

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency

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DATE: October 6, 2022

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

FROM: Debra Porchia-Usher, Interim Agency Director 

SUBJECT: Off-Agenda Report Relating to Information on the Welcoming Center Workplan and Evaluation

At the September 22, 2022, Children, Seniors, and Families Committee (CSFC) meeting, the Social Services Agency's Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) presented information regarding the Welcoming Center evaluation (Item No. 11). At that meeting, Supervisor Ellenberg requested additional information regarding the evaluation and Supervisor Chavez requested information regarding the workplan to transition the operations of the Welcoming Center to the County of Santa Clara (County).

The Welcoming Center

Managed by Seneca Family of Agencies (Seneca), the Welcoming Center is a therapeutic home-like setting where children, newly in care and in between placements, can be assessed and cared for while appropriate placement options are identified.

Supervisor Ellenberg requested additional information from DFCS regarding the evaluation and provided follow-up questions after the CSFC meeting.

- 1) Clarify the types of behaviors or supports referenced when discussing "high acuity" cases – are these largely mental health challenges, developmental disabilities, specific challenging behaviors, what is the distribution of needs referenced in this term?
 - As system entries have been reduced by supporting families at home in the community, most if not all cases coming into the system are highly complex involving overall family mental health needs. This would be inclusive of families experiencing relationship conflict, having unhealthy conflict resolution skills, and poor coping mechanisms. These children, youth and families require cross-system collaboration as they may also struggle with co-occurring issues such as substance abuse and or juvenile justice involvement.
 - Some common clinical factors include aggression to self, others or property, intellectual disabilities, autism, co-occurring physical health conditions, problematic sexual behaviors, and substance use.
 - Youth are likely to be adolescents with multiple failed placements (including relationship disruptions) and treatment episodes.

- Most youth are determined by the County's Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD) staff as requiring placement in a short-term residential therapeutic program.
 - Most youth that frequent the scattered site homes are youth who have one or more of the above-mentioned needs.
 - Youth require a multi-faceted approach to care with intensive services for severe behavioral or emotional challenges, which sometimes co-occur with physical health concerns and developmental disabilities. This involves coordination of placement, treatment, and funding between DFCS, BHSD, the County's Juvenile Probation Department (JPD), and San Andreas Regional Center (SARC).
- 2) Challenges cited by professional parent homes with high acuity youth – is this an increasing challenge recently (perhaps due to changes in volumes or needs of youth cited above) or an ongoing challenge?
- This is a historic challenge that has increased with the growing complexity of family and youth needs who are entering care. DFCS aims to increase capacity in the Intensive Services Foster Care Plus (ISFC+) model as well as build out the Children's Crisis Continuum Pilot Program.
 - DFCS is currently partnering with BHSD to add 17 specialized beds by the end of calendar year 2023. This partnership included contract amendments with Seneca Family of Agencies and with Pacific Clinics. This will increase capacity in the Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) and Extended Intensive Treatment Foster Care (E-ITFC) programs, which currently have capacity of eight and five beds respectively. Additionally, seeking feedback regarding gaps in training will provide beneficial guidance for improving resource parents' preparedness to care for youth with high acuity needs.
 - The Children's Crisis Continuum Pilot Program is intended to fully integrate the system of care for foster youth through strong partnerships and collaboration between DFCS, BHSD, JPD, SARC, the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE), and local service providers. This will enable seamless transition between settings and provide stabilization and treatment to foster youth with high acuity needs in the least restrictive settings possible. The County is planning to submit a grant application to CDSS to support inter-departmental strategies for stabilization and treatment. Counties selected by CDSS for grant awards of up to \$10,000,000 through Fiscal Year 2026 will be announced on January 4, 2023.
- 3) What strategies are in use to promote stability of social workers in a child's case, especially high acuity children?
- As DFCS understands the importance of social worker connection to the case, there is usually not a change of social worker, outside of the different programmatic structure, as the child penetrates the child welfare system. Any change is in alignment with a youth and or family need and to support the continued safety, permanency, and well-being of the youth. In addition, DFCS is enhancing its capacity to support high-acuity youth with specialized staff who have a clinical background and can utilize a treatment-centered approach to support youth and families. The clinical team's focus will have specific skills around the prevention and treatment of biological, social, thought, emotional, and behavioral challenges for youth impacted by trauma. The clinical team will assume support of youth with high acuity needs through an integrative service model with trauma-informed and clinically focused staff. The Board approved funding for this above-stated clinical team as well as a social services program manager III, who will help coordinate with BHSD and behavioral health providers. DFCS is also increasing access

to Placement Stabilization Services and Intensive Support Services to assist in additional crises and increase placement stability.

- 4) What strategies are in use to expand the pool of resource parents to support timely and successful placements?
- Collaborating with community and contracted providers to recruit families that are able to support youth with high acuity needs (i.e., targeted recruitment to identify persons within or previously within the social services field to become resource parents or professional parents).
 - Increasing relative placement by supporting relatives through the Resource Family Approval process and providing professional parent level support so relatives can provide specialized care to their family members (or other youth).
 - Allowing relatives to participate in trainings to become licensed as ISFC or ISFC+ homes, which allows for a financial incentive and supports around housing.

Additionally, Supervisor Chavez requested information regarding the workplan to transition operations of the Welcoming Center back to the County are planned as follows:

- September-December 2022
 - Identify possible locations, which includes exploring the current facility.
 - Incorporate feedback from the continuum of care evaluation to develop the program model for the DFCS Welcoming Center.
- January-March 2023
 - Begin licensure process (final application will be dependent upon identification of a permanent facility).
 - Finalize program model to determine any possible Request for Proposals for community-based organization partnership.
 - Identify additional County staff needs to be included in budget requests.
- April-June 2023
 - Finalize licensure process
 - Onboard and train staff
 - Complete any possible facility updates dependent upon final location

The transition timeline could be extended for any of the following reasons:

- Identification of an appropriate physical location
- Licensure process
- Staffing needs as driven by program evaluation

DFCS will work with Seneca to explore extending their current contract if additional time is needed beyond their current contract expiration of June 30, 2023.

C: Chief Board Aides
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Tiffany Lennear, Clerk of the Board
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