

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



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DATE: November 15, 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 Status Report

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Accept Children of Color Task Force Status Update.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS

There are not fiscal implication associated with the recommended action.

CONTRACT HISTORY

Not applicable.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

The Children, Seniors and Families Committee requested a status update on the Unified Children of Color Task Force. The last report to the Committee on was on May 10, 2006.

STATUS UPDATE

The Task Force met on May 9, July 11 and September 12, 2006. In June, Task Force members attended training by Dr. Rita Cameron Wedding on "Addressing Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services." In addition, a subcommittee has met 3 times to conduct a case review of a random sample of families about whom abuse or neglect allegations were substantiated in April 2006.

During Phase I of the Task Force's work in early 2006, members studied a wide variety of data from the Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) to determine factors contributing to overrepresentation at various decision points in the child welfare continuum of services. In March, this work culminated in the group selecting child abuse referrals, children's first entries into foster care and referral disposition decision making for more intensive study.

The Task Force started Phase II of their work at their meeting on May 9, 2006 by receiving a presentation on DFCS Emergency Response referral and investigation processes, including Enhanced Joint Responses by social workers and law enforcement officers. The group also reviewed a presentation on risk assessment and the latest drafts of the Comprehensive Assessment Tools (CAT) to be implemented in DFCS, and an update on the Differential Response Community Workgroup. Outcome and demographic data was presented on abuse/neglect allegation types, referral dispositions, voluntary and informal supervision cases, child removal reasons, child removals by child abuse reporter type, permanent placements, and living situation outcome at exit from placement (i.e., with kin or non-kin).

On June, Dr. Rita Cameron Wedding, Professor of Women's Studies and Ethnic Studies at CSU – Sacramento, provided training on "Addressing Racial Disproportionality in Child Welfare Services." This remarkable and enlightening training provided new insights and corrective strategies concerning the subtle and not-so-subtle socialization processes that result in nearly all, if not all people, unwittingly exercising biases based on race and ethnicity, and how policies and practices supportive of biases become unwittingly and insidiously institutionalized. All DFCS staff will receive this training in January 2007.

On July 11th, the Task Force reviewed material provided at Dr. Cameron Wedding's training and discussed application of her concepts and strategies in Santa Clara County. The Manager over Emergency Response presented information about the legal definitions of abuse and neglect, and the criteria and evidence for substantiating abuse and neglect allegations. Also presented and discussed were the research protocol for the subcommittee's review of substantiated child abuse and neglect referrals and recent outcome data on children exiting the Child Welfare System between October 2004 and September 2005 (i.e., reunified, adopted, guardianship, emancipation and other).

The subcommittee reviewing substantiated child abuse and neglect referrals met on August 8, October 2 and October 16, 2006. Case documents contain no identifying information. Judge Lucero approved the case file review. Subcommittee members have reviewed 8 cases thus far.

At the Task Force meeting on September 12th, data on the overrepresentation of children of color upon first entry into foster care was examined. Other agenda items included review of the minutes from the Differential Response Workgroup, a pre-pilot report on Gardner Family Care Corporation's Enhanced Differential Response Program, an update on the case file review, Contra Costa County's program to reduce disproportionality, and updates on Enhance Joint Response and the CAT risk assessment tools.

The October 10th meeting was cancelled due to uncertainties related to a possible labor group work action at DFCS. The next meeting is scheduled for November 14, 2006.

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, 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 Ombudsman, 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.

CONSEQUENCES OF NEGATIVE ACTION

Negative action would result in the Committee not receiving a status update on the Children of Color Task Force.

STEPS FOLLOWING APPROVAL

The Clerk of the Board will follow the usual procedures for a report of this type.

ATTACHMENTS

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