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Did You Know?

Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) is utilized by many counties across California and other states to inform practice and policies and to improve the outcomes for children and families who encounter the child welfare system. The goal for Santa Clara DFCS is to utilize CQI to keep improving on the great work that is already happening in our department. There are several components of CQI already being utilized by the department and the intent is to build on that work as well as other work that we have done with other partners.

Through the Casey Foundation’s support, Larry Brown a nationally recognized expert on the topic of Continuous Quality Improvement will provide us with technical assistance as we develop our CQI methodology.

Director’s Message

For Santa Clara County DFCS, the 2017/2018 year was a time of reconstruction, renewal, and rejuvenation. As a Department, we have enhanced our foundation – created a stronger, better-equipped organization to serve our community, families and children. With record recruiting and hiring, DFCS has decreased the empty codes to less than 10 vacancies. New, smart, enthusiastic, and passionate coworkers have joined our team.

This progress has not stopped at the front lines. In collaboration with the Casey Foundation, the Alia Organization has committed eight months to working with supervisors and managers. In small group and individual coaching sessions, leadership is provided with tools to improve our Department’s well-being. Understanding our individual and organizational well-being is the first step to minimizing secondary trauma and compassion fatigue. Alia also provides biweekly micro-learnings, covering topics such as mindfulness, transparency, and, most recently, purpose. For those who cannot listen live, past biweekly lessons are available here.

The 2018/2019 year brings new opportunities, goals, and next steps. As a Department, we aim to increase the number of children and youth placed in a family-setting by 20%; reduce re-entry into foster care within twelve months by 8%; and increase time to permanency within twelve months for children entering foster care by 15%. Children and youths safety and well-being is a community effort. By aligning our initiatives and partnering with community-based organizations, we strengthen the foundation of the previous year.

The first step this fiscal year is to continue with self-reflection and improvement. Disproportionality within the child welfare systems remains a nation-wide issue. As a learning organization, DFCS is re-committing to the Child and Family Practice Model. The Visions Organization is onboard to assist us in striving for greater inclusiveness, engagement, inquiry and respect, and working in a diverse environment.

We are committed to serving our community by placing Families First; creating a Circle of Support; and lending a Helping Hand to prevent and reduce child maltreatment.

Be well,

Francesca LeRue, Director
Department of Family and Children Services
Santa Clara County
Positive stories based on events/highlights/work of SCC DFCS and community that ties to the DFCS Mission and Vision statements

As experienced foster parents, Judy and Bill were used to welcoming children into their home. They had no idea they would someday welcome a birth parent in as well. When they started 16 years ago, Judy and Bill were admittedly fearful of and had many preconceived notions about biological parents. After they met the mother of their newborn foster son, they “fell in love.”

After leaving a group home and exiting foster care, the mother had become a victim of commercial exploitation. She had placed her children in foster care voluntarily, knowing that she could not care for them while homeless and struggling with postpartum depression. Judy and her husband quickly recognized that this mother was an “exceptional young lady who was trying hard for her children.”

When birth mom’s Voluntary Family Reunification (VFR) services ended, she still had no place to live, so Judy and Bill asked her to move into their mother-in-law unit with both of her children. The family was there for nearly three years until mom could save enough money to live independently, even buying her own home, in another state. The boys still come visit Judy and Bill and birth mom still depends on them for help, advice and guidance. Judy and Bill have become part of her Circle of Support.

The family’s story happened in Santa Clara County with RFA parents but they asked that we change their names for anonymity.

Amber L. Brandom, Quality Parenting Coordinator

Our Mission of Families First, Circle of Support and Helping Hand

The mission of Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children’s Services is to keep children safe and families strong. With respect and cultural humility, we partner with our diverse community to ensure that any child or youth who is at risk or has suffered abuse or neglect is safe, cared for and grows up in a stable, loving family.

Our Vision

Santa Clara County Department of Family and Children’s Services envisions a community where children and youth are safe, families and young adults are thriving, and every child and family is on a path to reaching their unique potential.

Child & Family Practice Model

The DFCS Child and Family Practice Model (CFPM) is the foundation of how our agency engages and works with children, families and our community. Implementation is ongoing as new initiatives and requirements need to be aligned and integrated with how they will be delivered and experienced through our practice.

The CFPM Training kicked off the newly hired Social Worker 13-week Induction Training that began on January 25, 2018. The CFPM Training included community members co-facilitating and acting as table “leads” to support the new workers learning. The Installation of Coaching to support CFPM Training and Development began on March 1, 2018 with the first phase starting with Executive Leadership in our Assistant Director, Daniel Little, providing Coaching to his direct reports. The plan will include building the knowledge, skills and abilities of Coaching through the Assistant Director, while also supporting, building capacity and creating a schedule to support the Managers to begin Coaching the Supervisors in their respective bureaus.

Fidelity Assessments, which look at how the practice model is actually used, were completed during this quarter. The DFCS will review the assessment outcomes to ensure we are meeting the needs of children and families.

A Fidelity Assessment Workgroup meets monthly to review process and performance data, as well as, utilizes feedback to improve processes. This group is comprised of a cross-section of DFCS/SSA staff and Multi-Cultural Community Partners. In addition, on-going support is available to through regularly scheduled Orientations/Trainings, as well as, one-on-one meetings when requested.

A.Mark Lapiz, MSW
Management Analysis Program Manager III
Quality Parent Initiative (QPI)/Kinship, Adoption and Foster Parent Association (KAFPA)

Neuroscience tells us that attachment and relationships are what mitigate the damaging effects of abuse and neglect and build resiliency. As such, the best, most trauma-informed service we can offer children is quality parenting. Changing a system that has always been dependent on service compliance, to one that is dependent on relationships and self-advocacy is a challenge.

QPI is how we ensure that what we do remains focused on [the parenting of] the child. QPI aims to ensure that while parents are receiving the advocacy and support they may need to transform their lives into safety, their children are receiving the best parenting they can in a safe and stable home. QPI is doing whatever is possible to reduce the trauma children experience from their removal and to create an emotionally safe space for them to heal their trauma.

Setting our system up in ways that support our resource parents in the specialized parenting of our children is the work of QPI. Empowering them to be a true partner, rather than a service provider, and assisting them in the complicated task of building a bond with the child while navigating relationships with the child’s family are our goals. In the same way that we invite biological families to the table to identify their own needs and strengths (Child & Family Practice Model CFPM), our resource families must also have a permanent seat and a voice at that table. Biological families have a right to know who is caring for their children and resource families deserve access to the people who know the most about the children they are caring for. This relationship building will mitigate split loyalties, and allow the child to settle into emotional safety where they can heal their trauma.

QPI is part of a larger attempt at systemic change. Together with the CFPM, Safety Organized Practice and Continuum of Care Reform, QPI recognizes the inherent power inside those we work with to identify what they need to be successful and to be supported in making that change happen.

This is a shift from seeing ourselves, the agency, as the “fixer” to recognizing our families and resource parents as the experts in their own lives. These ideals will not always be realistic but there are those out there who want to go the extra mile.

Amber L. Brandom, Quality Parenting Coordinator

Youth Stories

The Santa Clara County Foster Youth Services and programs serves to engage and empower foster youth ages 16-24 to participate in services to develop skills and competencies needed to transition from adolescents to adulthood. Services are also aimed at securing permanency and well-being to ensure that youth feel safe and are connected to at least one committed and caring adult.

In the month of May, the Hub youth Center served 168 unique foster youth who visit the Hub to access the following services, employment, shower, laundry, healthy snack, parenting, well-being, CalFresh, housing, legal services, medical-mobile van, Independent Living Program and reproductive health.

The Independent Living Program contractor, The Bill Wilson Center also co-located at the Hub provided case management services to 260 foster youth between the ages of 16-20 to ensure foster youth feel supported in Child and Family Team Meetings and help facilitate access to services to improve outcomes in education, employment and housing.

Transitional housing services is a supportive housing program for foster youth ages 16-24 in which participants are provided with affordable housing and learn independent living skills in preparation for their transition to adulthood, currently THPP serves, 26 (16-17 year olds); THP serves, 70 (18-20 year olds) and THP-Plus services 122 (18-25 year olds).

Over 150 foster youth have enrolled in the Santa Clara County Intern and Earn Summer Youth Employment Program. This employment initiative is a partnership with DFCS/Career Development Unit and the Department of Employment and Benefits Services to reduce the effects of generational poverty by providing opportunity youth with employment-based internships that foster safety, career explorations and exposure to public services. The DFCS has added two Employment Counselors to the Career Development Unit to ensure all foster youth in Santa Clara County have access to employment opportunities.

The DFCS in collaboration with Court Appointed Social Advocates, Silicon Valley Children’s Fund and The Bill Wilson Center hosting the first annual graduation ceremony to celebrate the educational success of foster youth in Santa Clara County. The event was held June 20, 2018 at the Silver Creek Country Club in San Jose, CA.

Marisela Martinez, MSW Project Manager, Department of Family and Children’s Services
System Improvement Plan (SIP)

In December 2016, The Santa Clara County Department of Children’s Services completed its County Self-Assessment (CSA). The results of the CSA support the development of the county’s System Improvement Plan (SIP). Santa Clara County DFCS has selected the following three areas to address our SIP goals.

Resource Family Approval (RFA)

The RFA Program continues to aim at approving families as soon as possible. The RFA program has worked to fill vacancies to ensure timely process of all placement approvals.

The State of California recently released updated 5.0 Written Directives. RFA has adjusted the requirements to ensure that families are being approved in a timely manner. These directives have reduced requirements to expedite the approval process including the Family Evaluation with the State released the previous month.

Currently RFA is collaborating with the State to seek technical support to assist SCC with the backlog of placement approvals. In the coming weeks RFA will also start a continuous quality improvement (CQI) process to inform what processes need to be changed.

From July 1, 2017 through May 31, 2018 the Department has received 96 recruited applications.

Want to become a Resource Home? Contact: 408-299-KIDS (5437)

Child and Family Team (CFT)

Child and Family Teams (CFTs) are essential to the success of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) efforts and the well-being of the children, youth and families. One of the fundamental principles of CCR is that child welfare services are most effective when delivered in the context of a child/youth and family-centered, Child and Family Team that shares responsibility to assess, plan, intervene, monitor & refine services over time. Social workers will attend mandatory training to provide an overview of how Child and Family Teams will be utilized and implemented for children, youth and families involved in Child Welfare and/or Juvenile Probation systems. Participants will walk away with an understanding of how they can use Child and Family Teams and CFT Meetings to support safety, permanency and wellbeing of the children/youth and families they work with.

Learning Objectives:
- The intent of teaming and its benefits to children/youth, families and communities
- Foundational standards for creating effective Child and Family Teams
- Roles and responsibilities within the Child and Family Team
- Steps to prepare for Child and Family Team Meetings
- Expectations around documentation of Child and Family Teams and Meetings

This training will be offered on June 25, June 26, June 27, and July 5. Future trainings may be offered based on agency need.

Registration Questions? Contact:
Rianna Garcia at Staff Development and Training: Rianna.Garcia@ssa.sccgov.org

Structured Decision Making (SDM)

Beginning in March 2018, the National Council on Crime and Delinquency/Child Research Center (NCCD/CRC) began working with DFCS on an analysis of SDM fidelity and utilization. Focus groups have been conducted with Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC) staff, and the results are being used for targeted training of CANC staff. The NCCD is developing a curriculum to address and enhance the use of the SDM Hotline Tool and its use in CANC. NCCD will continues its work throughout additional areas including Emergency Response, Dependency Investigations and Continuing case management, to support advanced training for staff that integrates the SDM tool into our work and supports consistent use of the tools in our practice. DFCS policies and procedures will be updated to determine where the SDM system could be better integrated into DFCS core practice model activities, including the front end of services.

Coming Soon:
- A written report on the SDM system for CANC.
- SDM refresher training for CANC- coming in August 2018
- Focus groups for Emergency Response – coming in July and August AND DI in September.
Oh no! The Ombuds Called Me. Now What?

When you receive a call from the Ombuds Office you may feel concerned, anxious or even angry. What do they think I have done wrong? Don’t they know I don’t have time to talk to them? Don’t they realize I go above and beyond with my clients? These are natural responses because when the Ombuds calls it usually means someone has contacted them to voice a concern about the way things are progressing (from their point of view) with one of your cases.

The DFCS social worker may actually have done everything right! In fact the Ombuds calls not to determine whether that is the case, nor to second guess the clinical discretion. The Ombuds calls because, generally, a visitor to the office feels stuck and is seeking help getting unstuck. Usually, this “stuckness” pertains to how the person is experiencing the process or a particular relationship within the system. For example, something is getting in the way of scheduling visitations, an agreed upon mode of communication isn’t working, or there might be an expectation regarding transition of a case that is not realistic. The Ombuds calls to gain understanding and provide an opportunity for clarification to relay back to the visitor. Sometimes, the Ombuds will recommend setting up a meeting with the social worker and the visitor if the issues are more complex or numerous. The Ombuds’ role in such meetings is to help facilitate the conversation, with the goal of increasing understanding and inviting participants into dialogue so everyone can move forward.

Who are they and what do they do, anyway?

The Ombuds is independent from DFCS and is a confidential resource for any person connected to a child welfare case in Santa Clara County, including DFCS staff. The Ombuds is a professional neutral advocating for fair application of processes and procedures, but not any particular client or outcome. The Ombuds engages in an informal manner with all parties, which means the focus is on communication and bridge-building, rather than investigation or determination of fault. Likewise, because the Ombuds works informally, there is no involvement in formal processes, such as trials. In addition to addressing individual case concerns, the Ombuds provides upward feedback to DFCS management and the County’s Children, Seniors, and Families Committee as to trends, and may make system improvement recommendations.

Working together to move things forward.

The Ombuds Office calls to provide an opportunity for all involved to feel understood and to address what is probably already a frustrating situation. The call from the Ombuds can help unblock a “stuck” communication and engagement cycle. Working together, the Ombuds can help move things forward in a way that addresses the visitors’ and the Department’s concerns, respects your role as a social worker and helps improve the way people experience the system.

Juvenile Welfare Office of the Ombuds (JWOO)  408-993-4114 or OMBUDS@ceo.sccgov.org

DFCS complaints contact: Meheret Sellassie, Project Manager, 408-501-6848 or Meheret.Sellassie@ssa.sccgov.org

Comments on DFCS Newsletter? Contact : DFCSNewsletter@ssa.sccgov.org