

Fresno County Department of Social Services (DSS) – Child Welfare Services (CWS)
Update - August 2023

1. System Successes (Comparing 2022 to 2023)

- a. Partnership with CDSS and County investment to establish a 9-day shelter to support needs of foster youth awaiting placement; we refer to this shelter as Mod C.
- b. Higher pay for Social Workers and an increased differential for child welfare to increase recruitment and retention
 - i. On May 17, 2022 (BAI 47), the Board approved salary increases to Social Workers, effective 5/16/22 (4.5% - 5.75%) and 1/23/23 (2%), as well as increasing CPS differential from 5% to 7.5%, effective 5/16/22.
- c. We have 357 (15%) fewer kids in out of home placement compared to a year ago. This is a first reduction in foster care cases in 10 years.
- d. One out of 4 kids entering foster care are placed with relatives and thus avoiding placement with families not familiar to them. This is a 27% increase compared to the year before.
- e. We have 69 kids in Group Homes today compared to 91 kids a year ago. This is a 24% reduction of number of kids living in a congregate care setting.
- f. Overall with increase of upfront services to families, we have 15% fewer kids entering the foster care system.
 - i. On average this past year, 72 kids per month enter into foster care compared to 85 kids per month entering foster care a year prior.
- g. We have reduced pending and overdue investigations by 60%.

2. Child Welfare System Improvements

- a. Child Welfare Services staff is collocated in a single building (#5) on the Clovis Campus. This new facility has a place to facilitate Children and Family Team meetings, visitation and has space for children awaiting placement, the Independent Living Program, and Hope Center (events).
- b. Safety Organized Practice (SOP) and other trainings taking place to give social workers tools to effectively engage with families.
- c. Referrals per worker in Emergency Response are significantly lower compared to the year prior.
- d. Caseloads per worker in Family Reunification and Family Maintenance are significantly lower compared to the year prior.
- e. DSS increased resources for the Child Welfare Services Quality Control Division to help support development of tools, policy/ procedure and training guides, and to provide support, technical assistance and mentoring for staff, supervisors and managers. This unit also conducts case reviews prompted by State and Federal requirements as well as any public complaints. The reviews are aimed at improving system wide issues and to improve practices.
- f. Increased partnerships with county departments (Behavioral Health, Public Health, Probation), California department of Social Services, Fresno County Superintendent of Schools, Fresno Unified School District, Local Tribal Social Services, Fresno State Training Academy, and various community based organizations to increase services and supports for our youth and families, as well as training and support for our staff.
 - i. The BOS approved a number of new agreements with various agencies that provide supportive services to our youth and families.
- g. DSS received over \$7 Million in funding for prevention services. Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) was submitted to CDSS to address an integrated statewide system that supports families to provide safe, stable, nurturing relationships and environments for their children and youth.

3. Children's Crisis Continuum Pilot – Supports for kids at Mod C.

- a. Fresno County DSS, in collaboration with Fresno County DBH and Fresno County Juvenile Probation, Madera County DSS, Madera County Behavioral Health and Madera County Juvenile Probation received an \$8.5 million

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award (10 pilots were awarded Statewide) to improve systems of care for multi-system involved children with complex needs. This is a 3-year pilot. Our pilot is aimed at supporting expansion of placement types and supports for children that are held over at Mod C. We have three goals for this pilot:

- i. Creating Enhanced Intensive Services Foster Homes as a placement option for youth
- ii. Creating more intensive wrap services to provide enhanced mental health and behavioral supports for youth
- iii. Creating Crisis residential step-down treatment option for youth

4. Challenges (State/Nationwide)

- a. Social Worker hiring and retention – in the recent years local schools are graduating fewer Social Workers (both bachelor and master level) and the need for all systems (DSS, Hospitals, Schools, Behavioral Health, various Justice partners have all added social work positions and are recruiting)
- b. Social Worker caseloads in Permanency Planning and Adoptions remain high and DSS is working on strategies to address them
- c. Insufficient placement options for children with complex needs.
 - i. DSS looks for homes for approximately 140 kids each month
 - ii. We are unable to find homes for approximately 6 to 8 kids each month within 24 hours and these are kids that reside in Mod C while awaiting placement.
- d. Current providers (Short Term Residential Treatment Programs (former Group Homes) and Foster Family Agencies and other placement facilities have ability to reject/eject children from placement.
 - i. These providers have ability to say no to accepting our kids into placement when they believe they cannot meet their needs even when they have room or their program design appear to meet the kids needs.
 - ii. They also can notify the county and ‘eject’ kids from placement due to no longer being able to meet their needs
 - iii. Nearly half the youth that ended up in Mod C during the first six months of 2023 were the kids that had a home (placement) and were ejected from that placement by the provider

5. Mod C Overview

- a. Emergency shelter for youth when no immediate alternative is possible. This is an alternative for kids staying in our office longer than 24 hours.
- b. Has capacity for up to 6 youth ages 12 to the day before their 18th birthday.
- c. Youth can stay there for up to 9 days while a purposeful placement is being found.
- d. In Mod C, kids have access to their own room, meals, activities, access to social workers and variety of individualized supports they may need while awaiting placement.
- e. Open 24/7 and does not turn away youth.
- f. Currently for our foster youth, MOD C is the only place that they can count on that will not say no and turn them away; it is a safety net for our kids that temporarily addresses some of our challenges in finding homes for youth with most traumatic experiences

6. Mod C – Improvements

- a. Partnering with California DSS (CDSS) to obtain licensing for up to 9-day stay.
- b. Partnered with Fresno County Superintendents Office of Schools and Fresno Unified for streamlined school enrollment and engagement for children.
- c. Increased partnership with DBH and DPH to address mental and physical health needs of children.
- d. Contract with an LCSW to provide support to children and staff at Mod C.

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- e. Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) training provided to Mod C staff; it's non-violent crisis prevention and intervention which focuses on prevention and equips individuals with proven strategies for safety defusing anxious, hostile or violent behavior and reduces the risk of injury; this includes de-escalation.
- f. Onsite security with options for increased security as needed.
- g. Increased partnership with FSO when there are concerns about a child and/or staff's safety while at Mod C.
- h. In-house visitation area is available with seating.
- i. Training scheduled for mod-c staff to complete a needs and services assessment to evaluate the youth's behavior, social interactions, and other characteristics to assist the youth social worker finding placement. Crisis Assessment Tool (CAT tool).

7. CWS Services Enhancement Project

DSS is continuing its work on the CWS Enhancement Project. During the past year, two key projects (FFPSA Planning and Implementation; Children Crisis Continuum Pilot) were added to this project and the following goals for FY 23-24 include these new projects:

- 1. Reduce entries into care by increasing prevention services and support to families;
 - a. This goal would be supported by roll out and implementation FFPSA
- 2. Increase relative placement and decrease the number of youth placed in congregate care setting
 - a. Increase supports to relatives and supports so that initial emergency placements and first placement for a child is with a relative
 - b. Increase family finding efforts for children in Permanency Planning
- 3. Increase reunification rates
 - a. Intensive review of all services bypass cases prior to determination
 - b. Intensive review of all termination of services cases before the cases are transferred to PP/adoptions

Overall, the projects for the next fiscal year include:

- 1. Complete Mod C licensing and improvement process, as well as develop a plan for a transition to the new location.
- 2. Start Implementation of services identified in the FFPSA.
- 3. Start operationalization of the Children's Well Being Continuum projects:
 - a. Development and contracting for the emergency enhanced intensive services foster care homes
 - b. Develop and implement the Wraparound and Super-wrap services agreement
- 4. Develop strategies for enhancement of family finding for all children in care with a focus on children in permanency planning
- 5. Develop strategies to increase hiring of SW and reduce vacancy rates for all positions in child welfare branch
 - a. Increase number of internships supported by the department
 - b. Prioritize reduction of caseload in Permanency Planning and Adoptions
 - c. Review remaining specialized caseloads
- 6. Refine existing approach to placement
 - a. Develop PPGs for family finding and placement search – primary responsibility for these functions to be assigned to primary case workers
 - b. We define support provided by RFS Team