



Fresno County
Department of Social Services
Child Welfare Services
Disaster Response Plan

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Introduction

This plan specifies the disaster response policies and procedures to be implemented after a major emergency has been declared by the Fresno County Department of Social Services' Director or designee.

During major emergencies, the Department of Social Services' (DSS) primary objectives are the following:

- A. Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for CWS children, Probation children, non-minor dependents, including non-minor dependents residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, children placed in or out of California through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), out-of-state non-minor dependents under county care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;**
- B. Respond, as appropriate, to new child welfare cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster and provide services in those cases;**
- C. Address and provide care for unaccompanied minors;**
- D. Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential child welfare personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;**
- E. Preserve essential program records; and**
- F. Coordinate services and share information with other states and counties. Include a description of the process utilized by the county to ensure that information regarding children placed pursuant to the ICPC occurs with both the sending state and the CDSS.**

CWS Disaster Response Criteria A:

Identify, locate, and continue availability of services for CWS children, Probation children, non-minor dependents, including non-minor dependents residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, children placed in or out of California through the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC), out-of-state non-minor dependents under county care or supervision who are displaced or adversely affected by a disaster;

- 1. Identification and location process of CWS children, Probation children, non-minor dependents, including those in probation residing in foster care, out-of-county placements, ICPC children, and out-of-state non-minor dependents who may be displaced***

In conjunction with the Probation Department, the Department of Social Services' primary concern is to assure the safety and well-being of children in its care, including children and non-minor dependents from other states/counties, children under the care and supervision of Probation, and children otherwise known as "unaccompanied minors," who may be left unsupervised as the result of a disaster.

To strengthen collaboration between DSS and Probation in identifying, locating, and continuing services to probation children in CWS care who are receiving Title IV-E foster care, DSS and the Probation Department will be working to establish an Inter-departmental Agreement that permits the sharing of specific information regarding probation children during a disaster. It is anticipated this will be in place by end of September 2016.

Immediately prior to, during, or after a disaster, the status of children in the Department's care will be determined via telephone or in person. Social Workers will maintain and carry with them, when leaving their primary worksite, a current record of every child in their case load by utilizing information from the Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS), Safe Measures, caseload reports, and field worksheets. CWS/CMS and Safe Measures provide information on children, siblings, birth parents, resource families, and other collateral/providers for additional emergency contact information, including children located in other states. In addition, both databases can provide access to children's placement addresses, telephone numbers, and social security numbers.

The status of foster children in the care of the Probation Department will also be determined via telephone or in person. Probation Officers have access to CWS/CMS, the Probation Department's Juvenile Automation System, and the Probation Department's Sharenet to access information regarding the children's current placement addresses, resource families, and additional information for the children and their known family members.

In a major disaster, DSS, in collaboration with the Probation Department, will provide a variety of services for court dependent minors/youths, minors and non-minor dependents from other states, Probation children, and unaccompanied minors, consistent with mandated care and shelter responsibilities as it relates to the care and supervision of children. Upon request of the Emergency Operations Center, DSS will provide emergency services which includes:

- The utilization of a disaster inquiry Care Line (559) 255-8320;
- Staff assignment to emergency shelters or relief programs to implement an information and location assistance program in coordination with the Care Line contact number;
- The identification, interview and provision of immediate care for displaced minor victims;

- The processing of caregiver requests of court dependent minors for disaster assistance;
- Activation of a phone tree to contact caregivers and birth parents (including out of county/state facilities) for/with care status updates and to relay information on court hearings, evacuation needs, etc.;
- Perform other tasks relating to the care and safety of dependent minors.

DSS will provide the American Red Cross a list of client names and their birthdates. The American Red Cross will then search their Disaster Victim Inquiry System and notify DSS on client matches. Once DSS identifies foster children staying at shelters, DSS will contact them to verify their status and connect the family to available resources as necessary.

2. Communication process with child care providers

Contact with and responding to the needs of resource families, birth parents, the children/youth in DSS care, in the hours immediately following a disaster or other emergency is a high priority.

A toll free line, established by DSS to provide emergency information in case of a major disaster will be activated/manned. This number will be available as a direct line of communication between DSS and resource families, non-relative extended family members (NREFM)s, relative caregivers, birth parents, group homes, foster family agencies, contract providers, and the children/youth placed in out of home care.

DSS staff will be deployed, in coordination with the deployment of Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health mental health staff, to designated American Red Cross (ARC) shelters to process initial intakes and registration of resource family/NREFM/relative caregivers and the children in their care; birth parent(s) and the children in their care; licensed providers and the children in their care, including daycare facilities, and unaccompanied minors presented to the care and shelter site for care and supervision. Managers will follow the process to identify and reunite unaccompanied minors with their parent/guardians also providing temporary placement, as needed.

After a disaster strikes, DSS will contact its resource family providers to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children under their care. Prioritized contact will be given to foster homes with medically at-risk foster children, group homes, and/or those located in the most heavily impacted disaster areas. Workers will first try to establish contact with resource families using phones if possible. If telecommunications are down or if after repeated attempts the family and its designated emergency contact are unreachable, then workers will make home visits to verify the status of the foster children.

Resource families evacuating the area will be instructed to notify DSS as soon as possible and provide information about where the family is evacuating to and how to

contact them in the future. Group homes will also be instructed to communicate with DSS regarding the status of children in their care as soon as possible.

The nature of the department's response will depend on the location and scale of the disaster, time of day, and availability of staff. DSS will dedicate available staff and resources to disaster response as appropriate given the scale and type of event.

For a disaster that occurs during business hours, all staff is expected to immediately report to their supervisor or the available next higher ranking manager. Some DSS staff may be released from duty to check on their families. Before dismissal, however, these workers will be given maps, client rosters, and an assignment to check on resource families that live close to them to ensure the safety and wellbeing of the foster children. This task should be accomplished within 24 hours. Workers will be expected to report back to duty as instructed prior to dismissal.

In the case of a localized disaster, geographically organized location information of youth in open cases can be accessed through Safe Measures.

3. Identification of evacuation procedures – Event known in advance

DSS will defer to the Fresno County Office of Emergency Services and other public safety departments to issue evacuation orders. DSS does not have the authority, expertise, access to information, or infrastructure to execute evacuations.

Resource families relocating to other areas are required to notify DSS as soon as possible to update their contact information including address and phone numbers. If Care Line workers are unavailable, a voicemail system will provide instructions and allow the family to leave messages about how to contact them in the future.

4. Identification of evacuation procedures – Event not known in advance

Depending upon the nature of the disaster, DSS will evacuate in accordance with the Fresno County Office of Emergency Services procedures. DSS will work with emergency response agencies to establish data sharing in order to identify and respond to displaced children.

5. Identification of shelters

During a major emergency, DSS will process the intake of unaccompanied minors and provide emotional support, nourishment, medical assessment, and crisis intervention/mental health assessment as needed until the children are reunified or other placements are secured. If the influx of unaccompanied minors is excessive, DSS will work with shelter organizations such as the Fresno Rescue Mission and local community centers which have large capacity facilities.

6. Parental notification procedures

Following a disaster, DSS will make reasonable efforts to contact the biological parents of the DSS foster children and provide information about the status of their children as it becomes available. However, the immediate priority will be the safety of children in care.

7. Alternative processes for providing continued services

During or after a disaster, DSS is not absolved from any of its State-mandated child abuse referral responsibilities; however, Government Code 8567 does allow the Governor to make, amend, and rescind State regulations. If necessary, DSS may submit a request to the Governor through the county's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) to suspend appropriate State-mandated child abuse referral responsibilities.

Following a disaster, DSS offices will likely be unable to meet all State and Federal regulations within mandated timeframes, and the courts may be temporarily closed and thus unable to issue orders and waivers needed by local DSS offices.

Immediately after a disaster, DSS will dedicate available resources as needed to continue all State and Federal mandated services. DSS will shift staff responsibilities as necessary to help maintain continuity of care services for the department's existing foster children and new referrals. Non-essential functions such as adoption services may be temporarily suspended as necessary.

8. Staff assignment process

All City and County employees are designated by both State and City law as "Disaster Service Workers." When the mayor or the designated next in command declares an emergency, all public employees are obligated to serve as Disaster Service Workers and may be assigned to perform activities outside of their normal duties that promote the protection of public health and safety or the preservation of lives and property. DSS staff responsibilities may change as reasonable and necessary to help fulfill City, State, and Federally mandated response roles. As per County policy, DSS staff will not be expected to perform disaster response duties that are unsafe or that they do not know how to perform.

Some DSS staff will have pre-designated immediate disaster response duties, such as staffing a shelter or conducting health and wellness checks on medically fragile foster children. These special assignments will supersede assignment to general Disaster Worker assignments.

9. Workload planning

Immediately following a disaster, ensuring the safety and well-being of foster children, especially the medically at-risk and unaccompanied minors will be the highest priority.

Otherwise, DSS will assign available staff as necessary to fulfill disaster response functions and maintain continuity of services to existing and new clients.

10. Alternative locations for operations

DSS operations are conducted at multiple sites in addition to the department's primary administrative office located at 2011 Fresno Street, Fresno, CA 93721. The locations of these sites are as follows:

- 2135 Fresno Street, Fresno, CA 93721
- 1404 L. Street, Fresno, CA 93721
- 4499 East Kings Canyon Road, Fresno, CA 93750
- 142 E. California Avenue, Fresno, CA 93706

Following a disaster, DSS employees will be expected to report to their normal worksite or designated staging area unless instructed otherwise. If a facility is inaccessible, the Director's office will instruct those workers to an alternative location to report to, dismiss them, or direct those with the ability to do so to telecommute.

Some workers may be assigned to a temporary office in order to assist with disaster response for foster children placed out of county, or to perform regular work or other disaster response duties if their primary worksite is inaccessible.

11. Orientation and ongoing training

A disaster training module was incorporated into the training provided to all new DSS employees. It is mandatory for all staff to complete the National Information Management System (NIMS) and the Standardized Emergency Management System (SEMS) training. It is also mandatory for all supervisors to complete additional training on NIMS and SEMS, as well as additional training regarding Mass Care and Shelter, which is provided by the American Red Cross.

CWS Disaster Response Criteria B:

Respond, as appropriate, to new CWS cases in areas adversely affected by a disaster, and provide services in those cases;

1. Investigation process

New child welfare investigations will be conducted in accordance with State and Federal law. However, under extreme circumstances DSS may seek permission from the court to extend some State and Federal mandated deadlines.

During or after a disaster, each Program Manager or designee shall ensure that all Emergency Response Child Abuse Referrals are investigated. In some situations, it

may be necessary to retain a skeleton crew or to shift staff to another facility in order to respond to emergency referrals.

2. Determine circumstances surrounding the child's potential entrance

Immediately after a disaster, DSS will dedicate available resources as needed to continue all State and Federal mandated services. DSS will shift staff responsibilities as necessary to help maintain continuity of care services for the department's existing foster children and new referrals.

3. Implementation process for providing new services

After a disaster, DSS will request the courts to activate disaster court procedures. Feasible time frames will be established to allow for the generation of court reports, and court appearances. All existing standards for new service provisions, except as added, amended, or rescinded by the Governor, remain in effect during a disaster or other emergency.

4. Services emphasizing reunification due to disaster

CWS staff will make every effort to locate the children's parents, legal guardians and/or responsible relatives to release the children to during or after the disaster in accordance with the Welfare and Institutions Code and Agency policies and procedures.

When no one can be located, CWS staff will provide services to such unaccompanied minors and unaccompanied non-minor dependents resulting from the disaster. These children, in accordance with the Welfare and Institutions Code and Agency policies and procedures, may be detained and placed in appropriate homes or facilities. CWS will work with the Juvenile court to expedite the return of children to located parents who are able to make appropriate provisions for their child(ren).

CWS Disaster Response Criteria C:

Address and provide care for unaccompanied minors;

1. Structure – CWS personnel

CWS personnel shall assist unaccompanied minors resulting from the disaster. CWS personnel assigned to a designated shelter and/or command post will process the initial intake and registration of unaccompanied minors, as well as make reasonable efforts to provide supportive services to all children under its care, custody and control, those under its temporary care and supervision, and the children's care providers during the disaster.

CWS personnel shall be assigned to rotating shifts for the care and supervision of detained children. The care and supervision site may be in a designated shelter or

other facility that is safe and has food, water, and proper sanitation for the children in those instances that traditional placements cannot be made.

2. Address language barriers to communicate quickly and effectively

For children and others whose main language is other than English, bilingual staff will be available. For languages where this is not the case, translators will be available via a DSS service contract or staff can utilize language line telephone interpretive services.

3. Determine likelihood of reunification and steps toward reunification

CWS staff will make every effort to locate the children's parents, legal guardians and/or responsible relatives to release the children to during or after the disaster in accordance with the Welfare and Institutions Code and Agency policies and procedures.

4. Assess and make a determination within 30 days

For unaccompanied minors who are left unsupervised, CWS staff will provide services to such unaccompanied minors and unaccompanied non-minor dependents resulting from the disaster. These children, in accordance with the Welfare and Institutions Code and Agency policies and procedures, may be detained and placed in appropriate homes or facilities. CWS will work with the Juvenile Dependency Court to expedite the return of children to located parents who are able to make appropriate provisions for their child(ren).

CWS Disaster Response Criteria D:

Remain in communication with caseworkers and other essential CWS personnel who are displaced because of a disaster;

1. Communication structure - staff

If a disaster occurs during business hours, workers should report to their supervisor or senior manager for instructions. DSS staff will also make reasonable efforts to contact their supervisors or other appropriate managers.

2. Communication structure – CWS personnel (phone tree)

For disasters occurring during non-business hours, DSS managers and supervisors will activate the phone tree and contact staff to check on their status and provide work instructions.

3. Communication structure – contracted services

Once the Foster Care Emergency Toll-Free Line is activated, contracted providers will be instructed to contact this number after taking steps to secure their family. Should

children be at their place of business or otherwise in their care receiving services, the contractor will contact the children's caregivers. They will make arrangements for reuniting the children and caregivers or assist in arranging medical care, as needed.

4. *Communication process when all normal channels are unavailable*

If communications are down or attempts are unsuccessful, workers should listen to the designated radio stations for instructions.

5. *Communication frequency*

In the event of a disaster, DSS staff will make reasonable efforts to contact their supervisors or other appropriate managers.

6. *Communication with the media*

The Department Director or designee will provide information to the public media.

7. *Communication with volunteers*

Communication with volunteers will be coordinated through the Fresno County Office of Emergency Services.

8. *Establishment of a toll-free number prior to disaster including Telecommunication Device for the Deaf (TDD)*

A toll free line, established by DSS to provide emergency information in case of a major disaster will be activated/manned. This number will be available as a direct line of communication between DSS and resource families, non-relative extended family members (NREFM)s, relative caregivers, birth parents, group homes, foster family agencies, contract providers, and the children/youth placed in out of home care.

CWS Disaster Response Criteria E:

Preserve essential program records;

1. *Record preservation process*

DSS' essential program records are primarily stored in the statewide database Child Welfare System/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). The CWS/CMS server maintenance is managed by the State's vendor, IBM Global Services. IBM is contractually bound to the State to provide extensive Disaster Recovery services in the event of emergencies. The services include, but are not limited to, providing access to Fresno County data through Sacramento.

2. Use of off-site back-up system

As an extra layer of data protection, DSS also backs up Fresno County caseload extracts from CWS/CMS data on DSS servers and portable hard drives of key executive staff. Laptops using an alternative power source are downloaded with the CWS/CMS application and remote access capability and are provided to child welfare assistant and program directors.

If critical infrastructure is inaccessible and power is unavailable, disaster managers should use the agency laptop, a portable printer, and a car with a power inverter to access and print maps and rosters.

Safe Measures can also be used to retrieve case load information.

CWS Disaster Response Criteria F:

Coordinate services and share information with other states and counties; include a description of the process utilized by the county to ensure that information regarding children placed pursuant to the ICPC occurs with both the sending state and CDSS;

1. ICPC reporting process must include a process that disseminates information to both the sending state and CDSS

For non-local disasters involving children/youths who are dependents of Fresno County but placed in another state, the case carrying social worker is responsible for contacting the receiving state agency by telephone, fax, or email. If unable to do so, the local Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) Liaison will contact the receiving state's ICPC Liaison or designee. The case carrying social worker will also attempt to contact care providers of those children/youths placed out of the state to determine their safety and well-being.

For local disasters involving children placed in Fresno from another state via the ICPC, the assigned courtesy supervision social worker or other staff member will contact the sending state's assigned social worker to inform him/her of the disaster or emergency and to communicate our plan to keep the child(ren) safe. In the event that the sending agency's social worker is unavailable, the Fresno County ICPC Liaison will contact the state's ICPC Liaison or designee to provide the above information.

The case carrying social worker is also responsible for contacting caregivers who have placement of children/youths outside the county in order to determine their safety and wellbeing.

CDSS will be responsible for coordinating services and sharing information with other States and Counties.

2. *Mental health providers*

Contact with services to be provided by local mental health providers will be coordinated through Child Welfare management and the Fresno County Department of Behavioral Health.

3. *Courts*

Communication with the Fresno County Juvenile Dependency Court will be coordinated by Child Welfare management/County Counsel, and Court Officers. The Court will be advised of the status of the children under its jurisdiction if they are affected by the disaster. Child Welfare management will ensure that social workers are available for court cases that require legal processes as time allows following a disaster.

4. *Federal partners*

Coordination with federal partners will be managed by the Department Director or designee.

5. *CDSS*

Coordination with state partners will be managed by the Department Director or designee.

6. *Tribes*

Information regarding a child served by the Department of Social Services who falls under the jurisdiction of the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and is affected by a disaster shall be provided to the applicable tribe as soon as reasonably possible by the assigned social worker or other ICWA designated staff.

7. *Volunteers*

The Department of Social Services will defer to the Fresno County Office of Emergency Services and other public safety departments for overseeing requests for, and deployment of, volunteers from outside the county/state.