

County of Santa Clara

Social Services Agency



353 West Julian Street
San Jose, California 95110-2335

DATE: January 20, 2023

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

FROM: Debra Porchia-Usher, Interim Director Social Services Agency

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DPU", is written over a rectangular box.

SUBJECT: Off-Agenda Report Regarding DFCS's Communication Efforts with Stakeholders

At the December 21, 2022, Children, Seniors, and Families Committee (CSFC) meeting, the Social Services Agency's Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) presented information regarding family engagement and healing efforts (Item No. 15). At that meeting, Supervisor Chavez asked Administration to provide information regarding stakeholders' concerns towards DFCS's practice refinements to engage families to prevent the separation of children from their families and communities.

DFCS has engaged in practice refinements to help provide structure and support to social workers and families to safely maintain children in their homes. The guiding principles that drive this work are: 1) Children do best with their families, 2) Family engagement is non-negotiable, 3) Families have the tools to solve their challenges if given the opportunity, and 4) There is no safety without healing.

DFCS has remained transparent in voicing these practice refinements to both DFCS staff and community stakeholders to both address any safety concerns and to reinforce DFCS's efforts towards maintaining children safely in their homes while providing supports and services. DFCS has provided the Family Healing and Engagement presentation, including the practice refinements, to numerous stakeholders and engaged in open conversation regarding their concerns. Each of these presentations included a thorough overview of DFCS's Family Healing and Engagement model, as well as lengthy question and answer sessions. Through this process, DFCS was able to take back feedback and build a partnership centered around child and family healing. These engagement efforts include:

- Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC) – Presented and engaged JJC leadership in April 2022. DFCS meets with JJC leadership every quarter.
- Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) – Presented and engaged CAPC in June 2022. DFCS meets with CAPC monthly. An updated data report was created based on

questions received from CAPC specifically related to the decrease in foster care utilization.

- Juvenile Court Partners – Presented and engaged Juvenile Court partners in March 2022, with an additional presentation in May 2022. DFCS and County Counsel meet with the juvenile court judges every quarter.
- DFCS staff – Presented and engaged DFCS staff in August 2022. DFCS has monthly all-staff meetings and the DFCS director attends numerous unit and division meetings to answer questions and address concerns.
- California Department of Social Services (CDSS) – After presenting DFCS’s practice refinements to CDSS in July 2022, they were invited onsite to see the work in practice. In September 2022, CDSS met with 12 DFCS staff to hear about DFCS’s current practice. As of this writing, CDSS has not raised any concerns.
- Quarterly DFCS Community Forum – Presented and engaged community stakeholders in October 2022.

Additionally, to ensure accountability and consistent implementation of the refined practices, DFCS implemented a randomized case audit process. Each quarter a randomized list is compiled of families where DFCS utilized safety planning to avoid the removal of children from their care. The list is reviewed by an identified staff to ensure compliance with DFCS’s policies and procedures and that assessments were completed accurately.

DFCS is following all state policies and procedures regarding the assessment of child safety. All counties are required to utilize the evidence-based model, Structured Decision Making, in which one component is a safety assessment. Per CDSS protocol, any time a safety threat is identified which cannot be addressed via a safety plan, then an out-of-home placement must be utilized. In situations where a safety threat is identified, but a safety plan is available, CDSS protocol is to maintain the child in the parent’s home. There is significant research on the impact of removal on the child’s immediate and long-term physical health and emotional wellbeing. Before this level of intervention is implemented, DFCS is required by law and policy to ensure all reasonable efforts have been exhausted to prevent removal. DFCS is adhering to this policy.

Several stakeholders from outside Santa Clara County have expressed an interest in DFCS’s Family Engagement model and how it has positively impacted family preservation and healing while still following state child welfare mandates. The following stakeholders were provided presentations of DFCS’s practice model:

- In September 2022, DFCS and County Counsel provided the Family Engagement model to the California Child Welfare Council Permanency Committee.
- In December 2022, DFCS and County Counsel provided the Family Engagement model to the Santa Cruz Race and Equity workgroup. Stakeholders included Santa Cruz County Counsel.

DFCS has placed enormous focus on family engagement and healing as well as understanding the negative effects of child separation. Since 2021, more children in Santa

Clara County have maintained relationships with their parents, siblings, friends, and community. More children have started their first days of school with a parent dropping them off. More children have said their first words or took their first steps while in the loving care of their parents. In short, the community's well-being has improved. This would not be possible without the incredible advocacy, diligence, and dedication of families, social workers, and the community. DFCS is very optimistic about the work happening within Santa Clara County's communities and very excited to see how Santa Clara County re-visions child welfare. While DFCS is excited about this work, DFCS recognizes that some stakeholders have continued to express uncertainty over the reduction in children entering foster care. DFCS will continue to offer an open dialogue to answer questions, address concerns, and receive feedback and suggestions.

c: Chief Board Aides
Greta Hansen, Chief Operating Officer
James R. Williams, County Counsel
Tiffany Lennear, Clerk of the Board
Ky Le, Deputy County Executive