Family Involvement

There is a recognized need to increase the degree of family involvement at all stages of a youth's case. This includes but is not limited to case plan development, when initial placement decisions are made, and when placement changes are needed. The Agency is presently in the process of revising its case plan documents to further enhance family involvement in the process and there will be an increased emphasis on involving the youth's family at every stage of the process to facilitate "buy-in" and increase the chances of successful outcomes.

2. Improved Case Review Process

Weekly case reviews are scheduled to discuss cases with critical issues and those pending placement but not yet placed. However due to other time constraints, if the unit supervisor is not present, the meetings are often not held. There will be a heightened effort to have the meetings every week regardless if one staff member is not available and all cases will be discussed on a rotating basis to ensure all issues are being addressed, not just those cases in crisis. Providers will also be regularly contacted for input on cases being discussed. This includes an increased focus on thorough re-assessment of cases, with particular attention paid to determining whether there is a need for continued placement or if additional services are needed.

3. Increased Pre-Placement Contact

At present, there is a heightened focus on the assigned probation officer seeing the youth while s/he is still at the Juvenile Facilities. This occurs approximately 80% of the time. At times, this is not possible due to the officer being out of the office for mandated visits, training, vacations, sick leave, etc. In those instances, the Senior Deputy Probation Officer will visit the youth and go over any placement issues and/or concerns. The Probation Agency is striving for a goal of the assigned officer seeing the youth beforehand 90% of the time in order to help facilitate a successful transition.

4. Improve Matching of Youth and Caregiver

The Agency presently uses the COMPAS assessment to assist in the determination of the youth's strength and needs in an effort to arrive at the most appropriate

disposition. This validated instrument has been helpful in that regard. However, it is anticipated that weekly case reviews will further facilitate regular discussions about particular placement program strengths and weaknesses (as observed by the probation officers visiting the placements monthly) as well as the particular needs of youth/family dynamics (oftentimes the family is known to at least one of the officers in the unit) in order to better match the two. Additionally, as family engagement is enhanced at the front end, it is anticipated that better placement decisions will be made to meet the needs of the entire family, not just the youth involved. This would include further exploration of any relatives or other placement options (with particular emphasis on local resources) that might be utilized prior to placement in a group home setting, if appropriate.

5. Decrease Changes in Probation Officer Caseload

At present, out of county cases are assigned by geographical regions in order to manage resources and ensure maximum utilization of staff time. When youth require a change in placement, they may receive a new probation officer if placed in a different geographical region. It is understood that this disrupts the bonding experience for that youth and every effort will be made to prevent that from occurring, including keeping the same probation officer if the youth is placed within the county or attempting to place the youth in another appropriate placement within the same geographical region.

Training Needs

Training needs that were identified by line staff and supervisors included the topics of local community resources, and placement related issues (including Division 31 regulations and case planning). Deputy Probation Officers (DPO) are required to complete 40 hours of yearly training once they have completed their initial DPO CORE training. The Probation Agency offers local community resource training and is available to all staff. An effort will be made to ensure staff receive this training as soon as possible. Additionally, the Agency is committed to sending staff to the new statewide CORE program for Juvenile Probation Officers training which is being offered by the Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice at UC-Davis in partnership with the California Department of Social Services.

Resource Needs

Various resource needs were identified during the PQCR by both line staff and supervisors. The following summarizes additional resources that need to be explored for feasibility.

1. Increase Specialized Placements in Ventura County

At present, approximately 75% of the youth placed in group homes by the Probation Agency are placed outside of the county. This is due to a lack of sufficient bed

space in the county for all youth ordered into suitable placement as well as a lack of placements offering specialized intensive services. For example, there is no placement within the county that specializes in sex offender treatment. The Interagency Placement, Expansion, and Review Committee evaluates new programs requesting licensure and have been discussing the resource needs of the various placing agencies within the county in an attempt to encourage new programs to meet our specific needs. Additionally, dialogue with the placements already operating within the county will be done to explore the possibility of a shift in program focus where appropriate.

2. Increase Recruitment of Foster Homes in Ventura County for 602 Wards

At present, all youth in foster homes placed through the Probation Agency are placed outside the county. Our Agency has not been successful in the past two years in locating foster parents in the county who are willing to take our youth. The need for involvement in formalized recruitment efforts, possibly in conjunction with Ventura County's Adult, Children and Family Services foster care recruitment efforts as part of their Family to Family core strategies, will be explored.

3. Increase Bilingual Line Staff in Placement Unit

Until January 2006, the unit had one line staff who was bilingual. At present, there are no bilingual line staff in the unit. One Senior Deputy Probation Officer (SrDPO) is bilingual and frequently interprets for line staff. Approximately, 10% of the cases have a parent who is monolingual and other staff members (SrDPO or other staff not assigned to the placement unit) must be called upon to interpret during parent visits and phone calls. Given resource availability, the assignment of a bilingual line staff member will be explored in order for increased communication and participation by the family to occur.

4. Increased Joint Staff-Supervisor Placement Visits

This would enhance both the supervision, training, and oversight of line staff but also increase oversight of the group home providers and improve communication to meet the needs of both parties. As this is resource driven (staff availability), this will be listed as a goal.

Appendix B

Summary of the Ventura County Self-Assessment

Submitted to the California Department of Social Services October 31, 2006

In Completion of the County's California Child and Family Services Review

Summary of Ventura County Self Assessment

A. Discussion of System Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement

Currently, measures have been developed and regular reporting processes are in place for five of the eight C-CFSR outcomes. Assessment of strengths and areas needing improvement for each of the five outcomes for which results are available is based on: (a) a review of the county's performance level over time for all of the indicators related to the outcome; (b) an analysis of the programs, policies and procedures that have affected performance on each indicator; and (c) input from CFS staff and public agency and community partners.

Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Child Welfare.

Outcome 1 includes measures for the recurrence of abuse/neglect and the occurrence of abuse/neglect for children in foster care. Levels of recurrence of abuse/neglect have decreased since mid-2003, the exception being a recent spike in the Federal measure in the two most recent report periods (Oct 04-Sep 05 and Jan-Dec 05). Local levels for all three measures of recurrence are lower than statewide levels in nearly all report periods.

Reported levels for abuse/neglect in care are available for only three periods because of a recent change in the measure's definition. For the three periods, the County's overall level for Measure 1C was 0.16%. This compares with the statewide level of 0.15% for the three periods and the National Standard of 0.57% for this measure. County levels based on the previous definition were below statewide levels in all cases but one and with only one point (0.71%) above the National Standard.

▣ Strengths

Factors that have contributed to the County performance for recurrence of abuse/neglect include: (a) improved decision-making regarding removals in emergency response investigations; (b) involvement of parents in decisions regarding removals and safety planning; (c) improved assessment of the needs of children and families entering the child welfare system; (d) treatment and support services received by parents and children; and (e) ongoing child visits by social workers.

Regarding abuse in care, an additional strength includes involving caregivers in decisions regarding placement change.

▣ Areas Needing Improvement

Areas that may be strengthened to further improve levels for this outcome include: (a) developing ongoing training in the use and supervision of the Structured Decision Making protocol; (b) developing supports for relative caregivers; (c) improving training and supports for foster parents; and (d) developing the processes needed to support the placement of children with best matched caregivers.

Juvenile Probation.

Probation's overall level for Measure 1C was 0%, indicating no probation youth in foster care placements had a substantiated allegation of abuse or neglect. This indicates Ventura County has exceeded the statewide level for all 15 cohorts.

▣ Strengths

Relevant factors that contribute to the low percentage of probation youth who are abused or neglected in foster care are our current procedures to place children including the best match philosophy, our caseload standards of meeting monthly face-to-face with the youth, regular site inspections of the placements, treatment and support services to the youth and their families and involvement of all parties in decision making and treatment goals.

▣ Areas Needing Improvement

Areas that can be strengthened to keep the level for this outcome low include continued support to caregivers and ongoing training and supervision of officers and placements.

Outcome 2: Children are maintained safely in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Child Welfare.

Recurrence of abuse/neglect for children not removed from their home has trended downward since 2003 and levels have been consistently lower than statewide levels. Recurrence for children who were not removed was targeted in the County's initial and current System Improvement Plans.

▣ Strengths

Results for Outcome 2 reflect not only those factors that have positively impacted Outcome 1 but also: (a) the ongoing use of SDM risk reassessments and (b) the availability of services for dependency cases after they are closed and high-risk families that were evaluated-out following an ER investigation.

▣ Areas Needing Improvement

Ongoing development and fine-tuning of processes currently in place will continue and is expected to improve performance levels for Outcomes 1 and 2.

Process indicators for child safety.

Child Welfare.

Process indicators include measures for timeliness in initiating emergency response contacts and completion of child visits. Levels for responses to immediate response (IR) referrals have consistently exceeded 96% as well as statewide levels. Levels for responses to 10-day referrals on the other hand improved steadily and exceeded the statewide level only in the most recent report period.

Despite a sizable decrease of 5% in Jan-Mar 05 compared to the preceding three months, completion levels for monthly child visits have improved steadily and have exceeded 90% over the last nine report periods.

▣ Strengths

- ☑ **Emergency Response compliance.** Achievement of high levels for IR referrals and improvement in timeliness for 10-day referrals reflects the commitment of ER workers to meeting the timeliness requirements.
- ☑ **Completion of child visits.** Improvements made in social worker child visits have resulted from increased staffing levels and supervision and feedback regarding completion rates for individual workers.

▣ Areas Needing Improvement

- ☑ **Emergency Response compliance.** Further improvement in compliance rates can be achieved by innovating supports for data entry of ER contact documentation.
- ☑ **Completion of child visits.** Key to maintaining high completion rates are: (a) maintenance of adequate social worker staffing levels; (b) routine monitoring and supervision of completion rates for PP cases; and (c) monitoring approvals of visit exceptions.

Outcome 3: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry to foster care.

Child Welfare.

Outcome 3 includes federally defined and state-defined measures for timeliness of reunification and adoption, placement stability, and re-entry to foster care. In general, both federal and state measures for adoption and re-entry to foster care show

decreasing levels for adoptions within 24 months of foster care entry and increased re-entries to care. Federal and state measures show mixed results for reunification and placement stability. Reunification indicated by the federal measure has trended downward over the five most recent periods while the state measure shows an increasing trend over the six most recent periods. Results for federally defined placement stability have shown higher levels of stability over the two most recent periods following a decreasing trend for the preceding six periods. State-defined stability on the other hand has decreased over the two most recent periods reversing an increasing trend that covered eight periods. State-defined stability was targeted in the County's initial and current System Improvement Plans.

▣ **Strengths**

- ☑ **Reunification.** Local strengths that contribute to achieving timely reunification include: (a) the introduction of the TDM process for involving parents in decisions regarding emergency child removals; (b) the development of reunification plans using the SDM Family Strengths and Needs Assessment tool; (c) improved delivery of reunification services; and (d) ongoing risk reassessment including use of the use of SDM Reunification Reassessment tool.
- ☑ **Adoption.** The following strengths contribute to achieving timely adoptions: (a) increased staffing levels in the CFS Adoptions Unit; (b) the availability of adoption support and therapy services; and (c) the availability of financial supports for adoptive homes.
- ☑ **Placement stability.** Efforts to achieve placement stability are built on the following strengths: (a) involving parents and caregivers in decisions regarding placement change; (b) child visits by social workers; (c) increasing numbers of foster homes that are available to accept placements; and (d) the availability of foster parent supports.
- ☑ **Re-entry to foster care.** Re-entry results reflect the impact of several strengths including: (a) the recent implementation of the SDM tool for reunification reassessment to help assure that children are not returned to their families prematurely; (b) the continuation of FR services following reunification while the case remains open; and (c) the availability of services for reunified families following case closure.

▣ **Areas Needing Improvement**

- ☑ **Reunification.** Improvements needed to achieve more timely reunification include: (a) continued development of the process for involving parents in decisions regarding emergency child removals; and (b) ongoing training in the use and supervision of the SDM Family Strengths and Needs Assessment and Risk Reassessment tools.

- ☑ **Adoption.** Improvement in achieving timely adoptions can be achieved by: (a) increasing the consistency with which the adoption planning process is implemented; (b) initiating home studies earlier in the adoption planning process; (c) increasing the recruitment of and support for caregivers willing to adopt a foster child; and (d) further strengthening the integration of ongoing and adoptions processes.

Improving the timeliness of adoptions will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **Placement stability.** Levels of placement stability can be increased through the following improvements: (a) fine-tuning the TDM process for placement change; (b) developing the process of matching children with the available home that can best meet the needs of an entering foster child; (c) increasing the number of foster homes that are available to accept placements; (d) increasing the availability of supports for caregivers including relatives; and (e) strengthening the existing training program for foster parents.

Increasing the stability of placements will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **Re-entry to foster care.** Improvement in several areas can help to decrease levels of re-entry to care: (a) reviewing relapses in services provided to participants in the Dependency Drug Court program to determine ways to reduce relapse levels and then developing and implementing those change strategies; (b) assuring that reunified families receive post-reunification services and continue to receive services following case closure.

Reducing re-entries to foster care will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

Juvenile Probation.

Probation's overall level for Measure 3B (Placement Stability) fluctuated during the rating period, with us at 2% below the statewide level followed by a decreasing trend. The most recent 12-month period indicated that 77% of probation youth in foster care placements experienced two or less placements. This compares with the national standard of 87% and the California state average of 95% for the same period.

The overall level for Measure 3D (Adoption) was 0% and that is because most probation youth ordered into out of home care are usually reunified with the family, are older and transitioned into adult transitional living environments, and if there is a probation youth eligible or appropriate for adoption, they are usually converted to a 300 WIC dependant and handled by CFS.

The overall level for Measure 3E (Reunification) has shown a decreasing trend and most recently indicates that 67% of probation of youth in foster care were reunified, compared to the national standard of 76% and the California state average of 48% for the same period.

Levels for Measure 3F (Re-entry) fluctuated during the rating period, starting at 39 % followed by an increase during December 2004 to January 2004, with a downward trend interrupted by a 20 % increase. The most recent reporting period indicates that 20% of probation youth in foster care re-entered foster care within 12 months of reunification. This is greater than the national standard of 8.6 % and the California state average of 14 % for that same period.

■ **Strengths**

- ☑ **Reunification.** The strengths that promote reunification are: (a) “best-match” placements that enhance the ability to reunify the youth and the family; (b) Probation’s main philosophy which is geared to reunification; and (c) use of placements that are closer to the family to encourage their involvement in treatment, which enhances the chances for reunification.
- ☑ **Adoption.** The strengths in this area include: (a) a good working relationship between Probation and CFS on prospective adoption cases.
- ☑ **Placement stability.** Factors that promote stability of placements are: (a) the reduced number of probation youth ordered into out of home care due to increased and enhanced programs for youth in the home; (b) use of a more stringent screening process; and (c) improved best match placements.
- ☑ **Re-Entry.** Efforts to prevent re-entry have recently been enhanced through innovative aftercare grants, including the JJCPA grants, the on-going Juvenile Mental Health Court, and the more stringent screening process.

■ **Areas Needing Improvement**

- ☑ **Reunification.** Improvements to increase the timely reunification are to involve the parent and families in the placement, enhance support to the families, and continue training.

Increasing reunification of youths with their families will be targeted in the county’s System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **Adoption.** Improvement in achieving timely adoptions can be achieved by increasing the communication and cross training of CFS and Probation staff, and improving support for caregivers.

- ☑ **Placement Stability.** Placement stability can be increased by improving the parents/families level of involvement in placement, increasing the use of local placements to enhance family involvement, and strengthening the existing training and support of families and officers.

Increasing the stability of placements will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **Re-Entry.** Levels of re-entry can be reduced by enhancing aftercare programs for youths who return home, providing additional support to youths and their families, such as wraparound services upon return, and involving the parents/families in the transition plan.

Reducing re-entries to foster care will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

Outcome 4: The family relationships and connections of children are preserved as appropriate.

Child Welfare.

Outcome 4 includes measures for placement of sibling groups intact, use of less restrictive settings for initial and predominant placement, and placement of ICWA-eligible children. Results for this outcome show: (a) decreasing trends for all siblings placed together and for some or all siblings placed together; (b) increasing percents of first-entering children placed in relative, foster family, and FFA-certified homes as their initial placement; (c) no change in levels of predominant placement for each placement setting over the five most recent periods; and (d) decreasing trends for placement of the small numbers of Indian children in child welfare with relatives or Indian non-relatives.

Strengths

- ☑ **Placement of siblings together.** Current strengths that support the placement of sibling groups intact include (a) licensing exceptions that allow the placement of sibling groups; and (b) recruitment of relatives willing to accept sibling groups.
- ☑ **Levels of placement restrictiveness.** Strengths that contribute to success in **initially** placing children in less restrictive settings include: (a) involving parents in child removal decision making; (b) ongoing partnership with local foster parent association; and (c) decreased rates of entry to foster care in the County.

Strengths that support the use of less restrictive settings as a child's **predominant** placement include: (a) involving parents and significant others in decision making regarding placement change; (b) the local SB 163 Wraparound Program; and (c) ongoing partnership with local foster parent association and foster family agencies.

- ☑ **ICWA placements.** Given the small number of Indian families in the County (there are no identified tribes in Ventura County), performance levels for this outcome reflect the diligence of social workers in identifying eligible children and recruiting relatives willing to accept placement of these children.

▣ **Areas Needing Improvement**

- ☑ **Placement of siblings together.** Improvement in placement of sibling groups intact can be achieved in several respects: (a) recruitment of caregivers including relatives and foster parents willing to accept initial placement of sibling groups; and (b) improve stability of sibling placements by developing supports for caregivers to address the needs resulting from serving larger groups and children with special needs.

Increasing the placement of siblings together will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **Levels of placement restrictiveness.** Improvements that can help to reduce the restrictiveness of **initial** foster care placements include: (a) continued development of the process of involving parents in deciding whether removal is needed; (b) recruitment of foster homes that provide emergency shelter care; and (c) further development of the process for completing emergency relative approval.

Use of less restrictive settings as the **predominant** placement of children in foster care may be improved by: (a) increase the number of foster homes available to accept placements; (b) development of supports for relative caregivers and foster family homes; and (c) continue to work with foster family agencies to accept placement of children needing therapeutic foster care and sibling groups.

Reducing the restrictiveness of initial and predominant placements by increasing placements in relative homes and foster family homes will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

- ☑ **ICWA placements.** Placement of ICWA-eligible children with relatives or Indian non-relatives is hindered by the limited number of Indian families in the County.

Outcome 5: Children receive services adequate to meet their physical, emotional and mental health needs.

Child Welfare.

Routine implementation of the Health and Education Passport process helps to ensure that a child's health needs are met and was targeted in the County's initial and current

System Improvement Plans.. Recent data indicate 33% of caregivers received a hardcopy of the HEP Notebook for a child entering their home and 33% of 883 children who were in care during FY 05-06 received a CHDP-related service that was recorded in the Notebook.

▣ **Strengths**

Strengths in this area include: (a) the existing process for distribution of the HEP Notebook to new caregivers; and (b) the active partnership between CFS and the County Public Health Department that supports the participation of Public Health nurses in several child welfare programs.

▣ **Areas Needing Improvement**

Improvement in use of the HEP process requires: (a) development of a process for documentation of all health and mental health services in the Notebook; (b) development of a process for routine monitoring and supervision of the distribution and use of the Notebook; and (d) development of performance standards for distribution of the HEP Notebook to caregivers and documentation of all health and mental health services received in the Notebook.

Improving implementation of the HEP process will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

Outcome 6: Children receive services appropriate to meet their educational needs.

No C-CFSR results are currently available for any indicator designated to measure this outcome.

Outcome 7: Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

No C-CFSR results are currently available for any indicator designated to measure this outcome.

Outcome 8: Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.

Child Welfare.

Results for Outcome 8 show performance of the local ILP for FFY 04-05 improved over FFY 03-04 in indicators for employment, high school diploma/GED completion, and college enrollment. The level for completion of vocational or on-the-job training decreased on the other hand. ILP outcomes were targeted in the County's initial and current System Improvement Plans.

■ Strengths

Local strengths which enable achievement of ILP outcomes include: (a) the interagency Youth in Transition Advocacy Council (YTAC) that assists in developing resources and services for transitioning youth including transportation, housing, healthcare, education, and employment; (b) the Youth Services of Workforce Administration that provides a variety of employment and training programs for transitioning youth.

■ Areas Needing Improvement

Further improvement in indicators for Outcome 8 can be achieved through: (a) maintenance of consistent staffing for the ILP; (b) the participation of the ILP and CFS on a regular basis in mutual review and consultation regarding program operations and program development; (c) development of an electronic database that enables routine reporting of information on youth enrollment in transition services, delivery of services by service type, and outcomes at the youth level.

Improving ILP outcomes will be targeted in the county's System Improvement Plan.

B. Areas for Further Exploration Through the Peer Quality Case Review

Ventura County, in collaboration with San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara Counties, conducted its first and only PQCR the week of January 30, 2006 and submitted its final report to CDSS April 3, 2006. The review focused on the stability of placements for children in both child welfare and juvenile probation caseloads. Selection of this area of focus was based on several factors. First, placement stability is a target in the County's current System Improvement Plan (submitted to CDSS September 30, 2005). Second, existing data for federally defined placement stability (Measure 3B) indicated consistently decreasing performance levels for child welfare-supervised cases for cohorts through July 2004-June 2005. (Existing data indicated consistently increasing levels for child welfare performance for State Measure 3C (through July 2003-June 2004 cohort). Third, the Probation Agency's participation in the review resulted from its collaboration with CFS in local programs related to group home foster care placements including the SB 163 Wraparound Program, the Children's Services System Oversight Committee, the Interagency Placement Expansion and Review Committee (IPERC), and the Independent Living Program.

Appendix C
Timeframes for Implementation of
Ventura County System Improvement Plan for 2007 – 2010

Plan Component	2007				2008				2009			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Improvement Goal 2.2: Best match: Increase the number of cases in which the existing best match process is applied when a child needs a foster placement.												
S 2.2.1: Develop and implement procedure for documenting, tracking and evaluating each best matched placement.			X	X	X							
Improvement Goal 2.3: Best match: Review, revise and implement administrative procedures that impact stability of out-of-home placements.												
S 2.3.1: Review, revise and implement procedures for changing social worker caseload assignments.			X	X	X							
S 2.3.2: Review, revise and implement procedures for providing clinical supervision to social workers regarding their management of individual cases.			X	X	X	X						
S 2.3.3: Develop "peer-to-peer" process for maintaining integrity of program values, policies and procedures.				X	X	X	X					
S 2.3.4: For Probation-supervised placements, enhance the intra-departmental relationship with Juvenile Investigations Unit.		X	X	X								
Improvement Goal 2.4: Best match: Increase availability and receipt of services and supports by caregivers in foster family homes.												
S 2.4.1: Identify gaps in services and supports received by foster parents and develop services and support to fill those gaps.		X	X	X	X							
S 2.4.2: Develop and implement a process for creating a "retention plan" for each child following a best-matched placement.		X	X	X	X							
Improvement Goal 2.5: Best match: Extend best-match process to placement with relatives.												
S 2.5.1: Determine stability of relative placements and compare with stability of FFH and FFA placements.			X	X	X	X						

Plan Component	2007				2008				2009			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
S 4.1.2: Improve implementation of COMPAS case planning process with parents.		X	X	X								
S 4.1.3: Increase enrollment of Probation-supervised youths in SB 163 wraparound program.	X	X	X	X								
TARGET 5: Increase timely adoptions (Federal Measure 3D [child welfare only] and State Measure 3A-2 [child welfare only]).												
Improvement Goal 5.1: Develop and implement procedures for expediting adoption planning as part of concurrent planning process.												
S 5.1.1: Develop, implement, and evaluate procedures for (a) initiating adoption planning earlier in the concurrent planning process and (b) systematically implementing the concurrent plan.				X	X	X	X	X				
S 5.1.2: Develop, implement and evaluate procedures for completing an unmatched home study for every currently licensed foster parent.					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TARGET 6: Decrease reentry to foster care (Federal Measure 3F [child welfare and probation] and State Measure 3G [child welfare only]).												
Improvement Goal 6.1: Increase the consistency with which the processes for SDM Risk Reassessment and SDM Reunification Reassessment are implemented.												
S 6.1.1: Develop and implement a process for (a) ongoing training of Social Workers in use of Risk and Reunification Reassessment tools and (b) monitoring and supervision of their use by Supervisors.					X	X	X	X				
Improvement Goal 6.2: Implement TDM process for children exiting from out-of-home care. (last of three phases for TDM rollout)												
S 6.2.1: Develop policies and procedures for conducting TDM meetings for children exiting foster care.					X	X						

Plan Component	2007				2008				2009			
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
S 7.1.4: Develop, implement and monitor a plan to expand the capacity of existing homes to accept sibling groups of different sizes and with different needs.					X							
Improvement Goal 7.2: Increase resources to support and retain related and non-related caregivers who foster sibling groups.												
S 7.2.1: Develop and provide incentives for caregivers to accept sibling groups.					X							
S 7.2.2: Develop and implement targeted services, training and support for caregivers who foster sibling groups					X	X						