

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency



333 West Julian Street
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DATE: May 28, 2019

TO: Board of Supervisors
Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: Robert Menicocci, Agency Director

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "R. Menicocci", is written over the "FROM:" line.

SUBJECT: Off-Agenda Report relating to options or strategy to shift current resources to enhance and further support resource families.

BACKGROUND

On May 16, 2019, the Social Services Agency (SSA) addressed questions regarding funding and support for resource families at a Board of Supervisors' (Board) Budget Workshop. At this workshop, information was requested on how the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) plans to strategize shifting current resources to enhance and further support resource families.

OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT RESOURCE FAMILIES

Currently, DFCS is discussing and exploring potential solutions to provide additional supports for children and resource parents. The high cost of living in Santa Clara County (SCC) presents a unique challenge to resource families to meet financial costs of having foster children placed in their homes. The cost of living also poses a challenge to the ongoing targeting and recruitment of additional resource homes. The financial supports that currently exist do not adequately address the creative funding issue and the barriers faced by our resource community. Greater flexibility with funds will help enhance our responsiveness to resource families.

Resource Family Approval (RFA) is a state-mandated process on standardizing information, training and opportunity to support caregivers with foster children and youth. The Governor's May Revision to the state budget provides a one-time increase of \$14.4 million through General Fund to assist counties with RFA; however, this does not include the increase of RFA homes in high cost areas, such as SCC. According to the Child Welfare Directors Association of California (CWDA), the RFA program will suffer a six million dollar decrease in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019-20 budget, even with the one time increase. The California State Association of Counties (CSAC) and CWDA sent a notice of opposition to the proposed cut and both associations are advocating for funding the development of a Family Urgent Response System (FURS) to support children and youth in foster care and caregivers in order to help strengthen their relationships. FURS is a statewide hotline that provides children and youth in foster care, as well as their caregivers, immediate trauma-informed support. While the state budget has not been finalized, DFCS continues to utilize the existing supports for caregivers.

DFCS provides resources to support kinship families (relatives and non-related extended family members) who are approved as RFA homes. The funding is provided through the Kinship Foster

Care Emergency Fund, as well as other resources, such as State Family Preservation funds, Federal funds and County funds. The state-funded Kinship Foster Care Emergency Fund allots \$53,000 per county, per fiscal year. The funds are typically exhausted within six months. These funds can be used for housing, health and safety upgrades associated with becoming a RFA home. Once these funds are exhausted, DFCS can utilize the other funding sources noted above to assist a RFA home with associated costs. Depending on the family's needs and funding availability, there is a one-time funding of up to \$2,000 per family through these funds. Additionally, a \$3,000 fund is available through Seasons of Sharing, which provides short-term, critical assistance grants through private donations. Seasons of Sharing can help fund housing assistance and critical family needs, including furniture and appliances, utility bills and medical equipment.

Following the approval of a RFA home, a RFA receives a reimbursement rate for each child and/or youth placed in the home. At this time, through state Special Care Increment (SCI) funds, RFA homes in SCC can receive supplemental payments for children or youth who have medical or behavioral issues. In the current rate structure, medical needs are reimbursed at a higher rate than behavioral needs. An element of Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) consists of a revised rate system, Level of Care (LOC), aimed at establishing more equitable reimbursement rates among caregivers with children of varying needs, such as medical, emotional and behavioral that require additional appointments and/or services. At this time, per the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), only Foster Family Agency (FFA) homes are eligible for a LOC assessment and reimbursement rates. The plan is to implement the LOC rates for all RFA homes, including DFCS RFA homes, which will provide the potential for higher reimbursement rates for caregivers based on a resource parents' level of support. The LOC is comprised of a matrix that include five domains: physical, behavioral/emotional, health, educational and permanency/family services. Each of these domains is scored separately based on the level of support provided by the RFA caregiver and totaled to determine the rate.

DFCS attempted to offset costs through other programs and funding sources available, including the Child Care Bridge program, funding for summer camps (made available by the Board), transportation support and other financial supports that are either one-time or temporary. An informational list is shared with caregivers during the RFA process and home evaluations. DFCS, along with our Resource Parent Advisory Committee, is exploring if additional work is needed to ensure caregivers are aware of available resources.

In addition to financial supports, DFCS is also reviewing the quality of services provided to resources families, including coordination of services, trauma sensitivity and responsiveness to the cultural and individual needs of each family.

A major challenge for caregivers is meeting youth's needs, who have been removed from their homes and placed in new environments with caregivers that are often unfamiliar to them. Youth entering out-of-home care, or those who have been in care long-term and/or are stepping down from congregate care to a home-based setting, may require significant support.

DFCS is assessing the needs of caregivers to safely support youth through the Quality Parent Initiative (QPI). QPI is an approach to strengthening foster care by refocusing on excellent parenting for all children in the child welfare system and building better partnerships across the triad of caregivers, birth parents and social workers. There are a number of areas for consideration, based on research, in which QPI initiatives can help build a more responsive service delivery system to help meet the needs of children and families. Currently there is a QPI Advisory Committee that consists of staff, caregivers, birth parents, former foster youth and

various internal and external stakeholders. As a result of QPI and other initiatives, the DFCS started a resource family and birth parent advisory group. DFCS is learning directly from impacted families about what is needed to achieve a more responsive system. In April 2019, DFCS sent five staff, a birth family and a resource family to the National QPI Conference. After a debrief meeting with those who attended, the QPI Advisory Committee reached out to presenters at the training to focus on visitation. Currently, modeling approaches for visitation and "comfort calls" are being examined. "Comfort calls" is a tool used at the time a child enters a resource home meant to build communication and trusting relationships. The intended benefit is for caregivers to gather information on the child to meet their needs, the parent to get to know the person caring for their child, but most importantly for the child. These efforts are being explored to elevate resource families as coaches and mentors to children, youth and families. The Kinship, Adoptive, and Foster Parent Association (KAFPA) is a non-profit organization that has a contract with SCC to support and advocate for resource families. They are integral partners in the QPI initiative and provide an additional voice to resource families. These are ways caregiver voice has been lifted to include their experience and expertise. QPI is one venue where discussions and recommendations are made regarding shifting of priorities and the use of funding.

Another area where efforts can be focused is working with contracted service providers of Wraparound (Wrap) to elevate responsive support to families. Resource family and birth parent advisory groups help us inform Wrap providers of the challenges families face, and how providers can be better served to be successful. Along with Wrap services, is enhancing individualized coaching for caregivers, increasing access to respite care and using foster parent mentors.

In line with the Child and Family Practice Model (CFPM), engaging caregivers and birth families to expand a circle of support for children and families are critical. This is an endeavor and must be met by social workers and service providers that work with families. To further support these efforts, DFCS is working with the Office of Contracts Management to use Logic Models and outcome measurements, to assess services, as well as using various Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) reviews for a closer look at processes and for improvement. Furthermore, DFCS, begun to assess the efficacy of services. The goal with these layers of program and service assessments is that more targeted and needed services will be provided to children, youth and caregivers.

Increasing collaboration with our community partners and exploring ways in which DFCS can support partners to increase the number of Professional Parents and Intensive Service Foster Care (ISFC) homes is necessary. DFCS participates in a Recruitment Collaborative with local FFAs. This Collaborative combines resources to recruit and connect families to agencies based on the level of care they are interested in providing, including Professional Parent and ISFC care. In addition, SSA is working towards putting the Professional Family Program in place. A team within DFCS is currently working on fleshing out program needs, projecting cost and identifying funding sources. SSA is also looking into determining the best strategy for solicitation and acquisition of the contract. Given the urgency of the program to offset the shortage in the Short Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP) slots in the County, SSA is looking at October 2019 as a reasonable start time.

DFCS is working towards aligning support services under one division in order to develop a more coordinated service delivery system. For example, RFA, QPI and the unit that conducts the Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTs), will be united in the same bureau. The goal to

unify these three areas is to provide social workers a “one-stop shop” model for better access and to enroll children, youth and families in services.

NEXT STEPS

- DFCS will evaluate modeling approaches for visitation and “comfort calls” over the next six months to assess for implementation.
- DFCS will continue to host monthly advisory groups for both resource families and birth families to increase insight into sustainable activities to support families and improve relationships and communication with families served.
- DFCS will continue to participate in state activities regarding CCR and the implementation of LOC.

c: Chief Board Aides
Miguel Marquez, Chief Operating Officer
James R. Williams, County Counsel
Megan Doyle, Clerk of the Board