



Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee

The mission of the Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee is to provide oversight for and promote communication between the Board of Supervisors, the Department of Social Services and its related agencies, and the community, with emphasis on providing information and recommendations that make the system more effective and efficient.

MINUTES

September 7, 2022

9:00 A.M. – 10:30 A.M.

Meeting held In-person with Zoom option

I. Call to order and introductions.

Wilma

Meeting called to order by Wilma Hashimoto at 9:08 AM with roll call by Elizabeth Bell. Introduction of Kimberli Smith as one of the new DSS CWS Deputy Directors and introduction of new FCSOC member, Kevin Lisitsin, representing District 2.

- Kevin Lisitsin, District 2 representative, has lived in Fresno all his life. He is a restaurant owner and a full-time Farmers Insurance agent. Kevin mentioned that he has been involved with different non-profits in his community and one of his passions in life is to work with underserved communities, especially the youth.
- Kimberli Smith is a resident of Fresno, CA with 17 years of experience at Kings County in Child Welfare. She has gone from being a line worker investigator to working with local law enforcement with drug-endangered children and has had supervisory roles. She has overseen Family Reunification, Family Maintenance, Emergency Response Hotline, Permanency and after hours stand by capacity.

II. Approve minutes for August 3, 2022, and the current meeting's agenda.

- Jill Stepke motioned; Rosemary Alanis seconded to approve August 3, 2022, meeting minutes. Tracy Kashian motioned; Rosemary seconded to approve the current meeting's agenda.

III. Updates.

A. Legislative Updates.

Elected Official Representative and DSS

- No Updates

B. Department of Social Services Addressing Critical Areas.

Kimberli Smith

- Have updated the Program Manager vacancies. Four Program Managers have now been hired and have been on the job for the last two weeks. The new PMs were internal candidates that were promoted. Three of the Program Managers went to the front line/intake and one of them went to the back end working with the courts and handling high-risk/high-complexity youth.
- Kimberli mentioned that she understands that FCSOC would like to have data reports, but due to the various changes recently in Fresno, they are still working on the data report to ensure the information given is productive to the meetings.
- Kimberli asked those in attendance what type of information the members would like Child Welfare to report out on an ongoing basis that will assist with the planning/preparation for the meetings.
- When the question was asked to the committee of what areas would they like to hear about from DSS on a regular basis, Jill Stepke mentioned that it would be good to hear about the high school aged children (9th – 12th) that are receiving assistance through IPL and the students that enroll in AB12 be reported on regularly. Specifically, how many children are aging out of the system, what programs are available to them and how many of them are taking advantage of those programs. With the hopes that having this data would help to provide solutions in getting more children to take advantage of the resources available to them to prevent homelessness with these children once they are no longer in foster care.

IV. Review of Action Items.

Wilma

A. Vote on Attendance Options for October 5th Meeting

- Jill Stepke motioned for the October 5th meeting to continue as a hybrid meeting, with the option of either virtual (Zoom) or in-person; Ed Avila seconded the motion.

V. Subcommittee Updates.

A. Education

Pam

- No updates.

B. Children's Mental Health

Wilma

- Link provided for the next Mental Health Subcommittee meeting being held on October 27, 2022 at 9:00 AM:
<https://fresnocountyca.webex.com/fresnocountyca/j.php?MTID=m33de268a65ae8f8835e0da724a0b0595>

VI. Round Table Discussion by members.

All

- Wilma said that she believes the catalyst for the evolution of this committee was based on the emergency placement and the hard to place children, so she would like a monthly update on how many [youth] entered MOD-C and for how many days and what challenges may have resulted in them having to be placed there.
- Kevin asked what is meant by “hard to place” and Kimberli responded that there is a term used that is called “complex needs” which is a youth that is being touched by education, Child Welfare, Probation, and the Central Valley Regional Center for Developmental Needs. She added that all these agencies DSS is collaboratively working with through its work groups and are also working together to determine how DSS can provide support for these youth as a team. Sometimes the youth that are “difficult” are labeled as complex needs because they have experienced a lot of trauma in their life. Getting together allows everyone involved to understand how the child’s needs can be met on every level. The complex youth that are usually dealt with sometimes don’t have all the resource partners linked and working collaboratively together. So when they come through DSS, the Department is in a position where it needs to find out what are their educational, behavioral, and medicinal needs. The resource partners also must look at the trauma and triggers the children are facing, how effective coping mechanism skills can be provided to them and what is the best way to engage with the child so the youth would be able to proceed in a lower level of care. The high-risk/high-complex needs youth are those who are typically going to MOD-C and part of the vision for the agency is to build the capacity of care givers and locations where housing can mirror a homelike setting.
- Pam mentioned that the annual report has some data (e.g., entries, placement changes, # of kids in office) but expressed there will not be definite data on the things the committee would like and believes the committee needs support from DSS on what will be the best data to look for such as the court process, which has been one of the main concerns.
- Pam noticed there was not enough information reported regarding education. She wants to know if there are school moves or home placement moves. She would also like to know what the barriers are for children that are not going to head start preschool when they have already been referred.
- Pam noted that in the County of Fresno, court rules for the process of moving a child’s home placement is being followed, which involves the social worker, the education rights holder, student/youth over age 10 and a District liaison. If there happens to be a disagreement, then the attorney and courts are involved. Pam would still like to know why a child is being moved in the middle of the school year and not during a natural break. If there is just one school move, they lose 4-6 months of academic progress. A high school student who moves just one time during high school is also cause for concern because data shows there is less than a 50% chance of them graduating. Fresno County graduation rate is at 48%.
- Jill Stepke said she is most interested in the high school kids because they are getting ready to age out of the system and we do not want them just to be left without proper resources. She would like to see data on how many we have in that high school age group and what kind of services we have for them. For example, if we have 10 of them, are 5 of them in a program to help them out or what is being offered to them? Are resources being taken advantage of? If not, it is important to know what could be changed so resources can be taken advantage of more. Pam added that it would be important to know if the services offered are effective enough to increase the graduation rate. Jill recognizes that there are foster parents that choose to not keep foster children after they turn 18 so one of her biggest concerns is the youth that end up homeless. Pam responded that she would like to see if there is a correlation between not using AB 12 (extended foster care) and homelessness amongst youth. Jill wants to make sure the youth are well informed about the resources that could benefit them.
- Karel Gonzalez (Focus Forward) said she recently had a client that was in a situation where she was in Supervised Independent Living Placement (SILP) and now she is homeless where there was no support regarding her transition back into a stable living program. The need is there for the transition back into AB 12 because there are not many available beds, independent living programs, or transitional housing programs. Karel has noticed situations like these are often common among former foster youth and juvenile probation kids.
- Pam wants to know if there is a point of contact for when situations like this occur. Catherine responded that she and Kimberli will come up with a point of contact.
- Ed Avila (District 5) wanted to compliment DSS and CASA for constantly checking in on the youth they are helping/advocating for because he has noticed this has worked well for the foster youth.
- Catherine said she feels like youth forget that if they choose not to stay with us, they can always come back. There is no closed door. Sometimes it is difficult itself to locate the youth that are struggling with homelessness.
- Pam commented that the Fresno County Superintendent of Schools does sit down with 9-12th graders and talk about ILP, refer them to ILP and refer them to AB 12.
- Wilma added that we cannot rely on the youth to find us. We need to go to them rather than them come to us because they may not know where exactly to call. Youth can be reached through marketing/point person or by providing them the 211 number.

- Karina Perez (District 1) noted that perhaps the foster youth who did not have the best experience in the system would not want to reach back out for support.
- The Craycroft Center was discussed. Catherine mentioned Craycroft would not be legal today due to not being able to get legally licensed for a long-term shelter. Craycroft was a 30-day shelter that was open to children 5 and up. MOD-C is in the process of having a 9-day shelter for children aged 12 and over as a temporary place for children to go so a purposeful placement can occur. Catherine mentioned that getting the 9-day shelter stay was a bit of a challenge to get approved because legally, it is not encouraged. She stated the reality is children need to be in homes and we need to prioritize everything we do to make sure they get in a home. She added the process is not easy and when complex kids are involved, there are days that seem harder, but it is our job to continue to try to find these children the lowest level of care possible and sometimes this cannot be done.
- Kevin believes kids should be given information regarding foster care at a younger age than high school youth. He feels it would be beneficial if older foster youth mentor the younger foster youth.
- Ed's question for Catherine is, "What happens after a child's 9-day stay at MOD-C?" Catherine responded hopefully, by that time, placement has been found for the youth. If a child cannot be placed in 9-days, technically the situation becomes incompliant with the State because the State only allows for a 9-day license. Catherine said that they keep in contact with the State, explain the situation, and even ask for their help. The State will offer guidance on how to find the right place. Things to keep in mind are that there are limited resources in the State of California, such as not having enough beds or places for the kids. When there is a call looking for a place for a child that has complex behaviors, Fresno is competing with other counties that are calling for their children and it's very competitive because it depends how the child is presented. Many times, placements want to take the least liable child, such as the child whose behaviors are easier to work with. Catherine described MOD-C as: each child having their own bedroom, showers, 3 hot meals a day, planned activities, go to school, and have their social workers there to support them.
- Pam would like to see how many days exactly the complex needs youth are in office under the 'In Office >72 hours' category and how many days they are still in office after the 9-day period because not only do you have to find the youth a home, but you also must take into consideration the educational needs of the youth.
- Rosemary Alanis (District 4) noticed the report stated an "Average 66 delayed Court Hearings in Child Welfare over the past four months; 57% of the delays are due to staff caused issues (late report, incomplete report, etc)" so she would like to hear an update regarding this for future meetings.
- Tracy Kashian (District 2) thanked Kimberli for her involvement in the FCSOC meeting. She believes the partnership the Committee shares with her will be the most important. Tracy added that we are here to oversee and help. She added that the Committee is also here to go to the Supervisors and help get what is needed for Child Welfare, but if the Committee is unaware what is needed, then no improvement will be made. While she likes celebrating the positive outcomes regarding Child Welfare, it is important to hear about the negative aspects of it as well, to find the best solutions moving forward. Tracy said if there are missing pieces involving the State that Child Welfare needs help with, perhaps the Committee can come and assist. For example, if the issue is lack of staffing, then the Committee could be the backup to assist with situations like this.
- Regarding the need for more foster homes, Pam would like to know if the Board of Supervisors could provide money to do a campaign through television, radio, and billboards. Tracy suggested that youth could also be reached through social media, such as Instagram through the ads that are shown on there. Rosemary said she is glad we are pushing on the resource families, but it starts with us calling in wanting to be a resource parent because that is where we come at an impasse. She mentioned that the application to become a resources parent has gotten rejected because they only accept family members who have children in foster care. Tracy suggested that the family members who are thinking about becoming a resource parent should get certified just in case they end up becoming an actual resource parent.
- Wilma would like to request additional information regarding the number of applications being received for RFA, the number that have been approved monthly, the average time and any declamations and the reasons why that may be.
- Kevin asked, "How difficult is it to become a foster home?" Catherine responded it is not easy to become a resource parent. The expectation for being a resource parent is higher than being a regular parent in terms of the home being safe and licensed. Now the Department is dealing with a huge backlog. The State has agreed to come in and help with the backlog. If the State comes in to assist, the Department will be able to concentrate on the calls coming in. Catherine went on to explain what should happen when an individual calls to say they are interested in becoming a resource parent. She said the individual should be referred to a Foster Family Agency (FFA) and receive forwarding information regarding the next steps.
- There are over 20 FFAs in the community that are partnering with DSS Child Welfare to provide foster homes. The staff are constantly recruiting so Catherine would like to find out why, in some instances, forwarding information is not being

offered.

- Tracy would like a count on how many are in the backlog and when new applications are being accepted.
- Karina would like a percentage on how much backlog there is what is the capacity situation.
- Catherine explained that when comes to capacity, it's important for the child to have a purposeful placement, such as keeping them in their school district. It is not enough to find a bed for a child, they need a home.
- Krystal Kwartz commented (via Zoom) that her mother started the process for the Resource Family Approval (RFA) program and has not gotten called to be fingerprinted. When the social worker of the day was contacted, Krystal's mother was told to not call back and the worker hung up on her. Catherine responded that situations like this need to be reported.
- Wendy Yribarren (District 1) would like an update on the error rates regarding the adoption process. In her experience, she was told there were many clerical errors with the documents and this prolonged the adoption process because the youth were starting to age out so eventually even further documentation was needed. Kimberli and Catherine said they will provide the error rate information.
- Jill asked (via zoom), "What are the advantages/disadvantages to being a foster parent at a partner agency instead of going through DSS? Catherine responded that she would not say there are any advantages/disadvantages, if you want to be a resource family, go through an agency because you will be licensed faster and you will then have the youth faster as well. Right now, DSS is only dealing with families, trying to get the backlog done and get the children that are currently in homes in licensed homes. At the moment, you will get more support at the foster care agency.
- Pam asked if there is a way the staff in FFAs can get a stipend and perhaps hire more FFA workers in the County.
- Pam would like the comprehensive list of the partnering agencies (FFAs) sent to the Committees' listserv and recommend that they forward it as well and this will assist with the campaign and help figure out how to get started.
- Krystal asked (via Zoom) what is the process that DSS takes when errors are made and if there is an effort made to fix the error. Catherine responded that the errors do get identified and corrective action is taken. Her role is quality control and there is discussion on ways to improve the practice, such as putting an emphasis on social worker training and coaching because she believes that has been a deficit in the past.
- DSS work groups discussion will be saved for a later time as more information is received.

VII. Public Comments.

- None

VIII. Adjourn.

Wilma

Next meeting will be on October 5th, 2022, in-person and virtually via Zoom. Meeting adjourned by Wilma at 10:33 AM.

Committee Attendance

District 1	District 2	District 3	District 4	District 5
		<input type="checkbox"/> Sal Quintero <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ari Martinez (Proxy)		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Karina Perez	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kevin Lisitsin	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> James Martinez	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Rosemary Alanis	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pamela Hancock
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wendy Yribarren	<input type="checkbox"/> Maisie Young	<input type="checkbox"/> Elizabeth Thomas	<input type="checkbox"/> Richard Bailey	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Ed Avila
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Jill Stepke	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tracy Kashian	<input type="checkbox"/> Patricia Miller	<input type="checkbox"/> Connie Waldrop	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Wilma Hashimoto

Attending Staff and Guests

Catherine Huerta, Kim Smith, Dalvin Baker, Elizabeth Bell, Julia Perez, Hillary Bolger, Karel Gonzalez, Brian Van Anne, Miriam Flores, Focus Forward, Pat Scovill, Janet Kwartz, Krystal Kwartz, Chad Valoris, Rocky Vang, Robert Jeffers, Public Defenders Office.