DATE: April 9, 2020

TO: Board of Supervisors

Jeffrey V. Smith, M.D., J.D., County Executive

FROM: Robert Menicocci, Social Services Agency Director

SUBJECT: Off-Agenda Report Relating to the Transportation Options to Resource Families

On February 25, 2020, the County of Santa Clara’s Social Services Agency (SSA), Department of Family and Children’s Services (DFCS) presented information regarding actions taken subsequent to closure of the Receiving, Assessment, and Intake Center (RAIC) to the Board of Supervisors (Board) (Item No.9). Administration was asked by Supervisor Ellenberg to provide information relating to opportunities for social workers to provide transportation services to foster youth in addition to transportation services provided through HopSkipDrive.

Transportation options available to resource families by DFCS

DFCS provides over 1,000 one-way transportation trips per month through a combination of contracted services, case carrying social workers, social worker Is, and extra-help transportation officers. Contracted school transportations average around 420 one-way trips per month for children ages six years and older. Additionally, social worker Is provide transportation for supervised visits and court hearings, school, medical, dental and counseling appointments. These total approximately 440 trips per month.

SSA contracted with HopSkipDrive, starting July 1, 2018, to augment school of origin transportation, as mandated by the federal legislation Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA), which requires that local school districts partner with child welfare agencies to ensure foster children can continue attending their schools of origin. During fiscal year 2019, 1,743 one-way rides were provided through this agreement for a total expenditure of $127,283. During the period between July 1, 2019 through December 30, 2019, 2,521 one-way rides were completed with a total expenditure of $141,053. The Board approved additional one-time funding of this agreement on February 25, 2020 with a new maximum financial obligation of $374,574 for fiscal year 2020, which will ensure
DFCS has sufficient capacity to continue to provide school of origin transportation as well as accommodate other transportation needs. (Item 37)

The agreement was intended to be implemented as a partnership between DFCS and the local school district where the child attends school; however, not all school districts are able to share in this cost, which has resulted in DFCS providing all of the funding for those instances. As a practice, when a DFCS staff submits a referral for HopSkipDrive services, and the youth has an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), then the IEP is requested to also be provided with the referral. The IEP is then reviewed to determine if transportation services were identified as a service to be provided to the youth. The majority of the time, the IEP indicates that the youth does not qualify for transportation services because they do not have a disability that falls under the Special Education section. School districts do offer school bus services or free Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) passes based on each individual student's needs. However, using public transportation can be cumbersome for students due to long commutes; therefore, HopSkipDrive transportation services are utilized under those circumstances.

This service was meant to provide transportation in order to meet the complex needs and high number of activities during the initial phases of a child’s entry into foster care. During this initial time period, the expectation is that the social worker and resource family would find a more permanent solution to meet the child’s transportation needs. Extensions beyond three months are granted to resource families experiencing a hardship due to a lack of transportation. Historically, most resource families are able to provide transportation to school, visits, and appointments; however, the number of resource families who need transportation assistance has steadily increased.

Each one-way HopSkipDrive transportation incurs a cost of $25 flat fee plus $2.50 per mile. DFCS incurs a 50% cancellation fee whenever a ride is cancelled within eight hours and a 100% cancellation fee if cancelled within two hours or if the rider is not available for transportation at the scheduled time. Over $17,000 in cancellation fees were incurred since July 1, 2018 and DFCS has made great strides to curb cancellations of rides and to eliminate this non-direct service expenditure so that additional funds are available to serve more children. When there are cancellations, DFCS staff are immediately notified and the staff then contacts HopSkipDrive to determine the reason for the cancellation. If cancellations are unexcused, then the Education Services Unit (EdSU) staff provides an e-mail notification to the case carrying social worker and their supervisor. This process has greatly reduced the cost of cancellations by over 50% and trip cancellations are isolated to a handful of children and youth. This process also triggers consultations with social workers to assist in identifying academic needs for the youth that may be contributing to chronic absenteeism as reflected in ride cancellations.

An initial cost analysis found the average cost per one-way transport with HopSkipDrive was $55.95 compared to $46.61 for a full-time County transportation officer. County employees can provide services to children that are not covered under the HopSkipDrive agreement, including transports for medically fragile children and children with ambulatory needs. One advantage of HopSkipDrive transports is its flexibility and availability during non-business hours.
While the bulk of transportation is provided by DFCS staff, the total quantified number of transportations provided by social workers and transportation officers is difficult to derive, as there is no automated tracking system for referrals. Based on a hand count of referrals provided in January 2020, the transportation officers provided approximately 260 one-way rides and the social workers at the Keiki Center and Julian Street Campus provided 520 one-way rides in conjunction with supervised visits.

Many case carrying social workers also provide transportation that is not accounted for and is difficult to tabulate, as this is usually rendered and documented within the broader service delivery to a child on their caseload. As an example, social workers have picked up foster youth from placement and transported them to court hearings, if the social worker's route brings them in close proximity of the child's placement and is near the social worker's route to work. While social workers can make accommodations to increase transportation, the rigorous demands of preparing court reports, conducting home safety assessment visits, and case planning activities make it difficult for case carrying social workers to absorb additional transportation services.

As an ongoing challenge, the demand for transportation continues to increase. Additional extra-help hours were approved for transportation officers. DFCS is actively recruiting for these extra-help positions to help ensure that the transportation needs of all children are met while endeavoring to increase consistency between drivers and the children. Familiarity between driver and child would allow for trusting engagement between the parties.

Other transportation resources

Resource families are eligible for up to $443 in mileage reimbursement per month for school transportation, depending on distance. Additionally, transportation is available to families who are involved with Seneca Family of Agencies' (Seneca) therapeutic visitation program. Seneca's program can accommodate up to 40 visits/transportations per week.

Foster youth have access to free monthly VTA passes, which provides the youth and resource families with additional options for transportation. Additionally, DFCS and the SSA Office of Contract Management has reached out to VTA regarding using its paratransit services for children under the County’s care. Meeting dates are being finalized for the third week of April due to VTA's critical discussions related to mutual aid among the Bay Area’s public transportation systems. This meeting will include DFCS and SSA executive leadership. Staff will explore potential cost-sharing opportunities with VTA Paratransit programs.

Opportunities to improve transportation services

A facilities improvement project to build more visitation rooms at the Julian Street Campus is underway. The additional rooms would allow for centralized supervised visits and would offer an opportunity to implement a system in which social workers would be assigned days where they only provide supervised visits and other days where they only provide transportation. This would ensure greater consistency in matching the same staff to the same family for both visitation and transports and would enable development of strong, trusting relationships.
DFCS is in discussions with the County’s Technology Services and Support (TSS) regarding a project to create a geo-mapping tool that would enable staff to maximize transportation of foster youth by mapping out destinations and identifying opportunities to transport multiple children at the same time. DFCS will also conduct further market research for other contracting opportunities, including but not limited to, bussing services and release of a request for proposal for all potential transportation options. DFCS is continuously monitoring usage and potential ways to expand services while striving to maintain fiscal restraints.

c: Chief Board Aides
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