

County of Santa Clara
Social Services Agency
Department of Family and Children's Services



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DATE: May 10, 2006

TO: Supervisor James T. Beall, Jr., Chairperson
Supervisor Don Gage, Vice-Chairperson
Children, Seniors & Families Committee

FROM: 
Will Lightbourne
Agency Director, Social Services Agency

SUBJECT: Children of Color Task Force Report

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Accept Children of Color Task Force Report.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no fiscal implications associated with the recommended action.

CONTRACT HISTORY

Not applicable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Children, Seniors and Families Committee requested this report on the Children of Color Task Force.

BACKGROUND

Reducing the overrepresentation of children of color in all phases of Child Welfare Services remains a vitally important goal in Santa Clara County. Over the past several years, the Social Service Agency, Department of Family and Children's Services (SSA/DFCS), the Child Abuse Council, and the Social Services Advisory Commission separately focused efforts to determine how best to address this disparity. In late 2005, they joined forces with representatives from Offices of the County Board Supervisors, Court Appointed Special Advocates, Juvenile Welfare Office of the Ombuds, San Jose State University, numerous community-based service organizations and concerned citizens to form the Unified Children of Color Task Force. The Task Force members share the goal of reducing the overrepresentation of children of color by carefully studying how various factors and conditions within the community and within DFCS operations can be enhanced or modified to reduce the disparity. André Chapman, President and CEO of Unity Care, and Jorge Gonzalez, DFCS Social Services Program Manager, co-chair the Task Force.

The Task Force met on November 15, 2005, January 31, 2006 and March 21, 2006. This first phase of the Task Force's work involved extensive analysis of data, far ranging discussion of possible causal factors and prioritization of areas for in-depth study.

The first meeting of the Unified Children of Color Task Force in November was a half-day offsite. Members receive a presentation from the Norma Doctor Sparks, DFCS Director, on the continuum of Child Welfare Services decision points, and strategies relative to the decision points that DFCS and community partners employ to address the disproportionate number of children of color in the system (see Attachment A). Data was presented and discussed concerning the following:

- Children in Child Welfare Supervised Care by Ethnicity

- Referrals, Substantiated Referrals, First Entries into Care, and Children in Care by Ethnicity and Population
- Referrals by Ethnicity and Zip Code
- Children in Care by Ethnicity
- Length of Stay in Care by Ethnicity
- Children in Relative/Non-Relative Placement by Ethnicity
- Children in Care by Placement Type and Ethnicity, July 1, 2005
- Adoptions by Ethnicity

(See Attachment B for a matrix of agenda items and data reviewed/discussed for the first three meetings of the Task Force.)

Following presentation of this background information at the meeting in November, members engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of community-based factors, such as the availability of culturally appropriate services and child abuse reporting patterns, and factors more inherent to DFCS child welfare services (e.g., the ethnicity of social workers) that might contribute to the overrepresentation. The framework for merging agency and community groups was also discussed to set the stage for ongoing collaboration. Next steps, additional data needs, and goals and objectives were clarified. Several participants volunteered to work with DFCS to review a proposed risk and safety assessment tool in regards to its cultural sensitivity.

At the second meeting of the Unified Task Force on January 31, 2006, participants received a overview of the Enhanced Differential Response program being developed with Gardner Family Care, Inc., and members were invited to participate in the Workgroup planning implementation. An update on the Risk and Safety Assessment tool was also provided, including how members' participation had been instrumental in improving the tool's sensitivity to cultural differences. Data was presented and discussed concerning the following:

- Children in Evaluated Out Referrals by Ethnicity
- Allegation Type by Ethnicity
- Allegation by Language
- Households by Ethnicity
- Indicators of Poverty
- Active Cases by Mother/Father Ethnicity and Language
- Total Number by Family Size

- Summary of UCB Data for Asians in Relative Placement

Next steps from the January meeting included obtaining more detailed referral and allegation information for analysis at the next meeting.

At the Task Force Meeting on March 21, 2006, the following data was analyzed:

- Counts of Children with One or More Referrals for July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005
- Ethnicity / All Allegation Types / All Dispositions CY05
- Comparison of Ethnic Discrepancies at Child Welfare Decision Points

In view of the data presented at all of the meetings up to that time, members analyzed the scope of overrepresentation at various decision points, and decided to more intensely study child abuse referrals (substantiated and unsubstantiated), children's first entries into foster care (i.e., children removed from their homes), and how decision are made about which families receive voluntary services vs. court-ordered Family Maintenance, Family Reunification and Permanency Services from DFCS.

During Phase II of the Task Force's work, members will meet monthly to identify SSA/DFCS practices and processes that might contribute to overrepresentation of children of color. Beginning on May 9, 2006, the Task Force will examine the child abuse screening and emergency response investigation functions, and substantiated child abuse and neglect referrals.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Negative action would result in the Children, Seniors and Families Committee not accepting this report on the Children of Color Task Force.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A – Child Welfare Decision Points and Strategies to Reduce the Overrepresentation of Children of Color
- Attachment B – Unified Children of Color Task Force Meetings, November 2005 – March 2006, Agendas and Data Reviewed

Children, Seniors & Families Committee, June 9, 2004, DFCS Activities Related to San José State University Children of Color Study
ATTACHMENT: Study Findings, Prioritized List of Strategies and Budget Considerations

Findings from San Jose State University Children of Color Study	Strategies to be Undertaken to Address Findings	Budget Considerations
1. Best Practice: Team Decision Making	Team Decision Making (TDM) was launched on a limited basis in DFCS through the Family to Family initiative in October 2003 and over 150 sessions have taken place since that time. This practice includes family and community members in decisions concerning the placement of children. A plan for the full roll-out of TDMs from pre-entry into the system and throughout key decision points in a case has been approved for implementation in FY 04-05.	TDM positions are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget. If upcoming vacancies can be filled, the trained Facilitators and Supervisor of a new TDM unit within DFCS can be maintained. It may be found upon full implementation that additional staff for facilitation and scheduling are required.
2. Barrier to Best Practice: Inconsistency Decision Making	Inconsistency in decision making is widely acknowledged in counties throughout California. Standardization is a key goal of the State's Child Welfare Services Redesign, and Santa Clara County is participating in this statewide effort. Selection and implementation of a standardized assessment tool is a priority for DFCS in the coming fiscal year. An enhancement to our existing assessment process that began last year is review and staffing of every Bypass case , which is helping improve consistency.	Full staffing (filled vacancies) is necessary to ensure comprehensive staff training and maximize utilization.
3. Barrier to Best Practice: Large Number of Inappropriate Referrals	Training for mandated reporters is available, but needs to be reviewed and targeted for discrete reporter groups (i.e. school personnel, medical, etc.).	Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget.

4. Record keeping should include more complete and measurable information

The overrepresentation of children of color in the rate of first entries into foster care is an outcome measure that the Social Services Agency is choosing to analyze as part of California's new Child Welfare System Outcomes and Accountability Act. Complete recordkeeping is essential to accurate analysis and tracking and is being addressed through an intensive round of training of DFCS social work staff. **Ongoing policy clarification and training** in data entry and documentation is needed.

Full staffing is necessary to ensure comprehensive staff training and maximum utilization. One additional FTE trainer will be required to adequately meet the need.

5. Need to expand Child Welfare Services, particularly those that are culturally sensitive, non-traditional, collaborative and involve clients' communities

- **Community Action Teams** have been formed in ethnically and geographically specific areas to increase community involvement in service delivery.
- **Culturally-focused Family Resource Centers** are focusing their efforts on families that do not require court-ordered services and will be providing services such as voluntary family maintenance and informal supervision. The Family Resource Centers will continue their partnerships with community organizations.
- A grant from FIRST 5 Santa Clara County has been awarded to DFCS to explore implementation of **Differential Response**, a key strategy of the statewide CWS Redesign that diverts low-risk families from DFCS and relies instead on community-based organizations as responders to low-risk child abuse and neglect referrals.
- The **Family Strengths-Based Services** program, implemented in 2002 through Gardner Family Care Corporation has expanded culturally sensitive, community-based diversion services to families and is showing success.
- The September 2003 pilot implementation of a **Joint Response Protocol** with the San José Police Department and May 2004 implementation citywide is an important component of child welfare services.

Full staffing is necessary to ensure continued services at FRCs and full implementation of Joint Response. Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ DFCS involvement in the Greenbook Project, which brings domestic violence and child maltreatment practitioners together to determine protocols for joint intervention, has a cultural diversity workgroup to examine relevant issues and help determine best cultural practices. 	
6. Best practice: Relative Placements	<p>A unit focused on identifying and supporting relative placements has been created inside the Department to facilitate increased relative placements and support for relatives. In January 2004, the majority of children in out-of-home care were placed with relatives.</p>	<p>Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget.</p>
7. Future research should address neighborhood and other community-level factors unique to Santa Clara County	<p>The Agency and the Department is a partner in the newly formed "Children of Color Task Force," a joint effort of the Social Services Advisory Commission, the Child Abuse Council and the Latino Social Workers Network, to address overrepresentation of children of color in the child welfare system. The Task Force plans to model its work after the county's Juvenile Detention Reform specific effort to scrutinize and improve "disproportionate minority confinement" (DMC). The DMC work is being guided by the nationally recognized Heywood Burns Institute of San Francisco, and involves intensive data collection and monitoring, community mapping in one selected zip code, and individual case reviews of youth being detained in Juvenile Hall.</p>	<p>Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget.</p>
8. Best practice: Parent Orientations	<p>Family orientation sessions to the child welfare system were launched in South County in the last three years. Based on the success of this initiative, countywide implementation began in January 2004.</p>	<p>Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget.</p>

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| 9. Best practice: Cultural Matching | Language and culturally specific units have been maintained through the reorganization, despite severe budget cuts. These units provide linguistic and cultural matching to clients in most cases. | Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget. |
| 10. Best practice: Strength-based approaches | A training agreement with Project Cornerstone , a County leader in the promotion of youth assets and strengths-based approaches, has recently been established. Cornerstone provided an orientation to DFCS supervisors in May 2004 and training of all DFCS staff is expected to begin in the fall. | Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget. |
| 11. Strengthen strongest predictors of family reunification = fewer workers per family, shorter case duration, fewer placement changes | Reduced social work caseloads and the assignment of one worker per family are goals of the Department's redesign. Reduced caseloads will allow more time to support children and families and strengthen supervision. The assignment of one worker per family will assure integrated case plans for all children in a family. | Full staffing is necessary to ensure this goal can be met. Resources are included in SSA's proposed FY04-05 budget. |