Fresno County
Department of Children and Family Services
Emergency Preparedness and
Disaster Response Plan
February 2009

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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 Children and Family Services Director or designee.

During major emergencies, the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) program's primary mission objectives are the following:

- Locate and continue services to all foster children in the Agency's care, with prioritized response to the most vulnerable clients, including medically fragile, disabled, and severely emotionally disturbed children.
- Ensure the safety and well-being of unaccompanied minors until they are connected with their parents or other family members.
- Preserve essential client records.
- Respond as appropriate to new child welfare referrals.
- Support the Agency's city-wide disaster response roles.

1. Identification and location process of children who may be displaced

The primary concern of Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services is to assure the safety and well-being of children in its care, and children otherwise known as "unaccompanied minors", who may be left unsupervised as the result of a disaster.

Immediately prior to, during, or after a disaster, the status of children in the Department's care will be determined via the telephone, a home call, and/or verbal or in person contact with emergency shelters. Social workers will maintain and carry with them, when leaving their primary work site, a current record of every child in their case load (CWS/CMS caseload reports and field worksheets), including: child's name, address, telephone number, age, social security number, and contact information for birth parents, siblings, resource families, and other collaterals/providers.

In a major disaster, DCFS will provide a variety of services for court dependent minors, and displaced minors, within the mandated care and shelter duties as they relate to the care and supervision of children. Upon request of the Emergency Operations Center, DCFS will provide emergency child welfare services including:

- Assign staff to emergency shelters or relief programs to implement an information and location assistance program in coordination with the toll-free disaster contact number;
- Interview, identify and provide immediate care for displaced minor victims;
- Process requests from caregivers of court dependent minors for disaster assistance;
- Activate 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.
- Activate a disaster inquiry line for court dependents
- Perform other tasks relating to the care and safety of dependent minors

Prioritized response to medically fragile children. Twenty-four hour response will be prioritized to pre-identified medically at-risk children.
Protecting and updating client records. The data extracts from the Child Welfare System Case Management System (CWS/CMS) contain essential contact information. To help ensure the accessibility of the files during emergencies, these electronic files are also backed up on agency servers and the portable hard drives of key executive staff. 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.

Identifying foster families in shelters. DCFS will provide the Red Cross a list of our client names and their birthdates. Red Cross will then search their Disaster Victim Inquiry System and notify DCFS about client matches. Once DCFS identifies foster

children staying at shelters, the Agency will contact them to verify their status and connect the family to available resources as necessary.

Managing disaster response. The nature of DCFS response will depend on the location and scale of the disaster, time of day, and availability of staff. The agency 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 are expected to immediately report to their supervisor or the available next higher ranking manager. Some DCFS staff members 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 foster families that live close to them to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children. This task should be accomplished within 24 hours. Workers will be expected report back to duty as instructed prior to dismissal.

2. Communication process with foster care providers

It is the Department's priority to make contact with, and respond to the needs of, resource families, birth parents, the children/youth in the Department's care, and unaccompanied minors, in the hours immediately following a disaster or other emergency.

The Foster Care Emergency toll-free line established by the Department to provide emergency information in case of a major disaster will be activated/manned. This number is available as a direct line of communication between the Department and foster parents, 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.

The DCFS staff will be deployed, and will coordinate deployment of Fresno County Mental Health staff, to designated American Red Cross (ARC) shelters to process initial intakes and registration of foster/NREFM/relative caregivers and the children in their care; birth parent and the children in their care; licensed providers and the children in their care, including daycares, 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, DCFS will contact all of its foster care providers to ensure the safety and well-being of the foster children within their care. Prioritized contact will be given to foster homes with medically at-risk foster children, group home, and/or those located in the most heavily impacted disaster areas. Workers will first try to establish contact with foster 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.

Foster families evacuating the area will be instructed to notify the Agency 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 the Agency regarding the status of children in their care as soon as possible.

3. Evacuation procedures

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

Families relocating to other areas are required to send an e-mail to the Agency's designated address or call the Hotline as soon as possible to update their contact information including address and phone numbers. If Hotline 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. Shelters

During a major emergency, the DCFS 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 exceeds the capacity of the Craycroft facilities, the children may be temporarily sheltered at a nearby facility.

5. Parental notification

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

6. Continuity of services

During or after a disaster, DCFS 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, DCFS 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, DCFS 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 DCFS offices.

Immediately after a disaster, DCFS will dedicate available resources as needed to continue all State and Federal mandated services.

DCFS will shift staff responsibilities as necessary to help maintain continuity of core services for the Agency's existing foster children and new referrals. Non-essential functions such as adoption services may be temporarily suspended as necessary.

7. 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. DCFS staff responsibilities may change as reasonable and necessary to help fulfill the Agency's City, State, and Federally mandated response roles. As per City policy, DCFS staff will not be expected to perform disaster response duties that are unsafe or that they do not know how to perform.

Some DCFS 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.

8. Workload planning

Immediately following a disaster, ensuring the safety and well-being of the Agency's current foster children-especially the medically at-risk-and unaccompanied minors will be the highest priority. Otherwise, DCFS will assign available staff as necessary to fulfill the agency's disaster response functions and maintain continuity of services to existing and new clients.

9. Alternative locations for operations

DCFS operations are conducted at multiple sites. In addition to the Agency's administrative offices at 2011 Fresno Street, 2135 Fresno Street, 1404 L. Street, and Craycroft 335 G. Street. Following a disaster, DCFS 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 on an alternative location to report to, dismiss them, or direct those with the ability to do so telecommute.

Some workers may be assigned to a temporary office in order to 1) assist with disaster response for foster children place out of county, or 2) perform regular work or other disaster response duties if the City is inaccessible.

10. Orientation and on-going training

A disaster training module will be incorporated into the training provided to all new DCFS employees.

11. New child welfare investigation process

New child welfare investigations will be conducted in accordance with State and Federal law. However, under extreme circumstances DCFS 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.

12. Implementation process for new services

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

13. Communication protocols

Staff communication protocols. As discussed in Section 1, if a disaster occurs during business hours, workers should report to their supervisor or senior manager for instructions.

For disaster occurring during non-business hours, DCFS managers and supervisors will activate the phone tree and contact staff to check on their status and provide work instructions. DCFS staff will also make reasonable efforts to contact their supervisor or other appropriate managers. If communications are down or attempts are unsuccessful, workers should listen to the designated radio stations for instructions.

Communication with the media. The Director will provide information to the public and media.

14. Contracted services

Once the Foster Care Emergency Line toll-free is activated, contracted providers are 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 for medical care, as needed.

DCFS essential program records are primarily stored in the statewide database Child Welfare System Case Management System, otherwise known as 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 from Sacramento.

As an extra layer of data protection, DCFS also backs up Fresno County caseload extracts from CWS/CMS data on agency 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 the child welfare assistant and program directors.

CWS Disaster Response Criteria E: Coordinated services and share information with other states

The case carrying social worker is responsible for contacting caregivers outside the county and state, to determine children's safety and well being.

The California Department of Social Services will be responsible for coordinating services and sharing information with other states.