

California - Child and Family Services Review

Santa Cruz County

County Self-Assessment

2024



California – Child and Family Services Review Signature Sheet

For submittal of: CSA SIP Progress Report

County	Santa Cruz
SIP Period Dates	February 3, 2025 – February 3, 2030
Outcome Data Period	December 2019 (Q4 2019) to December 2023 (Q4 2023)
County Child Welfare Agency Director	
Name	Gloria Carroll
Signature*	<small>Signed by:</small> <i>Gloria Carroll</i>
Phone Number	<small>831-454-4062</small> 831-454-4062
Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
County Chief Probation Officer	
Name	Fernando Giraldo
Signature*	<small>DocuSigned by:</small> <i>Fernando Giraldo</i>
Phone Number	<small>831-454-3207</small> 831-454-3207
Mailing Address	PO Box 1812 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
Public Agency Designated to Administer CAPIT and CBCAP	
Name	Gloria Carroll
Signature*	<small>Signed by:</small> <i>Gloria Carroll</i>
Phone Number	<small>831-454-4062</small> 831-454-4062
Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
Board of Supervisors (BOS) Signature	
BOS Approval Date	
Name	

Mail the original Signature Sheet to:

Children and Family Services Division
 Performance & Program Improvement Bureau
 California Department of Social Services
 744 P Street, MS 8-12-519
 Sacramento, CA 95814

*Signatures must be in blue ink

Signature*

Contact Information

Child Welfare Agency	Name	Gloria Carroll
	Agency	Family & Children's Services
	Phone & E-mail	831-454-4062 gloria.carroll@santacruzcountyca.gov
	Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
Probation Agency	Name	Jose Flores
	Agency	Juvenile Probation
	Phone & E-mail	831-454-3886 jose.flores@santacruzcountyca.gov
	Mailing Address	PO Box 1812 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
Public Agency Administering CAPIT and CBCAP <small>(if other than Child Welfare)</small>	Name	
	Agency	
	Phone & E-mail	
	Mailing Address	
CAPIT Liaison	Name	Bridget Semlek
	Agency	Family & Children's Services
	Phone & E-mail	831-454-4530 bridget.semlek@santacruzcountyca.gov
	Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061
CBCAP Liaison	Name	Bridget Semlek
	Agency	Family & Children's Services
	Phone & E-mail	831-454-4530 bridget.semlek@santacruzcountyca.gov
	Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061

PSSF Liaison	Name	Bridget Semlek
	Agency	Family & Children's Services
	Phone & E-mail	831-454-4530 bridget.semlek@santacruzcountyca.gov
	Mailing Address	PO Box 1320 Santa Cruz, CA 95061

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 2: Introduction	2
SECTION 3: C-CFSR Planning Team and Core Representatives	3
SECTION 4: Demographic Profile	6
SECTION 5: Public Agency Characteristics	28
SECTION 6: Child Welfare / Probation Placement Initiatives	51
SECTION 7: Board of Supervisors (BOS) Designated Commission, Board of Bodies	56
SECTION 8: Systemic Factors	58
SECTION 9: Critical Incident Review Process	116
SECTION 10: National Resource Center Training & Tech. Assistance	117
SECTION 11: Stakeholder Input - Peer Review, Focus Groups, Stakeholder Meeting	118
SECTION 12: Outcome Data Measures	137
SECTION 13: Summary of Findings.....	159

SECTION 2: Introduction

The purpose of the County Self-Assessment (CSA) is for each county, in collaboration with their community partners, to perform an in-depth assessment of Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation programs. This analysis includes both qualitative and quantitative data and guides the county in planning for program enhancements and continuous quality improvement. The CSA is one the three major components required by the California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR). The C-CFSR emerged as a result of California's Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636). As required by AB 636, Santa Cruz Family and Children's Services and Santa Cruz Juvenile Probation must analyze, in collaboration with key community stakeholders, its performance on critical child welfare and probation outcomes. These outcomes are measured using data from the statewide child welfare database. In addition to the outcome indicators, the CSA must review systemic and community factors that correspond to the federal review. The areas needing improvement will be addressed in the System Improvement Plan (SIP), which must also be developed in partnership with community partners. The SIP must be approved by the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors and submitted to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS).

In the past, counties have developed a separate plan for expenditure of federal and state funds for the Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF), Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT) and Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP). In June 2008, the CDSS, in collaboration with the California Welfare Directors' Association, announced integration of the CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF plan into the C-CFSR. In an effort to minimize duplicative processes, maximize resources, and increase partnerships and communication between organizations, the CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF Plan has been integrated into the CSA and SIP process.

Another change to the C-CFSR process was to expand the evaluation and reporting periods from a three-year cycle to a five-year cycle. This allows counties additional time to plan, implement, and achieve their desired outcomes and objectives.

As required, Santa Cruz County's Human Services Department, Family & Children's Services Division, and Juvenile Probation led the County Self-Assessment in partnership with the CDSS. The county was additionally supported in completion of this process by Hay Consulting.

SECTION 3: C-CFSR Planning Team and Core Representatives

C-CFSR Team

The planning team for Santa Cruz County’s C-CFSR process included representatives from Santa Cruz County Family & Children Services Division (FCS) and Santa Cruz County’s Juvenile Probation Department (JPD). The team met regularly throughout the entire C-CFSR process and consisted of:

Table 1: Santa Cruz County CSA Planning Team

Santa Cruz County CSA Planning Team	
FCS	JPD
Gloria Carroll - Director	Jose Flores – Division Director
Claudia Herrera-Sandoval – Ass’t Division Director	Jimmy Cook – Ass’t Division Director
Bridget Semlek – Sr. Human Svcs Analyst	Diane Culcasi –Data Analyst
Deborah Bresnick – QI Program Mgr	Christine Berge – Sr. Analyst
Casey Coneway – Sr. Human Svcs Data Analyst	
CDSS Consultants – Kiana Vicari (Performance & Programs Improvement Bureau)	
LaFatima Jones - OCAP	
Consultant – Leslie Ann Hay	

Core Representatives

In addition to staff, supervisors, and managers from both FCS and JPD, other core representatives involved throughout the CSA planning process included parents, youth, resources parents, services providers representing various areas of need (e.g., behavioral health, substance use disorders, developmental disabilities, domestic violence, independent living, youth development, parenting education, restorative justice, and others), schools, juvenile court, and community based organizations serving children, youth and families with various forms of assistance (e.g., economic, food/nutrition, housing, immigration, employment, child care, and other essential family supports). These stakeholders participated in the in-person Kick-Off Stakeholder Meeting or in-person or virtual Focus Groups. A more specific list of stakeholders involved throughout the CSA process is included on the next page.

The CSA Planning Process

Santa Cruz CSA planning began in late spring 2024 with the CSA Planning Team establishing regular planning meetings to design, launch and oversee CSA activities. Leslie Ann Hay of Hay Consulting provided facilitation throughout development of the CSA. The Planning Team continued to meet several times a month to design events, identify key stakeholders, and analyze findings throughout 2024. Events included an in-person county-wide stakeholder gathering, a peer-review week, and many focus groups. Themes and findings from these events are found in following sections.

Participation of Core Representatives

Santa Cruz’s CSA assessment process included a variety of forums designed to elicit stakeholder participation. The goal was to engage stakeholders and gather their input about the strengths and

barriers facing both Family & Children Services and Juvenile Probation. A wide variety of community members participated in three significant activities summer/fall of 2024, as seen below in Table XX. Full details about the peer review focus groups and kickoff can be found in Section 11: Stakeholder Input:

- **Peer Review:** A total of 18 cases (12 FCS; 6 Probation) were reviewed from September 16-20 by 10 participating counties to identify strengths and challenges in casework practice related to achieving permanency.
- **Focus Groups:** Between July and November 2024, 86 attendees across many stakeholder groups participated in one of 18 focus groups exploring experiences, observations, and ideas for change.
- **Kickoff Meeting:** Over 40 participants convened in person on June 20, 2024 to reflect on the goals of the CSA by identifying strengths, challenges and areas of improvement over the next five years. Participation from across the county ensured a broad array of perspectives would influence the development of the CSA.

Table 2: Stakeholders Involved Across SC’s CSA process:

Stakeholders Involved in the CSA Process	
FCS	CSA Participation
Child Welfare Clerical & Social Workers	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Child Welfare Supervisors & Managers	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Child Welfare Parents	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Child Welfare Resource Parents	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
JPD	
Probation Officers/Supervisors	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Probation Administrator	Kickoff Meeting
Probation Youth & Parents	Focus Groups
Probation Resource Parents	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Placement Team	Focus Groups
Community Stakeholders	
CASA of Santa Cruz County	Kickoff Meeting
Health Services Agency - Children’s Behavioral Health & Substance Use Disorders Services	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Community Action Board	Kickoff Meeting
Community Bridges	Kickoff Meeting
Conflict Resolution Center of SC County	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
County Office of Education	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Encompass Community Services	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Luna y Sol Familia Center	Kickoff Meeting
Monarch Services	Kickoff Meeting
Optimal Solutions Consulting	Kickoff Meeting

Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Parents Center	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Public Health	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Superior Court, Juvenile Court	Kickoff Meeting, Focus Groups
Watsonville & Dominican Hospitals	Kickoff Meeting

There are no BIA recognized tribes located in Santa Cruz County. However, the Ohlone and Amah Mutsun have a presence in the County. Efforts to reach out to these tribal representatives were unsuccessful.

SECTION 4: Demographic Profile

4A GENERAL COUNTY DEMOGRAPHICS

Population stratified by age and ethnicity and language spoken

Santa Cruz County is located on the California coast, situated at the north end of the Monterey Bay. The total population was 261,547 in 2023, which is about 9,000 fewer people than the 2020 population. This three percent decline coincided with the Covid-19 pandemic.

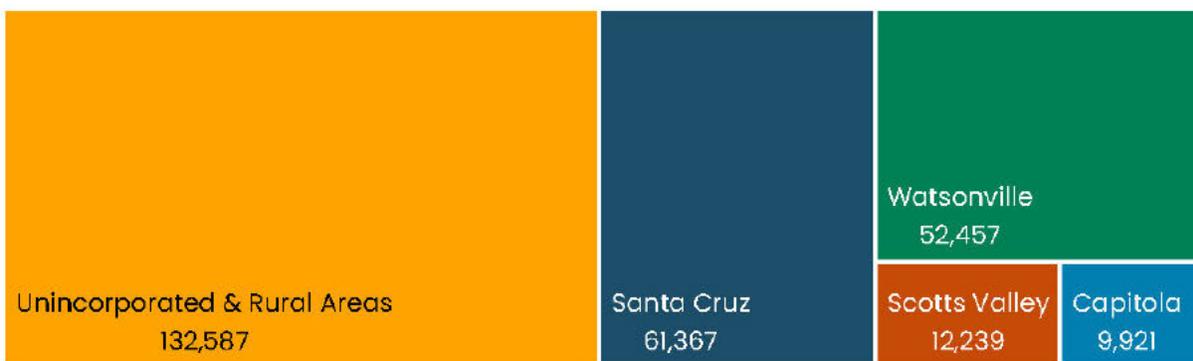
The four cities within Santa Cruz County are Santa Cruz, Watsonville, Scotts Valley, and Capitola. Five year population estimates as of 2022:

Table 3: Santa Cruz County Population by City

City/Area	Pop	Pct
Santa Cruz City	61,367	23%
Watsonville City	52,457	20%
Scotts Valley City	12,239	5%
Capitola City	9,921	4%
Unincorporated/ Rural Areas	132,587	49%
County	268,571	100%

Source: 2022 American Community Survey (5-year estimate), US Census; the most recent source that includes all four cities)

Chart 4: Santa Cruz County Population by City & Unincorporated Areas



Source: 2022 American Community Survey (5-year estimate), US Census; the most recent source that includes all four cities)

Population trends include:

Over the last 10 years:

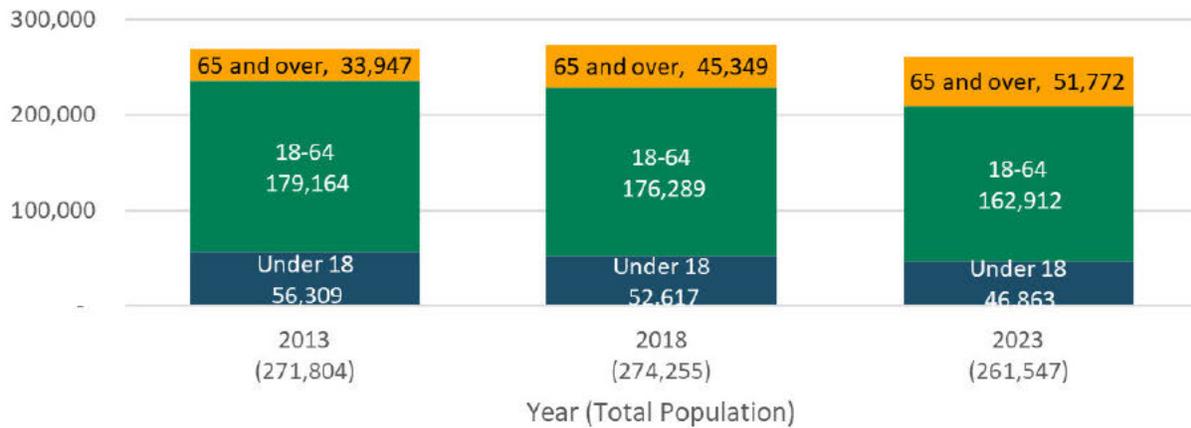
- the under-18 population declined 17%
- the 18-64 population declined 9%

Over the last 5 years:

- the under-18 population declined 11%
- the 18-64 population declined 8%

- the 65 and over population grew 53%
- the 65 and over population grew 14%

Chart 5: Santa Cruz County Population Changes 2013-23 by Age Group:



Source: US Census, 1-year estimates (2013, 2018, 2023)

Table 6: Santa Cruz County Population Demographics

	Pop.	%
AGE		
Under 18	46,863	18%
18-64	162,912	62%
65 and over	51,772	20%
RACE/ETHNICITY		
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	92,146	35%
White (non-Hispanic)	140,558	54%
Asian Amer./Pac Isl. (non-Hisp)	12,088	5%
Black (non-Hisp)	2,167	1%
Native Amer. (non-Hisp)	422	0%
Other & multiple race (non-Hisp)	14,166	5%
LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME (5+ yrs)		
English	166,388	66%
Spanish	66,459	27%
Other Indo-European languages	8,872	4%
Asian & Pacific languages	6,150	2%
Other languages	2,488	1%

Source: US Census, 1-year estimates (2023)

Table 7: Child Population (0-17), by Race/Ethnicity

	Pop.	%
Hispanic/Latino (of any race)	24,767	50.9%
White (non-Hispanic)	19,779	40.6%
Asian Amer./Pac Islander (non-Hisp)	1,370	2.8%
Black (non-Hisp)	434	0.9%
Native Amer. (non-Hisp)	149	0.3%

Other (non-Hisp)	2,160	44%
Total	48,659	100%

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu); based on CA Dept. of Finance projections 2020-2060.

Table 8: Median Income

	SC County	US	CA
Household median income	\$105,631	\$77,719	\$95,521
Median income of families with children under 18	\$117,329	\$95,721	\$104,361

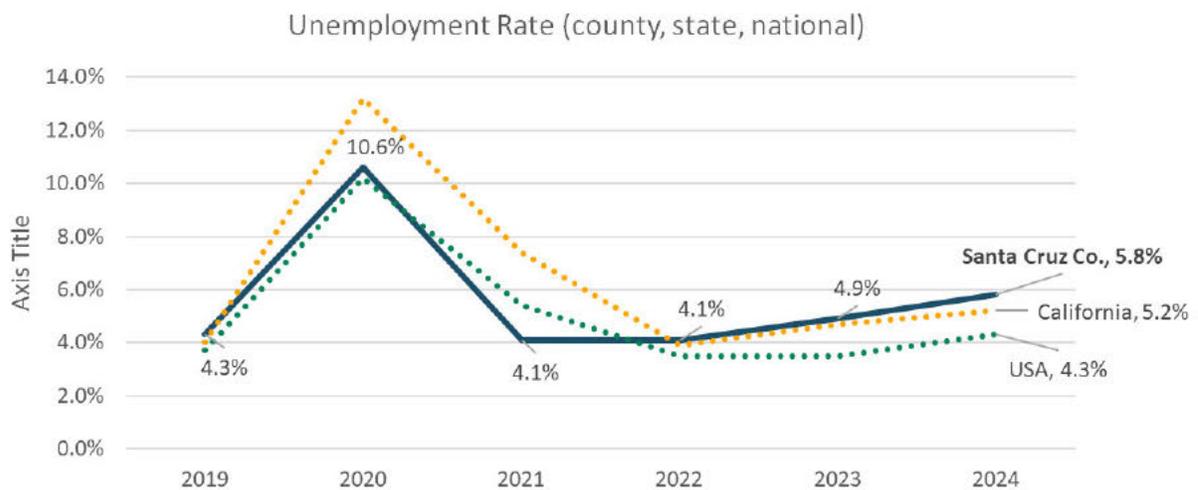
Source: US Census, 2023 1-year estimate

Table 9: Median Income Santa Cruz County Cities

	Median Income
Santa Cruz City	\$111,427
Watsonville	\$74,785
Scotts Valley	\$140,887
Capitola	\$96,412

Source: US Census, 2019-23 5-year estimates

Chart 10: Most Recent County Unemployment Rate = 5.8% (July 2024)

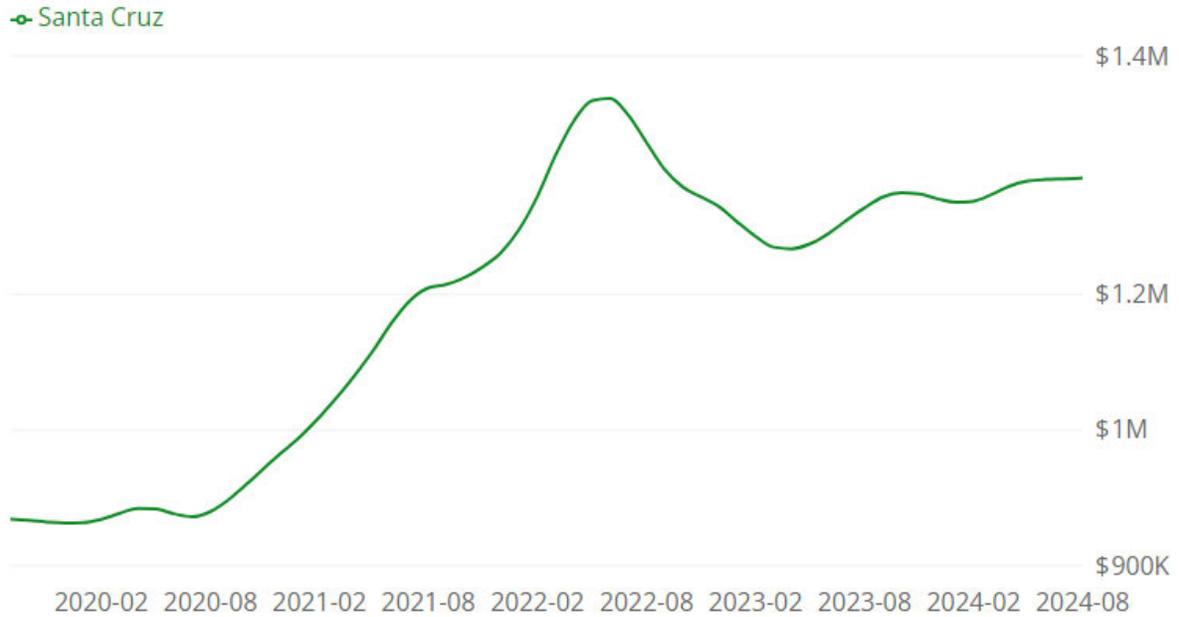


Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics, Santa Cruz-Watsonville Metro Area (data extracted Sept 18, 2024) https://www.bls.gov/eag/eag.ca_santacruz_msa.htm#eag_ca_santacruz_msa.f.2 Note: Unemployment Rate based on July rate each year

Average Housing Costs

- Average home value in Santa Cruz County: \$1,329,546
- Average home values have risen 38% since August 2020

Chart 12: Average Home Values 2020-2024



Source: Zillow, August 2024, <https://www.zillow.com/home-values/13715/santa-cruz-ca/>

- Fair Market Rent (FMR) for Santa Cruz County in 2024:
- One BR: \$3,085
- Two BR: \$4,054
- Three BR: \$5,000

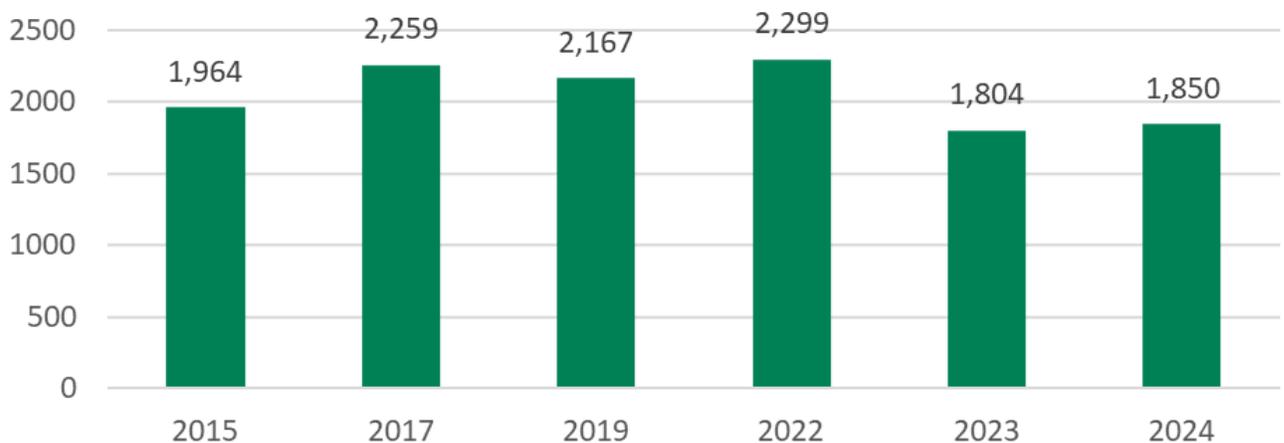
Source: US Housing & Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research, 2024 Fair Market Rent estimates (https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2024_code/2024summary.odn?&year=2024&fmrtype=Final&selection_type=county&fips=0608799999)

- Overall Median Rent: \$3,695 (all BR and property types)

Source: Zillow <https://www.zillow.com/rental-manager/market-trends/santa-cruz-ca/>

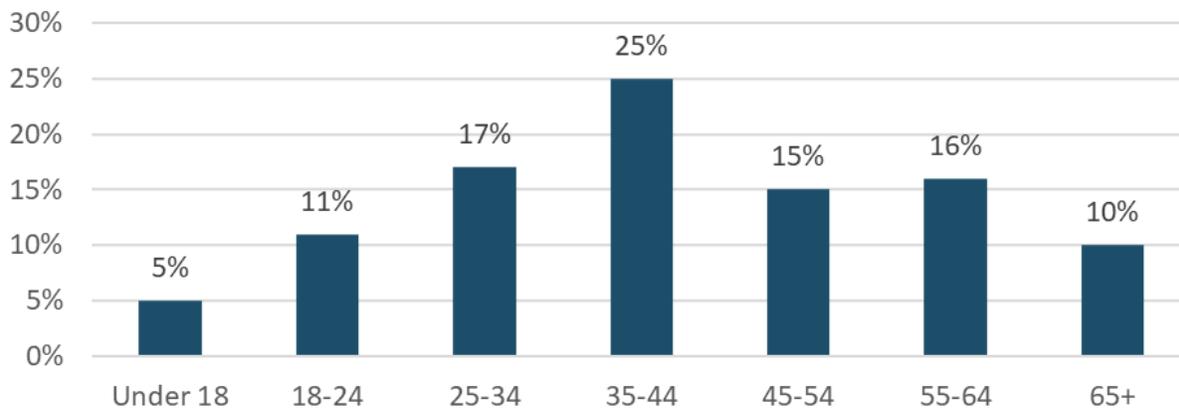
Homelessness

Chart 13: Homeless Point-in-Time Counts 2015-2024



Source: Applied Survey Research, Santa Cruz County Homeless Census & Survey.

Chart 14: Homelessness By Age



Source: Applied Survey Research, Santa Cruz County Homeless Census & Survey.

Analysis

High levels of homelessness and high housing costs remain perhaps the county’s most critical and persistent challenges. A recent report named the Santa Cruz-Watsonville metropolitan area the most expensive jurisdiction in the nation for housing. Since 2020, the average home value has increased 38% and is now over \$1.3 million, while the fair market rent for a two-bedroom rental is over \$4,000. While the recent point in time count reflects a decrease in the homeless population overall, this is not being reflected at the same rate for families entering the child welfare system which, for reasons discussed elsewhere in this report are impacted by housing issues at a higher rate

The high cost of housing continues to drive many low and middle-income residents to lower cost areas outside the county. Accordingly, the median household income within the county has continued to grow and is now over 10 percent higher than the state and over 20 percent higher than the national median income.

Census data show that over the past five years the county population has declined 5 percent overall, including an 11 percent drop in children (under 18), an 8 percent drop in adults 18-64 and a 14 percent increase in seniors (65+). The high cost and lack of affordable housing in the County is likely influencing families with children to look for housing in other areas outside of the county. For parents who remain in the County, the high living costs may influence the decision making around family size. The availability of remote work may also be contributing to family’s decision to move to other more affordable areas of the state/country. All of these factors would reduce the number of children remaining in the county. Conversely, Santa Cruz County has an aging population. This population may not be leaving the county at as high of a rate due to having established roots and are more likely to have purchased a home at a time when housing was more affordable and are less impacted by the extreme housing costs.

Meanwhile there has been little change in the racial and ethnic composition of the county since the last CSA. The county is 54% white non-Hispanic, 35% Hispanic/Latino, 5% Asian American-Pacific Islander, and 1% Black.

List of federally recognized active tribes in the county or the tribes, and service providers served most frequently

There are no Bureau of Indian Affairs recognized tribes in Santa Cruz County. However, there are members of the Ohlone tribe in the region. In addition, documented descendants of Missions San Juan Bautista and

Santa Cruz have become members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and can be found in Santa Cruz County, though most live in the Central Valley.

4B: CHILD MALTREATMENT INDICATORS

Table 15: Number of Low-Birth Weight Newborns

	Santa Cruz # / % of low birthweight infants	California % of low birthweight infants
Average 2015-2017	168.3 / 6.1%	6.9%
Average 2020-2022	137.0 / 6.1%	7.2%

Source: State of California Department of Public Health
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DMCAH/surveillance/Pages/Low-Birthweight.aspx>

Table 16: Number of Children Born to Adolescent Parents (Ages 15-19)

	Santa Cruz: Births & Rate per 1,000 female adolescents	California: Births & Rate per 1,000 female adolescents
2017-2019	273 births 7.8 /1,000 females 15-19	51,176 births 12.7 / 1,000 females 15-19
2020-2022	198 births 6.1 /1,000 females 15-19	38,319 births 9.8 / 1,000 females 15-19

Source: State of California Department of Public Health
<https://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CFH/DMCAH/surveillance/Pages/adolescent-births.aspx>

Family Structure

According to the US Census Bureau 2023 American Community Survey, Santa Cruz County had 99,069 households. The average household size was 2.47 people. Families (married and cohabitating couples and single parent households with children under 18) made up 62 percent of the households in the county.

Households with children under 18 represent 24.5 percent of all households in the county, including five percent that are single-parent households.

Nonfamily households made up 38 percent of all households in Santa Cruz County, though this does not mean that they were necessarily living alone. In addition, 37 percent of all households have one or more people 65 years and over.

Source: 2023 ACS, Selected Social Characteristics (Table DP02)

Housing Cost & Availability

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the Santa Cruz-Watsonville metropolitan area is the most expensive jurisdiction in the nation for housing. The city of Santa Cruz tends to have the most expensive housing while outlying areas such as the San Lorenzo valley typically have lower housing costs. Proximity to coastal areas and the ocean drive up the cost of housing.

The estimated fulltime hourly wage that workers must earn to afford a two-bedroom rental home at HUD’s Fair Market Rent while spending no more than 30% of their income on housing costs is \$77.96. By comparison, California’s state housing wage is \$47.38, and the national wage is \$32.11 for a two-bedroom rental.

Source: National Low Income Housing Coalition, “Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing,” 2024 report (https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/2024_OOR.pdf).

To address current and projected shortages of affordable housing, the county’s Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA) determined that from 2023 to 2031 the county needs to create 4,634 new housing units across all income levels.

Source: Santa Cruz County, 2023 Housing Element <https://cdi.santacruzcountyca.gov/Planning/Housing/2023HousingElement/whatisthehousingelement.aspx>

A broad range of stakeholders identified the cost of living, the scarcity of affordable housing, and the access to living wage jobs as contributors to financial pressures to families with children. This is particularly prevalent of vulnerable families that become involved with child welfare and for youth who may be involved in the juvenile justice system. Families that become involved with our system are eligible for several housing programs to include Bringing Families Home and Family Unification Program vouchers (FUP)

2-1-1 Calls

According to the 2023 2-1-1 Annual Report, calls for assistance were most frequently about housing, while other basic needs such as utilities, food/meals, and legal, consumer and public safety services were also prominent. Information about how many referrals resulted in services is currently unknown prompting discussions in the county about the need for creating a closed loop referral service program. This has been identified as a priority but is in early stages of exploration.

Table 17: Santa Cruz County 2023 2-1-1 Calls

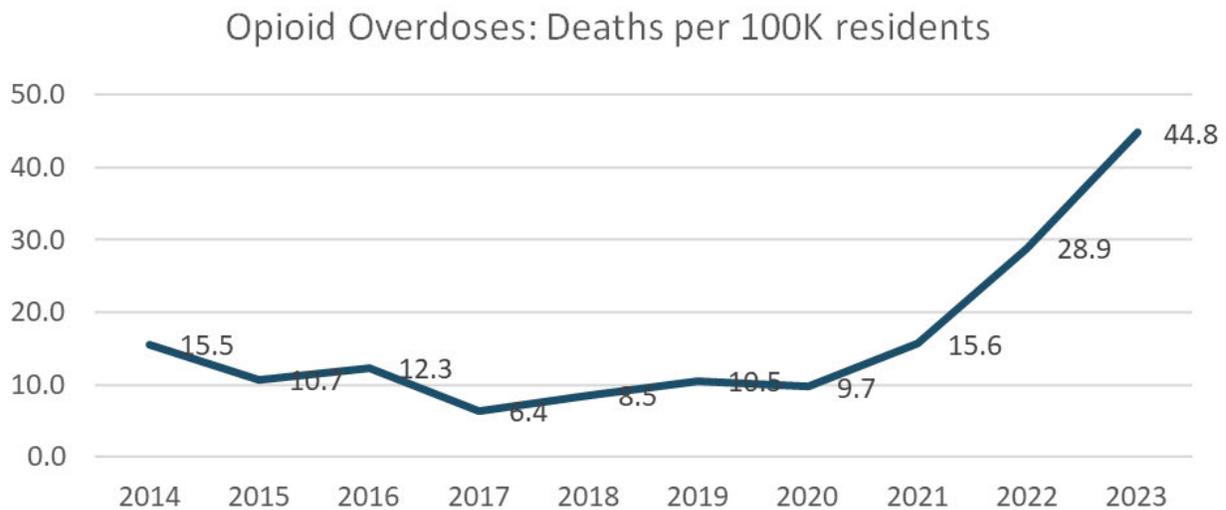
Santa Cruz County, 2023 Calls	
Total Calls	4,480
Total Referrals	8,050
Top Caller Needs (by Category)	
Housing	2,140
Utility Assistance	582
Food/Meals	523
Legal, Consumer and Public Safety Services	456
Disasters	385

Source: United Way of Santa Cruz County, “2-1-1 2023 Annual Report”, <https://211santacruzcounty.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/211-SCC-Annual-Report-2023-1.pdf>

Substance Abuse

Since 2020, Santa Cruz has experienced an alarming rise in opioid-related overdose deaths. In 2023 it had the sixth highest rate of opioid-related overdose deaths in the state.

Chart 18: Opioid Overdoses 2014-2023

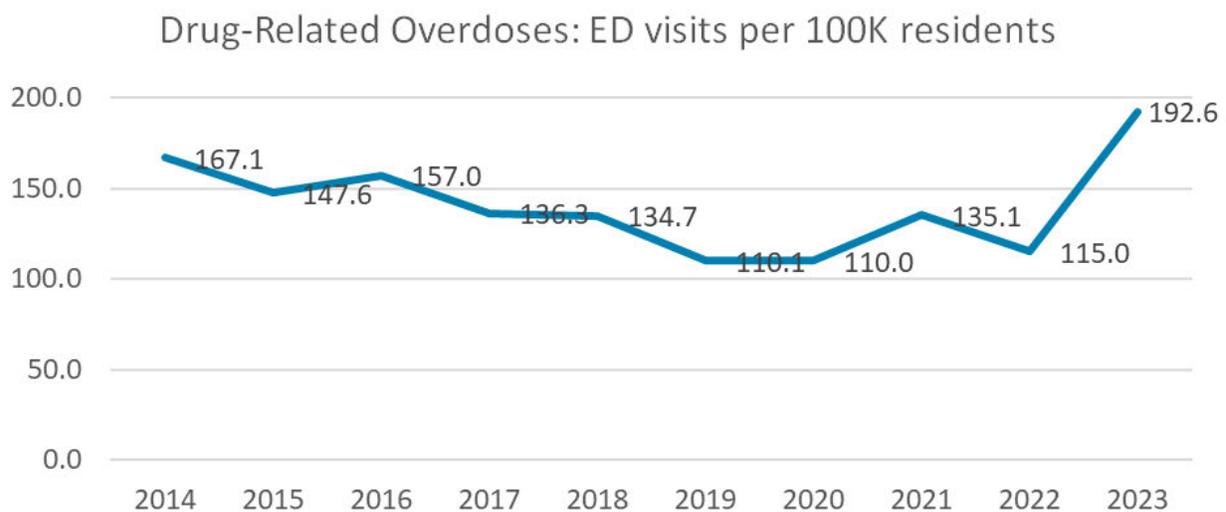


Source: 2014-2022 data are from DataShare Santa Cruz County (<https://www.datasharescc.org/indicators/index/view?indicatorId=7869&localeId=281>); 2023 data are from the California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard (<https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/ODdash/?tab=CA>)

The overall level of drug-related overdoses that lead to hospital emergency department visits has also increased sharply in 2023.

The exact reasons for the increase in opioid overdoses and related deaths is unknown, however the use of fentanyl by child welfare involved parents has increased in the last few years. The particular lethality of this substance is a likely contributor. The increase in parents with severe substance use issues in combination with already strained substance abuse resources continues to make this an area of focus for the County.

Chart 19: Drug-Related Overdoses 2014-2023

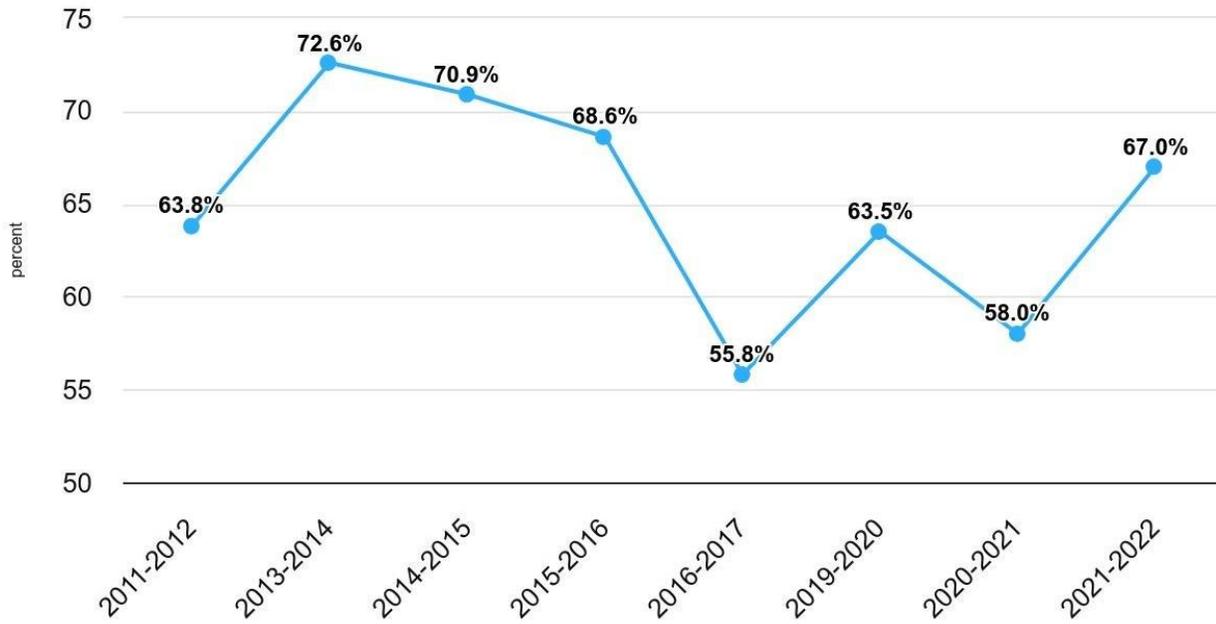


Source: the California Overdose Surveillance Dashboard (<https://skylab.cdph.ca.gov/ODdash/?tab=CA>)

Mental Health

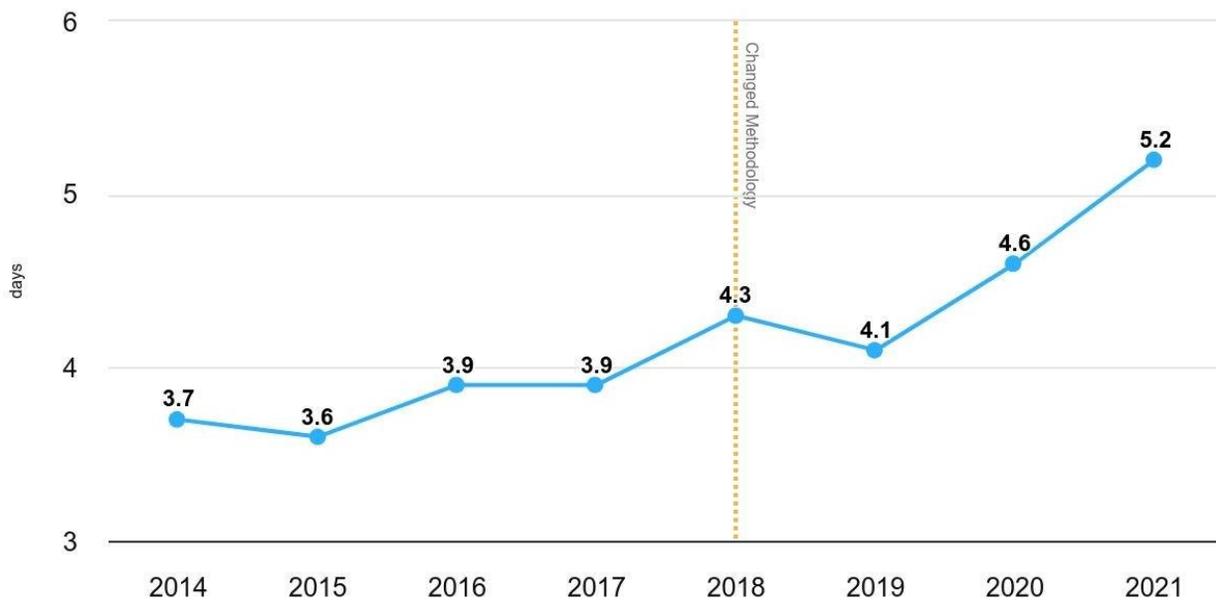
Chart 20: Adults With Likely Serious Psychological Distress 2007-2022

Chart 21: Adults Needing & Receiving Behavioral Health Care Services 2011-2022



Source: California Health Interview Survey (2021-2022)

Chart 22: Poor Mental Health: Average Number of Days



Beginning with 2018, the CDC's BRFSS has updated their modeling procedure for producing small-area estimates.
Source: County Health Rankings (2021)

Chart 23: Child Fatalities

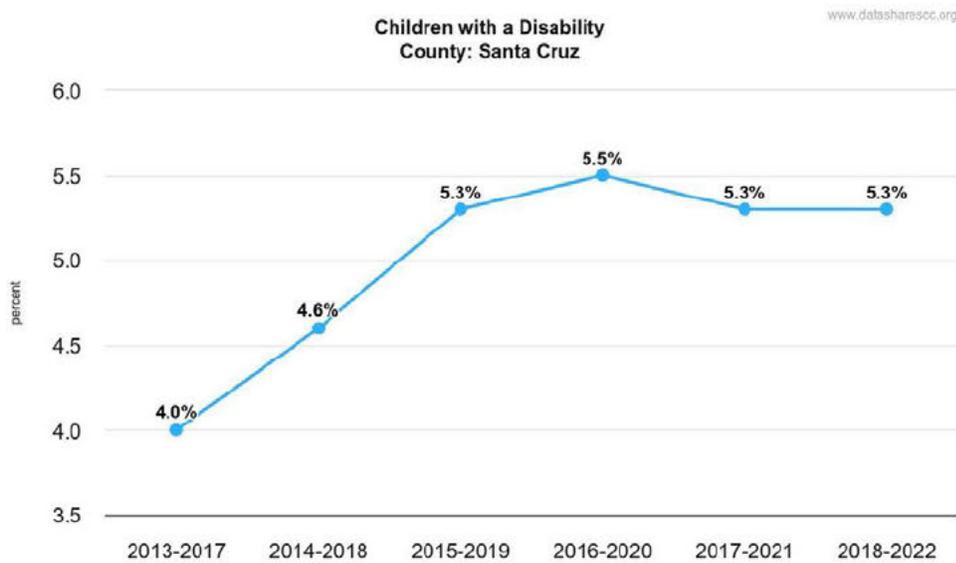
The most recent data available from the CDC indicates that 13 children under 15 years old died in 2020. All other counts by cause of death and age are masked because they represent 10 or fewer fatalities.

	Birth defects	Cancer	Diseases of the heart	Homicide	Influenza and pneumonia	Suicide	Unintentional injuries	Total
Ages 1-4	M	M	M	M	M	N/A	M	13
Ages 5-14	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	(ages 1-14)
Ages 15-19	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M

Source: CDC Wonder Database, wonder.cdc.gov (most recent data is from 2020).

The chart below shows that at least five percent of children in the county have been reported as having a disability between 2015 and 2022.

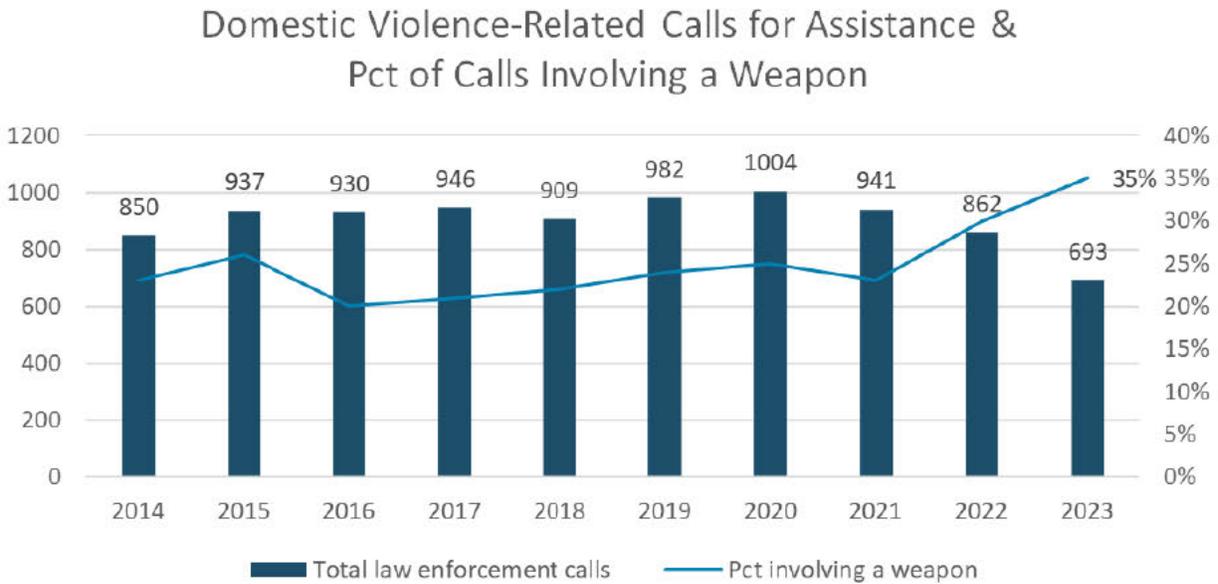
Chart 24: Children with Disabilities



Source: American Community Survey 5-Year (2018-2022)

Source: DataShare Santa Cruz County

Chart 25: Law Enforcement Call for Domestic Violence



Source: Open Justice (openjustice.doj.ca.gov), Domestic violence related calls for assistance.

Rates of Emergency Room Visits for Child Victims of Avoidable Injuries (As Applicable)

Not available at the county level.

Table 26: ER Visits for Child Victims of Avoidable Injuries

Age group	Non-fatal Injury ED visits in 2022	Total children in Santa Cruz County	ED visits / 1,000 children
<5 years	768	11,107	69.1
5-9 years	670	13,092	51.2
10-14 years	870	14,380	60.5
15-19 years	565	21,379	26.4
Total	2,873	59,958	47.9

Source: CDPH Epicenter Injury Data <https://skylab4.cdph.ca.gov/epicenter/>

Analysis

The County has vulnerable populations that make them at greater risk for maltreatment. Included are the population that have severe substance use and/or mental health challenges. The economic conditions that create financial and housing instability are more likely to be present in these populations which further places these families at risk. Families residing in Watsonville may be particularly vulnerable give

the average income is significantly lower than in other areas of the county. Watsonville also has an undocumented population that are more hesitant to seek services out of concern for their immigration status. In addition, youth with complex needs place them at greater risk of maltreatment especially when parents lack the skills and resources to respond to these needs.

Over the past three years the county has experienced a spike in opioid related overdoses and was ranked as having the sixth highest opioid-related death rate in the state. Stakeholders indicated that the severity and intensity of drugs prevalent in the community have greatly complicated the treatment and recovery process for families involved in child welfare and youth involved in juvenile justice. In addition, the service system has not yet adjusted its treatment models to effectively address the more addictive quality of available substances.

More positively, however, domestic violence-related calls to law enforcement have declined sharply since 2020, from 1,004 to 693. Calls regarding domestic violence reached a 10 year high in 2020 which corresponds to the height of the pandemic and at the time that the County was amid an extended shelter in place. This trend mirrors calls to the child abuse hotline where calls from law enforcement represented most calls as families had limited contact with other mandated reporters. The challenges created by a global pandemic and other natural disasters that plagued the community during this time, the lack of social supports and inability to obtain resources likely contributed to in home stressors and situations coming to the attention of Law Enforcement. As the community shifted back to in person settings and alternatives to calling law enforcement once again became available, the decrease in calls to Law Enforcement is not unexpected. The increase in more serious incidents, such as calls involving weapons may be a result of less serious calls being redirected to community-based organizations specifically equipped to handle domestic violence related concerns.

There has been no real change in the percentage of low birthweight infants, but the percentage of children born to teens has declined from 10% to 6% since the last CSA, which mirrors a statewide pattern.

Mental health data as of FY 2021-22 shows that two-thirds of adults received mental health care services. However, since we do not have data for FY 2022-23 or FY 2023-24, we do not know if these rates remained in place or were short-term, pandemic-related effects that have since receded.

Many stakeholders as well as peer reviewers commented that the severity of mental health issues with which parents often present is a complicating factor. This requires longer term, more intensive interventions to stabilize families for successful reunification, thus delaying permanency. This creates a capacity issue for the County in that there are limited resources locally to deal with severe mental health and individuals many times must look outside the county for services. The unhoused population, which likely have a higher prevalence of mental health challenges, can be difficult to engage in long term services.

A review of the maltreatment indicators has highlighted those that have contributed the most to child abuse and neglect in our county. Housing Cost & Availability, Substance Use and Mental Health Issues rise to the top as factors that put our families at risk for entering and re-entering the Child Welfare System. Other maltreatment indicators have either decreased or have remained at a stable, low incidence with less impact to the families we serve.

4C: CHILD WELFARE PLACEMENT POPULATION

Number of children with allegations stratified by age and ethnicity

Table 27: Total children with allegations (2019-2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	169	129	104	118	93
1-2	191	179	148	157	162
3-5	343	302	292	293	286
6-10	729	585	607	597	633
11-15	744	628	635	589	570
16-17	233	214	222	214	154
Black	33	28	39	40	41
White	757	606	642	751	702
Latino	1,234	1,093	987	1,006	1,077
Asian/PI	11	21	22	23	27
Nat Amer	■	■	■	■	■
Missing	366	282	310	143	44
Total	2,409	2,037	2,008	1,968	1,898

Source: [California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\) \(berkeley.edu\)](https://www.cdwip.org/)

Table 28: Allegation Rates (per 1,000 children)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	72.2	55.7	46.8	50.9	42.0
1-2	36.8	35.9	31.8	34.5	35.7
3-5	36.6	35.6	37.2	39.6	40.3
6-10	44.3	38.8	41.2	41.6	45.5
11-15	44.5	41.0	43.2	39.8	38.6
16-17	30.2	33.9	37.1	35.6	25.0
Black	78.6	61.5	90.5	93.0	94.5
White	31.9	29.3	32.2	38.1	35.5
Latino	41.6	40.0	38.0	39.4	43.5
Asian/PI	6.4	14.8	16.8	17.3	19.7

Nat Amer	49.4	47.0	55.9	36.0	47.0
Total	41.7	38.8	40.0	39.8	39.0

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu)

Number of children with substantiated allegations stratified by age and ethnicity

Table 29: Total children with substantiated allegations (2019-2023)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	28	20	20	25	19
1-2	20	13	15	14	21
3-5	30	15	16	18	6
6-10	49	28	30	29	28
11-15	54	35	25	30	30
16-17	15	█	10	12	█
Black	█	█	█	█	█
White	73	34	38	47	42
Latino	99	79	69	73	66
Asian/P.I.	█	█	█	█	█
Nat Amer	█	█	█	█	█
Total	196	118	116	128	111

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu)

Table 30: Substantiated Allegation Rates (per 1,000 children)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	12.0	8.6	9.0	10.8	8.6
1-2	3.9	2.6	3.2	3.1	4.6
3-5	3.2	1.8	2.0	2.4	0.8
6-10	3.0	1.9	2.0	2.0	2.0
11-15	3.2	2.3	1.7	2.0	2.0
16-17	1.9	1.1	1.7	2.0	1.1
Black	7.1	2.2	7.0	9.3	4.6
White	3.1	1.6	1.9	2.4	2.1
Latino	3.3	2.9	2.7	2.9	2.7

Asian/P.I.	0.0	0.7	0.0	0.0	0.7
Nat Amer	6.2	0.0	0.0	7.2	0.0
Total	3.4	2.2	2.3	2.6	2.3

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu)

Number of children with allegations by type

Table 31: Children with one or more allegation, by allegation type

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sexual Abuse	200	209	245	238	152
Physical Abuse	588	404	433	452	474
Severe Neglect	70	61	46	63	57
General Neglect	1,332	1,125	998	950	1,006
Exploitation	0	0	0	0	0
Emotional Abuse	213	237	282	263	208
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	0	0	0	0	0
At Risk, Sibling Abused	0	0	0	0	0
Substantial Risk	0	0	0	0	0
Total	2,409	2,037	2,008	1,968	1,898

Source: [California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\) \(berkeley.edu\)](https://www.berkeley.edu/ccwip/)

Table 32: Children with one or more allegation, by allegation type (as a pct of children with allegations)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Sexual Abuse	8.3%	10.3%	12.2%	12.1%	8.0%
Physical Abuse	24.4%	19.8%	21.6%	23.0%	25.0%
Severe Neglect	2.9%	3.0%	2.3%	3.2%	3.0%
General Neglect	55.3%	55.2%	49.7%	48.3%	53.0%
Exploitation	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%
Emotional Abuse	8.8%	11.6%	14.0%	13.4%	11.0%
Caretaker Absence/Incapacity	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%
At Risk, Sibling Abused	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%
Substantial Risk	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu) Note: A child is counted only once, in category of highest severity.

Number of children with first entries stratified by age and ethnicity

Table 33: Children with first entries to foster care, by age & ethnicity

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	20	14	14	22	14
1-2 yr	11				
3-5 yr	16				
6-10 yr	14				
11-15 yr	14		10	13	
16-17 yr					
Black					
White	39	21	18	22	17
Latino	34	20	26	27	18
Asian/P.I.		0	0	0	
Nat Amer		0			0
Missing		0	0	0	0
Total	78	43	45	54	39

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu) Note: Includes children in care for at least 8 days.

Number of children with subsequent entries stratified by age and ethnicity

This is derived by subtracting first entries (C14, above) from total entries.

Table 34: Children with subsequent entries to foster care, by age

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1		0	0	0	0
1-2 yr					
3-5 yr					
6-10 yr					
11-15 yr	13				
16-17 yr			0		
18-20 yr			0		
Black		0			
White	14				
Latino	18				

Asian/P.I.	0	0	0	0	0
Nat Amer	0	0	0	0	0
Total	33	12	13	12	16

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu) Note: Includes children in care for at least 8 days.

Number of children in care stratified by age and ethnicity

Based on a point-in-time count, the number of children in care has dropped 35% since 2019, from 154 to 100 in 2023.

Most notably, however, the drop was almost entirely attributable to fewer Latino children in care, which was reduced from 96 to 46. There was no significant change among other race/ethnicity groups.

Table 35: Children in care, by age & ethnicity – Point in time count (July 1)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Under 1	16	11	10	15	14	9
1-2	32	21	19	11	13	13
3-5	17	20	13	14	14	14
6-10	22	24	16	13	19	16
11-15	41	27	17	26	24	18
16-17	26	15	19	15	16	15
Black				0		
White	51	47	46	47	46	35
Latino	96	64	45	45	46	41
Asian/P.I.				0		
Nat Amer						
Multi-Race	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	154	118	94	94	100	85
<i>Children in care per 1,000</i>						
Black	4.8	11.0	2.3	0.0	9.2	13.7
White	2.2	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.3	1.8
Latino	3.2	2.3	1.7	1.8	1.9	1.7
Asian/P.I.	1.2	0.7	0.8	0.0	0.7	0.7
Nat Amer	18.5	6.7	7.0	14.4	10.1	13.5
Multi-Race	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	2.7	2.2	1.9	1.9	2.1	1.8

Children in care with open cases by service component

Table 36: Caseload by service component type (Point in time count as of July 1)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Emergency Response	23	17	12	8	14	12
No Placement FM	44	37	27	17	21	13
Post-Placement FM	22	21	10	18	21	15
Family Reunification	49	48	33	41	38	25
Permanent Placement	93	75	74	64	64	68
Supportive Transition	36	43	45	31	25	28
Total	267	241	201	179	183	161

Source: California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (berkeley.edu)

Number of children in care with tribal affiliations/number of ICWA eligible children

Table 37: Children in care by ICWA eligibility (Point in time count as of July 1)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
ICWA Eligible						
ICWA status pending						
Non eligible	160	129	114	93	73	56
No ICWA status data	100	104	77	75	93	94
Total in Care	267	241	201	179	183	161

Source: [California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\) \(berkeley.edu\)](https://www.berkeley.edu/ccwip/)

Analysis

Over the past five years, the number of children reported to the county with allegations of abuse or neglect has dropped 20%, due largely to the declining child population. The child population dropped 10% from 2018 to 2023 (according to the most recent 5-year Census period), while the allegation rate per 1,000 children has dropped only 6% from 2019 to 2024. Latino children continue to be referred at slightly higher rates than white children. Black children, who represent less than 1% of the child population, have had the highest allegation rates over the past five years.

After a sharp decline in 2020, substantiated allegations have stabilized between 110 and 130 per year. In 2023 there were 2.3 substantiated allegations per 1,000 children which has decreased from 3.6 in 2019. Changes in legislature regarding the criteria for General Neglect will likely continue to lower these rates as efforts to divert families experiencing economic and housing insecurity from child welfare are active in the community. Substantiated allegations have been highest among children under 3 which has been

consistent from the last County Self-Assessment. The prevalence of substance abuse in the county and the number of infants born substance exposed make up many the substantiations in this age group. More concerted efforts around prevention services for expectant mothers are a focus of the Child, Youth and Family Well-being Cabinet

General neglect has consistently been the most common type of allegation (53%), followed by physical abuse (25%) and emotional abuse (11%).

Perhaps the most significant changes since 2019 have been the sharp drop in total children in care and the declining disproportionality between Latino and white children. The number of Latino children in care has declined 57%, while white children in care have declined 31%. The increased use and buy in of social workers for utilizing Safety Organized Practice and safety planning has likely influenced the number of children coming into care as these tools provide social workers with alternatives to foster care while still addressing safety threats.

Child Welfare supervised 161 children in foster care (point in time) on July 1, 2019, which was below the average of the prior 5 years (214). The range was between 267 (2019) and 183 (2023) children under child welfare supervision in foster care. Most of these cases (96) were children in permanent placement and youth in supportive transition. For the past five years there has been no meaningful difference in rates between Latino and white children in care per 1,000 children.

In 2023 The majority of children with first entries were Latino (18/39). For children or youth who re-entered child welfare during 2023, the majority were White (8/16) which is consistent with the trend from 2019.

Child Welfare supervised 161 children in foster care (point in time) on July 1, 2019, which was below the average of the prior 5 years (214). The range was between 267 (2019) and 183 (2023) children under child welfare supervision in foster care.

It is difficult to make meaningful inferences about trends related to Black, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American children in care because their counts have remained between 0 and 6 per year over the past five years. Counts in this range are more suitable for examination by case review than by quantitative or rate-based analysis.

Similarly, the count of ICWA-eligible children has remained between 3 and 7 per year.

The Race and Equity Workgroup meets on a regular basis to review and discuss race and equity data with special attention to data that points toward potential disproportionality. A deeper review of this data shows that sibling sets for black children have contributed to the higher rates of allegations and foster care entries. With respect to the decrease in Latino children coming into care, it is believed that the increase in safety planning with family and nonrelated extended family members (NRFMs) has allowed Latino children to remain out of care. The existence of similar networks of support in the white and black population do not appear to be as prevalent. This continues to be an area of focus that FCS will review and monitor over the next System Improvement Plan cycle.

4C: JUVENILE PROBATION PLACEMENT POPULATION

Number of children with first entries stratified by age and ethnicity

During the past five years there were a total of 33 probation youth with first entries to foster care. Of those, 79% were Latino youth and all were between the ages of 11 – 17. Percentages below reflect the percentage of youth on probation who had first entries to foster care,

Table 38: Children with first entries to foster care, by age & ethnicity

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	-	-	-	-	-
1-2 yr	-	-	-	-	-
3-5 yr	-	-	-	-	-
6-10 yr	-	-	-	-	-
11-15 yr	2%	.7%	1%	-	.4%
16-17 yr	2%	2%	2%	.7%	.4%
Black	-	-	-	.35%	-
White	1%	.35%	.4%	-	-
Latino	3%	3%	3%	.35%	.8%
Asian/P.I.	-	-	-	-	-
Nat Amer	-	-	-	-	-
Missing	-	-	-	-	-
Total	4%	3%	3%	.7%	.8%

Source: KIDS database

Number of children with subsequent entries stratified by age and ethnicity

From 2019 – 2023 24% youth from the chart above also had a subsequent entry to foster care. Percentages below are of the overall number of foster care youth for the past five years.

Table 39: Children with subsequent entries to foster care, by age & ethnicity

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	-	-	-	-	-
1-2 yr	-	-	-	-	-
3-5 yr	-	-	-	-	-
6-10 yr	-	-	-	-	-
11-15 yr	6%	-	3%	-	3%
16-17 yr	-	6%	3%	6%	-
18-20 yr	-	-	3%	-	-
Black	-	-	-	3%	-

White	-	-	-	3%	-
Latino	6%	6%	9%	-	3%
Asian/P.I.	-	-	-	-	-
Nat Amer	-	-	-	-	-
Total	6%	6%	9%	6%	3%

Source: KIDS database

Number of children in care stratified by age and ethnicity

Based on a point-in-time count, the number of children in care has dropped 40% between 2019 and 2023. It should be noted, however, that on July 1, 2023, there were an additional small handful of youth in STRTP placements that had turned 18 and are therefore not included.

Table 40: Children in care, by age & ethnicity – Point in time count (July 1)

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Under 1	-	-	-	-	-
1-2	-	-	-	-	-
3-5	-	-	-	-	-
6-10	-	-	-	-	-
11-15	1%	.5%	1%	-	.7%
16-17	2%	2%	43%	1.5%	1.45%
Black	-	-	-	-	-
White	2%	-	.7%	.75%	.7%
Latino	1%	5.3%	4%	.75%	1.45%
Asian/P.I.	-	-	-	-	-
Nat Amer	-	-	-	-	-
Multi-Race	-	-	-	-	-
Total	3%	5.3%	4%	1.5%	2%

Source: KIDS database

Analysis

Probation supervised 138 youth (point in time) on July 1, 2023, which was below the average of the prior 4 years (282). The range was between 288 (2019) and 287 (2022). Most of the youth under probation supervision on July 1, 2023, were Latino (70%) which was consistent with prior comparison years.

Probation numbers are historically low for foster care youth but the number of children with first entries into foster care dropped significantly, by 83% since 2019, in 2022 and 2023 that can be attributed to earlier interventions with families, referrals to community-based services, and utilization of less restrictive programs such as Wraparound to prevent removal from the home of origin. However, the disparities between youth of color and white youth in care continue to be prevalent and this is most likely because

more youth of color are contacted by law enforcement in the south part of the county which is predominantly Latino.

SECTION 5: Public Agency Characteristics

5A POLITICAL JURISDICTIONS

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Pursuant to the provisions of the California Constitution, the five-member Board of Supervisors governs the Santa Cruz County unincorporated area and is the executive and legislative governing body of the County of Santa Cruz. The Board directs overall operations of the various County departments and districts by establishing policies and approving the budgets and financing for all of County government and certain special districts.

The Board of Supervisors also serves as the governing body for a number of political entities separate from the County, including County Service Areas, the Santa Cruz County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, and County Road maintenance districts. Board members also serve on other local and regional boards such as the Associations of Monterey Bay Area Governments, the Local Agency Formation Commission, and the Santa Cruz County Regional Transportation Commission. The current Chairperson of the Board of Supervisors is Justin Cummings.

The Family and Children's Services (FCS) Division is a component of the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD), which is responsible to the County Administrative Officer and the Board of Supervisors. Supervisor Bruce McPherson serves as the Chair of the Child Welfare System Improvement Plan Steering Committee. The FCS Division is responsible for all child welfare, adoption, and foster care licensing services and the FCS Division Director directly reports to the HSD Agency Director. The Santa Cruz County Probation Department provides juvenile probation services. Both departments are responsible to the County Administrative Officer and the Board of Supervisors. The County Administrative Office is responsible for the preparation and supervision of the County's budget, legislative analysis, contract and grant administration, intergovernmental relations, supervision of non-elected department heads, and oversight of all departmental functions.

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES

There are no Bureau of Indian Affairs recognized tribes in Santa Cruz County. However, there are members of the Ohlone tribe in the region. In addition, documented descendants of Missions San Juan Bautista and Santa Cruz have become members of the Amah Mutsun Tribal Band and can be found in Santa Cruz County, though most live in the Central Valley.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS

There are approximately 38,000 students in grades K-12 in the 10 school districts and the County Office of Education within Santa Cruz County. Four of the ten districts are small, one-school site districts with student populations between approximately 100 students and 175 students. The largest school district, Pajaro Valley Unified (PVUSD), provides education instruction for about 45% (17, 520) of the children within Santa Cruz County. PVUSD alone is comprised of sixteen elementary schools, six middle schools, three high schools, five charter schools, seventeen children's centers, a continuation high school, an adult education school, and two alternative schools. There are also two K-8 Districts (Live Oak School District and Soquel Union Elementary School District), combined serving about 3,250 students in the mid-county

region. Three other K-12 districts round out the comprehensive offerings with Scotts Valley Unified School District (2,964), San Lorenzo Valley Unified School District (5,540 students) and Santa Cruz City Schools (6,272 students). Finally, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education is a public agency whose purpose is to provide educational leadership, resources, and services to schools to ensure quality educational opportunities for all students. Their mission is accomplished through partnerships with teachers, school districts, businesses and other governmental agencies. Direct instructional programs are offered through Special Education, Alternative Education, and Career & Adult Learning Services Programs. Student Support Services are offered in a variety of direct and indirect programming, often serving vulnerable youth populations more intensively, such as those experiencing homelessness, involved in foster care or probation and/or in need of behavioral health services. Additionally, district services are provided in the areas of staff development and fiscal support and infrastructure.

FCS collaborates with the districts and the County Office of Education in several ways:

- **Placement Meetings:** School staff are invited to attend FCS placement review committee meetings. Placement meetings also include Probation and/or Children’s Mental Health staff. When a child is being placed in a Short-Term Residential Treatment Program (STRTP), FCS works with Mental Health and Probation for approval of the placement.
- **Individual Education Plans:** FCS works closely with the schools regarding individual educational plans (IEPs) and associated educational funding.
- **AB490:** Santa Cruz County’s Foster Youth Advisory Board, a collaborative body coordinating foster youth education issues, was instrumental in facilitating a Memorandum of Understanding among the County Office of Education (COE), FCS, Probation, CASA and all local school districts to delineate roles, responsibilities, and procedures for educational services to children in care and ensure compliance with AB490. The Board continues to focus on minimizing disruption of school attendance during placement, increasing the number of children who can stay in their home schools, and ensure that children in foster care have the same educational resources as other children.
- **Investigations:** FCS works cooperatively with individual schools when investigating child abuse referrals and interviewing children at school sites.

LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES

- California State Parks, Santa Cruz County
- City of Santa Cruz Police Department
- City of Scotts Valley Police Department
- City of Watsonville Police Department
- City of Capitola Police Department
- Santa Cruz County Sheriff’s Department
- University of California at Santa Cruz Police Department

The FCS Division has established Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Joint Protocols with Behavioral Health, and Juvenile Probation. Separate agreements for various aspects of child welfare, including investigations and cross reporting, domestic violence, sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation of children (CSEC), and juvenile sex offenders, delineate each party to the agreement’s role(s) and responsibilities. The MOUs assist the agencies in working cooperatively in cases with overlap between agencies. Several important areas of collaboration include:

- **Cross Training:** The County has sponsored cross training between child welfare, probation, and law enforcement staff. The cross training has enabled greater understanding among the various

agencies of the work of their colleagues, how to strengthen collaboration, avoid duplication of effort, increase consistency of response and continue to address how to better work together.

- **Domestic Violence Reports:** A provision of the MOU between FCS and law enforcement specifies that law enforcement will report all domestic violence incidents where children were present as soon as possible, but no later than three days after the incident, to the FCS Division.
- **Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children:** FCS maintains an MOU with Juvenile Probation, Public Health, Children’s Behavioral Health, Juvenile Justice Court and the County Office of Education that establishes the framework for the Santa Cruz County Commercially Sexually Exploited Children Program (CSEC Program). This MOU describes Santa Cruz county’s obligations to identify, document and determine appropriate services for CSEC and those children at risk for exploitation. As described in California Welfare and Institutions Code §16524.7, Santa Cruz County participates in the CSEC program administered by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) in order to more effectively serve CSEC youth by utilizing a multidisciplinary approach for case management, service planning and the provision of services. Participants on the multidisciplinary team include members of the Santa Cruz County District Attorney’s Office, Juvenile Probation, Public Health, County Office of Education, Family & Children’s Services, Children’s Behavioral Health, Rising Worldwide, Encompass Community Services and Monarch Services.
- **Interagency Child Abuse Council:** The Interagency Child Abuse Council, a collaborative among law enforcement, child welfare, the District Attorney’s Office, Probation, Parole, and two community-based providers coordinates ongoing investigations in sexual abuse cases. The Council also promotes cross communication between the Council partners. Included in the cross communication is an agreement to alert Council members when a perpetrator has been paroled.
- **Child removals:** FCS staff work closely with law enforcement when children are removed from their homes. As provided in our MOU, social workers and law enforcement officers conduct child welfare investigations jointly. The law enforcement agencies have legal authority to take children into custody and FCS does not.
- **Conflict Resolution:** FCS generally has strong working relationships with the various law enforcement agencies. When issues arise as they sometimes do in cases with many vested parties, the chain of command is used to resolve the issue. Working collaboratively, FCS and the various law enforcement agencies have resolved confidentiality issues and are able to communicate openly which leads to better relationships and fewer misunderstandings, reduces duplication of effort, and ultimately contributes to better services for children and families.

In addition to the other law enforcement agencies noted above, the FCS Division works closely with the District Attorney on matters of shared responsibility. On mutual investigations, FCS may be called upon to provide information to the District Attorney so that the District Attorney can analyze the information and determine his own recommendations.

PUBLIC HEALTH

The Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care (HCPCFC) is a public health program to meet the medical, dental, mental, and developmental health needs of dependent children and youth in court-ordered, out-of-home placement or foster care. The goals and objectives of the HCPCFC are common to the health, welfare, and probation departments and are implemented through close collaboration and cooperation among this multi-disciplinary, interdepartmental team. Through this program, a Public Health Nurse (PHN) provides expertise to the Human

Services Department/Family and Children’s Services Division and collaborates with social workers, probation officers, and foster parents to ensure that health care resources are provided to children placed in foster homes and STRTPs.

The HCPCFC PHN is co-located with social workers at the Human Services Department, Family and Children’s Services, although the PHN is an employee of the Health Services Agency’s Public Health Division - Children’s Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP). The Santa Cruz County Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) program is dedicated to the health and well-being of children. As part of the State Children’s Medical Services, CHDP provides for the early detection and prevention of health problems among children from low-to-moderate income families. Program staff works collaboratively with health care providers and child advocate agencies to ensure that eligible children receive quality health care and to empower families to be knowledgeable, responsible health care consumers.

The goal of the HCPCFC is to identify, respond to, improve and enhance foster children’s physical, mental, dental and developmental well-being. The PHN is a consultant and liaison to social workers, foster parents and probation officers. S/he is responsible for assurance of foster children’s health by:

- helping foster parents obtain timely comprehensive health assessments and dental examinations and immunizations.
- expediting referrals to specialty medical care (such as cardiology, gastroenterology, neurology, Stanford Neurodevelopmental Foster Care Program etc.).
- coordinating health services for foster children placed in and out of Santa Cruz County and out-of-state.
- providing medical documentation and proof to the court as needed.
- providing medical education through the interpretation of medical reports and training for foster care team members; and
- assisting social workers in overcoming obstacles by gaining access to coordinated, multidimensional services.
- monitoring and oversight of court ordered psychotropic medications
- The PHN also participates in the creation and update of the Health and Education Passport, an electronic health record required by law for every foster child.

5B INFRASTRUCTURE - CHILD WELFARE

Organization of service components

Since 2012, the FCS Division has significantly restructured the organization of service components. In September 2012, we combined our Emergency Response (ER) and Dependency Investigations (DI) programs into a single Investigations program comprising four social work units. With this reorganization, families are no longer assigned an ER worker to conduct the initial investigation, followed by a separate DI worker to conduct further investigation and write the Jurisdiction/Disposition report. In the new structure, one Investigations worker carries out all of these tasks. In addition, a post-disposition (post-dispo) worker gets assigned to the case at the time of petition filing and they are responsible for case management during the pre-disposition phase. In September 2014, our post-disposition (post-dispo) service components were similarly reconfigured. In the past, the Division had two Family Maintenance/Family Reunification (FM/FR) units, one Permanency Planning (PP) unit, and one Adoptions unit. A child or family moving from one of these service components to another was assigned a new social worker. The restructuring in September 2014 resulted in generalized post-dispo units that carried FM, FR,

PP and Adoptions cases. In 2016, after evaluation of this restructuring, PP and Adoptions were separated into their own units, separate from FR/FM units.

The primary purpose of reorganizing the service components was to reduce the number of social worker changes that a child or family experiences during the life of a case. Under the old model, a family might be assigned to as many as five social workers if the case ends in adoption—and this number could even be higher due to staff turnover. Under the new model, a family will be assigned fewer social workers, although the number could be affected by staff turnover. Research indicates that children and families do best with fewer changes of social worker, and we anticipate that our restructuring will provide a better experience for children and families.

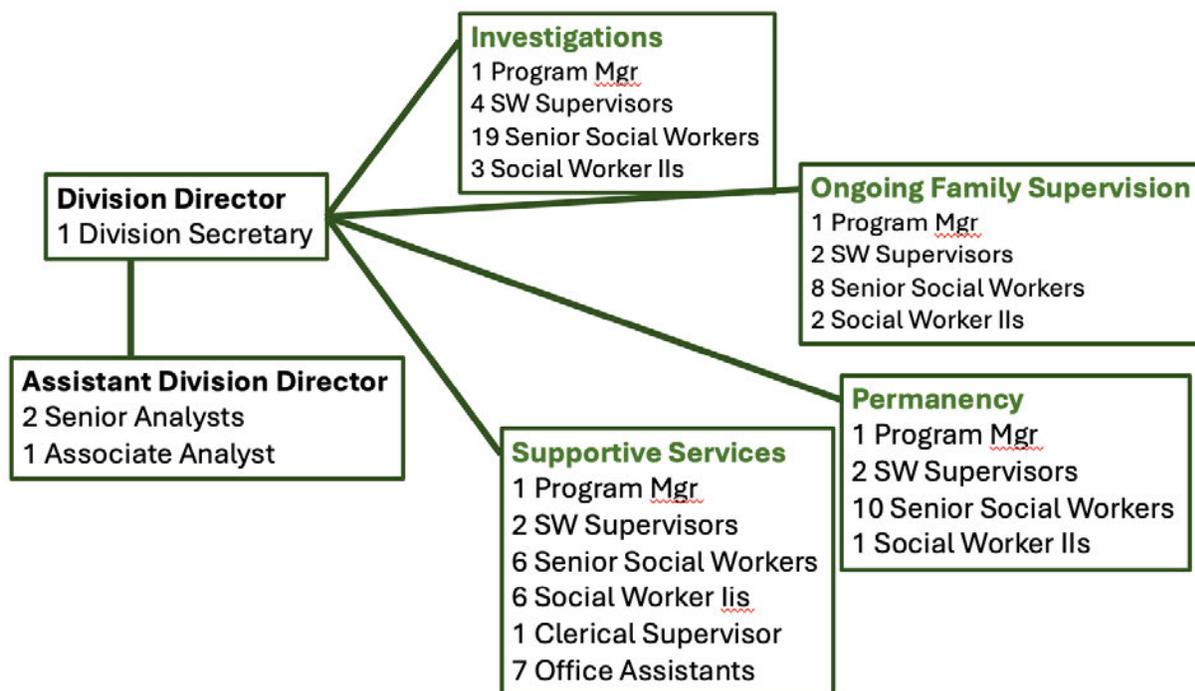
In 2022, FCS Director, Leadership and Staff defined an Organizational Development Workplan for FCS 2022-2023 that would explore task assignment and workflow throughout the division to address potential gaps in practice and task distribution. Gaps in service delivery were especially pronounced in tasks where confusion around role clarity were identified. One of the gaps identified was engagement of families in the case planning process. The result was a multi-year, multi-phase restructure of our organizational service components, including the examination of tasks throughout the division. A 22-member Work Group was created in August 2023, comprised of staff from every area of program.

Phase I covered Front End work through disposition of a dependency Court case, and directly impacted staff from the Investigations and Ongoing Programs. The desired outcome was to support better outcomes for families, more equitable work distribution for staff, and to provide clarity and consistency for engagement with and task completion for clients. On January 2, 2024, staff in the Investigations Program were assigned to work in either Emergency Response or Court. Full implementation of Phase I took place on March 11, 2024, with Court workers taking on all case management through disposition. Phase I resulted in a multi-program consensus on responsibilities and obligations that resulted in a higher level of response and care for our children and families. Results of the phase I restructure include an increased timeliness in response to referrals, significant improvements in closing referrals within the 30-day mandate, as well as improved safety planning. Initial findings are that the restructure has had positive impact on safety planning as there has been an increase in the number of safety plans that have been generated since the Phase I Restructure. FCS will continue to monitor this as it is one of the strategies outlined in the ER Enhancement Funds plan and is documented in CWS/CMS as a special project code.

Phase II covers post-disposition work including Ongoing (Family Maintenance/Family Reunification) and Permanency (Adoption, Guardianship, Another Planned Permanency Living Arrangement, Supportive Transition for Non-Minor Dependents, and the Adoption Assistance Program). This phase began in September 2024 and has an expected implementation in the first quarter of 2025. Phase III will cover Special Teams to include Office Administration, Court Officer, Child Family Teaming, and Resource Family Approval. We expect to begin Phase III by 3Q 2025. For all phases of the Restructure, staff first complete a survey to help identify priority areas to focus on which guides the decision making for the current phase. Phase II priorities have been identified as Task Assignment (workflow), Communication, Collaboration, Bridge Building.

Objectives for Phase III will be identified at the onset of the phase in the same manner

Figure 41: FCS Organizational Chart 2024



Since the last CSA, FCS welcomed a new Division Director, the addition of an Assistant Division Director, an additional Sr. Human Services Analyst and an Associate Analyst. The addition of management staff provided an opportunity to review Division priorities and reallocate resources to direct attention to projects that have been previously unattended such as monitoring compliance with ACL’s and ACINs.

Social work position types

As described above, case-carrying positions in FCS are now divided into Investigations (19 FTEs) and post-Dispo (16.5 FTEs). In addition, we have a number of specialized senior social worker positions including court officer (1 FTE), resource family approval workers (4 FTEs), and Adoption Assistance Program (AAP) workers (2.5 FTEs). In 2022, FCS created a specialized unit for CFTs, and Family Finding comprised of Social Worker IIs and Sr. Social Workers (6 FTE). Finally, we have seven Social Workers who perform specialized functions across programs including absent parent/relative search, visit supervision, resource family approval social worker, and placement coordinator. Social Worker IIs do not carry caseloads but perform essential supportive tasks to senior social workers.

Job Description and Qualifications by Classification

Division Director:

Positions in this class are responsible for developing, administering and evaluating a service program area identified as a division within the Human Services Department such as Employment Training Services or Eligibility Services. This class is distinguished from the Assistant Human Services Department Director in that the latter assists the Department Director with over- seeing the overall coordinated services and functions of the Department and assumes full responsibility in the absence of the Department Director. This class is distinguished from Division Director-Social Service Programs in that the latter has

responsibility for all social services programs which include those characterized by complex, highly visible and sensitive services

Training and Experience: Any combination of training and experience which would provide the required knowledge and abilities is qualifying. A typical way to obtain this knowledge and abilities would be:

Three years of responsible administrative or management experience which would demonstrate application or possession of the required knowledge and abilities listed above.

A master's degree in business or public administration, Social Services or Social Work, or closely related field, may be substituted for one year of the required experience.

Assistant Division Director

Positions in this class are responsible for assisting with developing, administering and evaluating a service program area identified as a division within the Human Services Department. Incumbents report to a Division Director. They may have direct managerial responsibility for a Division program(s). These positions assume full responsibility for the division in the absence of the Division Director.

Two years of responsible administrative or management experience which would demonstrate application or possession of the required knowledge and abilities listed above.

A master's degree in business or public administration, Social Services or Social Work, or closely related field, may be substituted for one year of the required experience

Program Manager

This class is assigned to manage: (1) one or more significant human services programs under the direction of a Human Services Department Division Director where incumbents are responsible for developing, reviewing, evaluating, monitoring and directing the daily operations of specific programs w. This class is distinguished from subordinate first level supervisory classes (Social Work Supervisor II, Eligibility Supervisor I) in that incumbents are second level supervisors and/or are responsible for a human services program with significant program and administrative responsibilities.

Training and Experience: Two years of responsible administrative or management experience which would demonstrate application or possession of the required knowledge and abilities listed above.

A master's degree in business or public administration, Social Services or Social Work, or closely related field, may be substituted for one year of the required experience

Senior Human Services Analyst

This is the super-journey level in the Human Services Analyst series. Positions in this class conduct complex human service program studies, analyses and research projects involving advanced planning and scheduling for social services, income maintenance, and employment and training functions and services. Incumbents are expected to exercise considerable independent judgment in selecting study techniques and resources. Positions in this class are responsible for several major projects. Incumbents provide lead direction to lower-level analysts and operations staff as assigned.

Training and Experience: Any combination of training and experience which would provide the required knowledge and abilities is qualifying. Typical ways to obtain this knowledge and abilities would be: One year of experience at a level equivalent to Associate Human Services Analyst with Santa Cruz County.

Associate Human Services Analyst

Associate Human Services Analyst is the journey level class in the Human Services Analyst series. Incumbents perform varied and difficult work independently with review upon completion. Positions at this level are responsible for several phases of a major program revision or development.

Training and Experience: Two years of experience performing duties comparable to that of Assistant Human Services Analyst with Santa Cruz County.

Social Work Supervisor II

Supervises social work unit staff providing the most difficult, sensitive and specialized casework services.

Training and Experience: Training and experience equivalent to a master's degree in social work or a master's degree from a two-year counseling program from an accredited college, and two years of social casework experience comparable to a Senior Social Worker in Santa Cruz County.

Senior Social Worker

Senior Social Worker is the super journey level. Incumbents spend a substantial part of their time on the most difficult, sensitive and specialized services where major case decisions are made independently and where consequence of error may be significant. Advanced casework skills, a high degree of program knowledge, judgment and creativity are required. Incumbents may, as an additional duty, serve as an alternate supervisor or in a lead/consultative capacity.

Training and Experience: Any combination of training and experience, which would provide the required knowledge and abilities, is qualifying. Typical ways to obtain this knowledge and abilities would be:

Two years of experience performing social service casework services equivalent to a Social Worker II in Santa Cruz County or a master's degree in social work or a master's degree from a two-year counseling program from an accredited college plus one year of social service casework experience.

Social Worker II

Under direction, to carry a service caseload and to provide social services; to conduct social studies and develop service plans which may include the need for specialized social services, to provide information about available services and to refer clients to appropriate departmental or community human services resources; and to do other work as required

Training and Experience: One year of experience performing social service casework services comparable to a Social Worker I in Santa Cruz County or a bachelor's degree from an accredited college with a major in social work, social welfare, human services, or one of the social or behavioral sciences.

Clerical Supervisor II

This is the second full-supervisory level in the general clerical series. Positions in this class supervise: (1) several units with different functions through subordinate supervisors; (2) a large unit of second (e.g., journey) and third level clerical positions performing varied and difficult clerical work; or (3) a very large staff of second level positions performing a variety of clerical work. Incumbents are responsible for planning, organizing and implementing administrative and office clerical systems and processes. Positions in this class may also provide administrative and/or secretarial support to a department head and perform the full range of secretarial functions in addition to exercising administrative and technical supervision over a group of clerical subordinates.

Training and Experience: Any combination of training and experience, which would provide the required knowledge and abilities, is qualifying. A typical way to obtain this knowledge and abilities would be:

Four years of responsible clerical experience at the journey level or higher that demonstrates application or possession of the required knowledge and abilities listed above, including one year in a supervisory capacity. Formal secretarial or general office clerical training may be substituted for up to one year of the required non-supervisory experience on an hour for hour basis.

Office Assistant III

Positions in this class are characterized by the performance of specialized, difficult and responsible clerical work requiring thorough knowledge of clerical methods and procedures and the exercise of considerable discretion and independent judgment in performing and scheduling their work. The use of typing skills is essential to the satisfactory performance of the work of all positions in this class. Incumbents may have extensive public contact which entails explanation of departmental policies, laws and procedures which require knowledge of the functions of County departments. Supervision exercised by positions in this class is usually limited to providing technical direction to subordinates and providing initial training and orientation of new employees.

Training and Experience: Any combination of training and experience that would provide the required knowledges and abilities is qualifying. A typical way to obtain these knowledges and abilities would be:

Two years of experience in general office clerical work that demonstrates application or possession of the required knowledges and abilities. Formal secretarial or general office clerical training may be substituted for up to one year of the required experience on an hour for hour basis.

Performance: Type at a corrected rate of 50 words per minute from clear copy or to pass an equivalent performance test.

Public Health Nurse II

Public Health Nurse II is the fully qualified professional level generalist class in the Public Health Nursing Series. Incumbents are assigned to work independently in a wide variety of public health nursing programs, clinics and projects. Assignments include providing counseling and guidance to Public Health Nurse I's, paraprofessional and other staff and to plan and organize clinic activities. This class is distinguished from the higher class of Public Health Nurse III, which serves as a lead and assists a Public Health Program Manager or directs, evaluates and supervises specialized programs such as the Communicable Disease Program.

Training and Experience: Two years of experience performing duties equivalent to a Public Health Nurse I in Santa Cruz County.

Staff recruitment and selection

Santa Cruz County operates a continuous open recruitment for the senior social worker. New applications are rated to determine whether they meet the minimum qualifications for the position. Once rated, the Personnel Department provides HSD with a list of the top 10 highest scoring, qualified applicants. FCS offers each of these applicants an opportunity to interview for the position. Interviews and reference checks are conducted by the FCS leadership team. The leadership team then discusses each candidate's interview performance and reference checks and decides whether to offer a position to the applicant. In these hiring decisions, the Division attempts to hire applicants who have MSWs (particularly Title IVE students), who have prior child welfare experience, and who are bilingual in English and Spanish, whenever possible. Recruitments for Social Worker II are based upon a current vacancy and candidates need to apply for these positions separately from the continuous social worker recruitments. Staff hired into these positions can gain the necessary skills and experience to move into a senior social worker position and are encouraged to apply if they meet all other requirements.

Methods for assigning cases

Within the Investigations program, cases are assigned by the program supervisors based on a rotation of social workers with language being the primary consideration. There are separate rotations for English and Spanish speaking social workers. Social Workers receive credit when assigned a case which moves them to the bottom of the assignment list. This ensures workload equity in assignments. Ongoing and Permanency, cases are assigned based on several factors, including caseload size, language, geographic location, and complexity of case. In some circumstances, supervisors may deviate from a strict rotation based on the number and complexity of cases that are currently open to a particular worker.

The supervisors make every effort to ensure that workloads are equitable across social workers.

Average caseload sizes

Caseload sizes are affected by staff turnover and vacancies, as well as by staff leaves of absence. When fully staffed, average caseloads for Investigations are 8 to 9 investigations per month. Court Workers average 1-2 new cases per month. However, when the Division's vacancies are high, as well as leaves of absence, the average Investigations caseload can be 9 to 11 investigations per month. The average number of cases for our Ongoing Unit is 7. The average caseload for our Permanency workers is 15. We have two post permanency workers (AAP) who average a caseload of 216 each. The family Finding Unit is comprised of Social Worker IIs who do not carry a caseload but rather perform family finding activities as needed for all caseloads.

Staff turnover

The following table shows the turnover rate in the FCS Division, by all types of position, for the period of May 2022- May 2023. For purposes of this self-assessment, the turnover rate was defined as the number of workers who left the Division by promoting to a position in another division, retiring, resigning or who were terminated during the specified time period calendar year divided by the total number of positions for each staff category.

Table 42: FCS Staff Turnover by Position, May 2022-May 2023

Job Type	May 2022 employees	2022 staff who left FCS before May 2023	Internal FCS promotions/transfers to new job type	External hires (June 2022-May 2023)	May 2023 employees	Turnover (% 2022 staff that left by May 2023)
Director/Mgr	5	1		1	5	20%
Social Work Supvr	11	3		0	10	27%
Sr Social Worker	40	10	3	6	34	25%
SW I/II	5		1	3	7	0%
Admin/Clerical	10	2		1	9	20%
Analyst	1			0	2	0%
Pub Hlth Nurse II	1	1		1	1	100%
Grand Total	73	17	4	12	68	23%

Source: HSD Personnel Records

Table 43: 2023 FCS Staff Demographics: Racial Identity

Racial Identity	2023 % of FCS Staff
Hispanic/Latino	52.9%
White (non-Hispanic)	44.1%
Black	1.5%
Unreported	1.5%

Source: HSD Personnel Records

The 2022 turnover rate in FCS was 23%, which is undesirably high and is an increase from 2018 (16%). There was high turnover among senior social workers, who had a 25% turnover rate for their job classification. The impact of the pandemic on the workforce is likely a contributing factor across the employment sector and not isolated to child welfare. The 10 senior social worker departures included several voluntary resignations and three internal promotions. The high turnover rate continues to be a concern. There does not seem to be any single reason for it, but rather several different reasons—staff reaching retirement age, staff leaving the area for family reasons, and staff choosing to accept social work positions elsewhere in the community (e.g. Hospice, FFAs and STRTPs) and out of County. Due to the high turnover, the number of vacant senior social worker positions has varied from 2 to 8 at various times during the last year. Filling vacant positions is the highest priority for the management team. We hired 7 new senior social workers in 2023, and our efforts to hire are continuous. Because many Bay Area counties are hiring, there is considerable competition to attract good candidates. We currently have 6 of the 46 (13%) Sr. Social Worker positions are currently vacant and we are hopeful that we will be able to fill these vacancies within the next few months. Vacancies, turn-over rates and learning curves can create challenges for data entry into CWS/CMS initially. New staff can receive support from peers and supervisors when these challenges arise. However, impact to practice and outcome data measures has been minimal as FCS continues to perform consistently across years.

Staff education levels and demographics

Of the 43 current child welfare senior social workers who are responsible for managing child welfare cases, 29 have master’s degrees. Of these, the majority have MSWs, and a minority have other related degrees such as a master’s in counseling. There are 14 senior social workers who do not have master’s degrees

but do possess bachelor's degrees either in Social Work or closely related field. A college degree is not required for the social worker II position. Most of our social worker IIs have some post graduate education or experience commensurate with a degree. All social work supervisors and division managers possess master's degrees in social work or a related field. The division director has a master's in social welfare.

The Department does not track the number of years of child welfare and/or related experience possessed by our social workers. It is safe to say that there is a wide range, from long-time staff with 30-plus years of experience to brand new hires whose only experience is their Title IV-E internships. Most recent new hires have related work experience either in human services or closely related fields such as probation.

In Santa Cruz County, the primary ethnic minority group is Latinos/Hispanics. Although most FCS clients speak English, there is a minority of clients who speak Spanish as their primary language. To ensure appropriate communication and case management, HSD makes every effort to hire social workers who are bilingual in English and Spanish. Currently, 41 or 68% of our total social work staff are bilingual in Spanish. Most of these bilingual workers are ethnically Latino. The Division is strongly committed to providing culturally competent services to our clients, and this is reinforced through periodic trainings as well as staff hiring.

Bargaining Unit Issues

Clerical, social worker and supervisory staff are represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 521. The County and SEIU have historically enjoyed a cooperative working relationship. SEIU contacts the County about overall and individual workload issues if they are contacted by a union member with a concern. However, these issues are generally addressed in a non-adversarial manner and generally to the satisfaction of all invested parties.

FCS staff can participate in the HSD Workload Committee, pursuant to Article 26 of the General Representation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The Committee is composed of three general representation members, three management members and one union representative. The Committee's intent is to ensure fair and equitable workload size across specific job classifications in the MOU. Staff may also forward individual workload concerns to the Committee for consideration. The purpose of the Workload Committee is to address workload concerns arising from cases/tasks, and/or functional assignments and make recommendations for consideration in the following areas:

1. Workload distribution
2. Workload Impacts
3. Workload efficiencies including but not limited to technology solutions
4. Protected time; and
5. Forecasting future trends and resources needed

Any proposals mutually agreed to by the Committee will be recommended to the HSD Director for timely review and response.

Salaries

- For social worker IIs, the starting salary (step 1) is \$5,758.02 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$7,281.59
- For senior social workers, the starting salary (step 1) is \$85,464 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$108,156.

- For social worker supervisors, the starting salary (step 1) is \$7759.98 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$9,812.21
- For Human Services Administrative Analysts, the starting salary (step 1) is \$6791.07 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$9,072.09
- For Sr. Human Services Analysts, the starting salary (step 1) is \$7454.92 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$9,954.34
- For Public Health Nurse II the starting salary (step 1) is \$9557.42 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$11,172.85
- For Administrative/Clerical staff, the starting salary (step 1) is \$4,253.52 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$5,388.83
- For Administrative/Clerical staff Supervisor, the starting salary (step 1) is \$4,477.11 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$5,664.42
- For Program Managers, the starting salary (step 1) is \$9,157.02 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$12,214.57
- For the Assistant Division Director, the starting salary (step 1) is \$10,063.54 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$13,436.54
- For the Division Director, the starting salary (step 1) is \$12,185.10 per year. The top step (step 7) is \$16,327.69.

Contracted Services

The following services are contracted to community-based nonprofit agencies or independent consultants:

- After hours hotline services
- Counseling services (individual, group and family counseling)
- Parent education—using the Triple P evidence-based model
- Supervised visitation services
- Independent Living Program services
- Transitional Housing Placement-Plus Program
- Transitional Housing Placement – Plus Foster Care
- Counseling and case management services for AB12 youth
- Educational support services (FosterEd program)
- Differential Response (Families Together) Services
- Resource parent family assessments
- Kinship resource parent in-home support services
- CSEC prevention and counseling services
- Housing navigation and case management (families and youth)
- Emergency childcare navigation and childcare provider training

Over the last five years there have been numerous individuals and agencies contracted to provide these services. There are too many to specify here. Section 8F (Service Array) outlines a more detailed description of the partners and contractors who provide some of the most essential services for the outcomes of re-entry and permanency.

JUVENILE PROBATION INFRASTRUCTURE

The Juvenile Division administers a comprehensive array of services, including investigation, diversion, pre- and post-adjudication interventions, community supervision, and out-of-home placements for referred youth. Additionally, the division oversees youth committed to Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTF) under SB 823, following the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) Realignment. Through strategic collaboration with community partners, the division ensures the delivery of trauma-informed, culturally responsive support that prioritizes the well-being of youth and families while upholding public safety.

The Juvenile Division utilizes the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) to effectively engage youth and families. The ICPM serves as a comprehensive framework that outlines shared values, core components, and practice standards for professionals supporting California's children, youth, and families. Central to this model is Child and Family Teaming (CFT), a collaborative, team-based approach designed to achieve key objectives, including enhancing life skills, fostering family engagement, reducing recidivism, and mitigating victimization.

The Juvenile Division is led by the Juvenile Division Director and Assistant Division Director. The Division Director oversees the implementation of the juvenile budget, program development, and development of policy and procedures. The Assistant Division Director is responsible for oversight of day-to-day operations. In addition to operational oversight, the Assistant Division Director provides oversight to five supervisors (Intake Unit, two General Supervision Units, Wraparound Unit, Placement Unit) and 11 Probation Officers. The Intake Unit supervisor's role involves oversight and processing of all law enforcement reports that arrive in custody or out of custody reports and diversion services. The two General Supervision Supervisor's role involve providing supervision services to youth who have been adjudicated into the Juvenile Justice system. The supervision involves providing linkages to resources and services to support their rehabilitation. The services range from completion of terms and conditions set by the court.

The Supervisor for the Wraparound Unit oversees probation officers who provide supervision and support for youth and families who require more intensive support by a team-based modality which implements the ICPM principles in the rehabilitative approach. Lastly, the Placement Unit Supervisor provides oversight to Probation Officers who provide supervision to youth who had been removed from their home, specifically those who enter a STRTP setting.

Staffing Characteristics/Issues

Turnover Ratio:

The Juvenile Division strongly reflects the population it services as both its Division and Assistant Division Director are bilingual, fluent in English and Spanish. At the supervisory level three of the five supervisors are bilingual/bicultural fluent in English and Spanish. Of the 11 Probation Officers, nine of the Probation Officers are also bilingual/bicultural fluent in English and Spanish. Most staff are Latino and are primarily housed in the south end of the county which aligns with the demographic we serve. With respect to the staffing, our division like the overall department, has a low attrition rate. Currently the Juvenile Division is fully staffed.

Staff Recruitment & Selection:

A full time Probation Officer may submit a request for a specific position; however, there is no guarantee to any assignment. The Deputy Probation Officer is expected to be able to complete all duties as assigned within any position in the department, which includes both the Juvenile and Adult Divisions. All Deputy Probation Officers hired with the department are required to go through a thorough hiring process. The hiring of staff is conducted when an opening is available the department prefers the Deputy Probation Officer to have a bachelor's degree upon employment and prior experience within the criminal justice field is encouraged. Upon applying for a position within the department, a State required written exam must be completed. The applicant's score on the written exam is considered as part of the entire application. Applicants will also complete a Personal History Questionnaire (PHQ) prior to being selected for an interview. Once the PHQ is reviewed and it is determined the applicant has passed the PHQ the applicant will be invited to participate in a selection interview panel. Upon successfully passing the selection interview, the applicant must complete a peace officer's background investigation. Applicants who successfully complete the background investigation are then offered a conditional offer of employment, pending the completion and passing of a medical evaluation, fingerprints and psychological screening. The basic requirements for a Deputy Probation I include completion of a bachelor's degree from an accredited four year college or university in psychology, sociology, social services, humanities, criminal justice or a related field or two years of experience performing duties comparable to those of Probation Aide in Santa Cruz County. The basic requirements for Deputy Probation Officer II include one year of experience performing duties comparable to a Deputy Probation Officer I in Santa Cruz County and successful completion of the core training course for Probation Officers as mandated by the Standards and Training for Corrections Program. The basic requirements for Deputy Probation Officer III include two years of experience performing responsible probation casework duties comparable to a Deputy Probation Officer II in Santa Cruz County. Employees must complete the Supervisor Core Training as mandated by the Corrections Standards Authority within the first year of hire.

The salary for a Deputy Probation Officer I/II ranges from \$36.57 to \$40.41 an hour for the beginning step 1. The salary for a Deputy Probation Officer III is \$45.68 for the beginning step 1.

Probation Private Contractors:

The Department's main source for service delivery continues to be provided through interagency agreements and collaboration with other county departments and community-based organizations. Included are services to youth on wardship of the Court to prevent out-of-home placement. This is accomplished with Wraparound teams which is a collaboration between Probation and Encompass Youth Services. The Probation Department also partners with numerous other Community Based Organizations and local contractors to provide interventions and services for youth at the diversion level as well those on probation. The range of contracted services is as follows:

- Parent-Teen Mediation
- Victim Offender Dialogue Program
- Substance Use Disorder Counseling
- Community Service Programs
- Life Skills Programs (to include employment skills) and Case Management Services
- Cultural Enrichment and Activities Assessments and Psychological Assessments for Re-entry Services
- Mentoring and Advocacy

- Parenting Classes

Deputy Probation Officer Caseload Size by Service Program:

Officers within the Probation Department are assigned caseloads based on vacancies and departmental need. The Juvenile Field Services Division caseload size varies depending on the level of supervision and specialty services needed. A review of caseloads and their sizes are as follows (please note there are four supervisors covering the supervision of the following caseloads):

- Juvenile Placement – Three Placement Officers provide supervision and reunification services (when applicable) to youth on wardship with court ordered out-of-home placement. All trained POs assist with facilitation of Child and Family Team Meetings. The average caseload size is 8-10 per officer.
- Community Accountability Program (CAP) - North County has one CAP Probation Officer that covers the Live Oak, Santa Cruz City, and San Lorenzo Valley geographical areas. South County has two CAP Probation Officers who cover the medium and high need youth in the Watsonville and Aptos areas. The average caseload size is 20.
- General Supervision – There are four Probation Officers covering North and South County respectively. The caseloads serve low to moderate need youth with the average size caseload of 25.
- Wraparound Unit – There are two Wraparound Probation Officers responsible for the supervision of caseloads in both North and South County. The average caseload is 10-12.

Bargaining Unit Issues

The Santa Cruz County Probation Officers Association (SCCPOA) represents Supervising Deputy Probation Officer III and Deputy Probation Officers I and II. Juvenile Hall Group Supervisors, Accounting and Clerical staff are represented by Service Employees International Union (SEIU).

The unions maintain an interest-based negotiation style with the County to work collectively to resolve and agree on a multitude of issues that can occur within the workplace. The unions affect staff in a positive manner, as their main purpose is to ensure consistency and fair and equitable treatment among all members.

5C FINANCIAL RESOURCES – CHILD WELFARE

PSSF/CAPIT/CBCAP/Children’s Trust Fund

The Children’s Network is a local interagency organization that oversees the distribution and uses to which Santa Cruz County puts our PSSF, CAPIT, CBCAP, and Children’s Trust Fund resources. The largest amount of funds supports the County’s differential response program, Families Together. Other uses of the funds are for supervised visitation, a flexible fund for immediate need payments for CWS families, pre- and post-adoptive counseling, the Child Abuse Prevention Council’s prevention activities, and support for the County’s Children’s Network.

Other Supplemental Funding Streams

Leaps and Bounds: Funded by a four-year grant from the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration, the Leaps and Bounds program was developed in 2010 to provide screening, assessment and treatment planning for children ages 0-5 with parents involved in Family Preservation Court

(dependency drug court). The federal grant expired on September 30, 2014. The Department has allocated Realignment funds to maintain key aspects of this program.

First 5 – First 5 of Santa Cruz County provides funding for the Families Together differential response program, which was first implemented in September 2006.

Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)—MHSA funds are used to support services to dependent children that are provided by Children’s Mental Health, as well as to support mental health services provided by the local Independent Living Program. In addition, MHSA funds have been and continue to be used to support training and service provision for Triple P parent education services.

Early Periodic Screening Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) funds -- In recent years, HSD has collaborated with Children’s Behavioral Health to access MediCal EPSDT funds to maximize services in several areas.

- EPSDT funding is used to enrich the Independent Living Program (ILP) by providing a high level of mental health counseling and supportive services to current and former foster youth. ILP services are designed to assist youth ages 14 ½ - 21.
- EPSDT services provide therapeutic treatment services to foster children who are in out of home placement. This includes therapeutic supervised visitation, which assists families in overall family functioning and facilitates eventual reunification.
- EPSDT sources partially fund mental health services to dual diagnosis clients who have been linked to the child welfare system.
- EPSDT funding also partially supports mental health services to Families Together clients who are referred by the child welfare system.

FosterEd: The FosterEd program, providing educational support to children in the child welfare system, is currently funded by grants to the National Youth Law Center from the Stuart Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, and Annie E. Casey Foundation. The program was also funded by a multi-year federal grant that expired in September 2014. Finally, the County Office of Education draws down Title IVE funds to support this program.

Wraparound Services for Youth on Wardship: Santa Cruz County operates a Wraparound program utilizing JPF funding. The program is a collaborative effort by the Juvenile Probation Department and HSA’s Behavioral Health Division through service provision from Encompass. The program serves 30 to 50 youth and their families on an annual basis; the target population are youth of the Juvenile Court who are on probation. The goal in each case is to preserve and strengthen the home environment and increase a family’s capacity to engage natural helpers in order for children to continue to live in their home environments.

Blending/braiding of multiple funding streams

There are several programs that blend multiple funding streams in order to provide a unified service. A description of this is below:

Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP Plus) – THP Plus Realigned funds and EPSDT funds are braided to support this program. EPSDT funds are utilized to enhance THP Plus services through the provision of a full array of mental health rehabilitation and case management services to eligible youth. Services include assessment, individual and /or group counseling, crisis intervention, medication management support and chemical dependency treatment services with 24-hour on-call availability. A more detailed description of services can be found in the service array section.

Short Term Residential Treatment Programs (STRTPs) – Child Welfare funds and EPSDT funds are braided together to support short-term intensive mental health assessment, treatment and rehabilitative services in one STRTP locally as well as across the state. Haven of Hope, for youth identifying as female, is the only in County STRTP option. STRTP’s programs provide a stable short-term living environment for adolescents experiencing difficulty in foster placement, or homelessness, and coordination with the case carrying Child Welfare social worker and Mental Health staff.

Independent Living Program (ILP) – EPSDT funds are used to augment Realigned ILP funds in order to support the provision of behavioral health services to eligible youth in this program, which is described in the service array section. Key behavioral health services provided in this program and funded by EPSDT include individualized assessment, individual and group counseling, case management, assistance with educational progress, employment skills, daily living skills, social skills, self-esteem, and if needed, medication management skills.

Therapeutic behavioral health services to children in out-of-home placement – EPSDT funds are braided with Child Welfare funds to provide intensive behavioral health services for the purpose of reunification for children in foster placement. Staff at the Parents Center, a local non-profit counseling agency, are contracted to provide a full array of behavioral health rehabilitation and case management services including assessment, counseling, family therapy, therapeutic supervised family visitation and crisis intervention. For a further description of this program, please see the service array section.

Families Together – First 5 of Santa Cruz County provides funds that are blended with PSSF Family Support funds, as well as CAPIT funds and County Children’s Trust Funds to support the Families Together differential response program for Santa Cruz County. This program is described in detail in the service array section.

FosterEd— The FosterEd program was operated with braided funding from the Stuart Foundation, Walter S. Johnson Foundation, Annie E. Casey Foundation, Title IV-E funding, and a federal grant. One of the strategies for the 2015-2020 SIP was for FCS to develop a plan to sustain this highly valuable program in partnership with the County Office of Education (COE). A task force including representatives from FCS, CASA, COE, FosterEd, and Pajaro Valley Unified School District (PVUSD) collaborated to educate local school boards about the needs of foster youth and requested specific, dedicated funding through their allocated Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) funds. As a result of this effort and the ongoing COE advocacy, this program is fully funded and sustainable.

5C FINANCIAL RESOURCES – PROBATION

Community Action Board (CAB)

Workforce Services – CAB provides meaningful workforce mentoring service including direct job placement, job shadowing, and work experience opportunities. CAB was awarded this contract through an RFP process and funded through SB 1913/SLEFS funds.

Family Night – "Una Comunidad Sana y Segura - Family Night Series", paid with JJPCA funding, primary goal is to enrich youth and family bonds across all facets of life. This encompasses nurturing stronger family ties, cultivating social skills, enhancing communication, and fostering a sense of belonging within both the family unit and the broader community. The series aims to create a safe and welcoming space where community members can come together. Throughout the sessions, families will have the

opportunity to interact socially, share meals, and engage in themed activities such as art projects and valuable opportunity to learn about various community services and relevant topics such as immigration, mental health, positive discipline, rental assistance, etc. Each family participating in the program attends two sessions per month, spread over the course of a month, providing consistent opportunities for families to bond and grow together. Una Comunidad Sana y Segura Family Night Sessions take place at Luna y Sol Familia Center and is available through JJPCA funding.

Youth and Family Advisory Committee – The Youth and Family Advisory Committee plays a pivotal role in shaping and enhancing the juvenile justice system within Santa Cruz County by providing valuable insights, experiences, and perspectives, helping to ensure that the policies and programs implemented are not only effective but also resonate with the needs and realities of the community. The Youth and Family Advisory Committee is a vital initiative designed to bring together diverse voices from Santa Cruz County to address the needs of youth and families. There is a modest incentive for participants on the Committee that is funded with JJPCA funds.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION CENTER (CRC)

Restorative Justice – This program includes Victim Awareness/Community Impact Education, Victim-Offender Dialogue Program, and Parent/Teen Mediation Program. These services give the youth an opportunity to repair the harm they have caused by their offenses. The Family Mediations focus on family dynamics, communication skills, rebuilding trust, boundaries, accountability and responsibility. CRC was awarded this contract through an RFP process and funded through SB 1913/SLEFS funds.

ENCOMPASS

Wraparound Services - Wraparound Services provides short-term, intensive outpatient behavioral health services and transitional support to youth and their families including caregivers to preserve and strengthen the home environment while increasing youth and families' capacity to successfully function in the community resulting in reduced out of home placements. Wraparound positively impacts the community by addressing individual and family behavioral health needs and criminogenic risks to reduce recidivism. The support services further increase the use of community-based alternatives to reduce unnecessary use of detention and improve individual/family system functioning through improved capacities and skills. These services are funded through JJPCA funds.

Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA)

TODOS (Together Obtaining Desired Outcomes for Success) - The TODOS program uses evidence-based practices to reduce recidivism and increase life skills and competencies for youth and families currently involved in the juvenile justice system. Functional Family Case Management/Behavioral Health Services structured with a combination of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, and Motivational Interviewing are used for the treatment plan for the individual being served. Services are funded through JJPCA funds.

FoodWhat

FoodWhat is a youth empowerment and food justice organization that uses organic farming as a vehicle for growing strong, healthy and resilient youth. FW's programming offers youth a relevant toolkit of skills and experiences geared toward breaking cycles of poor health, poverty and violence. FW youth find their power through farming and gardening, empowerment workshops, culinary arts, co-organizing community service projects, and increasing healthy food access for low-income communities. FoodWhat was awarded this contract through an RFP process and funded through JJPCA funds.

Santa Cruz County Office of Education

Restorative Justice and Practices - Restorative Justice and Restorative Practices are integrated into the Law-Related Education and Prevention Programs system. Restorative Justice views crime as a wound needing to be healed by addressing three elements: Accountability, Community Safety and Competency Development. Accountability addresses the individual's ability to be accountable for their actions. Community Safety addresses the issue of protecting the larger community from further actions by the individual. Competency Development addresses the individual ability to be enriched by new skills and education. Restorative Practices are incorporated by allowing the individual to be listened to by their peers, by creating space for healing to occur through relationship building as well as creating and fostering a sense of community and belonging. This program is funded with JJPCA funding.

Walnut Avenue Family and Women's Center

Safe Dates – Safe Dates is a school-based program for middle and high school students designed to stop or prevent the initiation of dating violence victimization and perpetration, including the psychological, physical, and sexual abuse that may occur between young individuals involved in a dating relationship. The program goals are to change youth norms on dating violence and gender-roles and improve conflict resolution skills for dating relationships.

Safe Dates promotes the need for help and awareness of community resources for dating violence. The program works within Juvenile Hall, and Probation Evening Center located at the Luna Y Sol Familia Center and other community locations. Safe Dates was awarded this contract through an RFP process and funded through JJPCA funds.

5D PLACEMENT OPERATED SERVICES

County RFA Approval

The State Department of Social Services contracts with the County to approve resource family homes. The current MOU between FCS and CDSS has been in place since 2009. Resource family homes must meet State health and safety requirements to be approved, and potential resource parents are screened and evaluated for suitability. RFA staff assess the caregivers' home to assure it is a safe physical environment for children. They review various background checks tied to the caregivers and other adults residing in the caregivers' home. They refer caregiver families for psychosocial assessments and review the results. RFA workers offer case management support to RFA families, extending to them training, guidance and services as needed. If concerns emerge about the well-being of a child in an RFA-approved home, an RFA worker will carry out an investigation to assure the child's safety.

County Adoptions

The Human Services Department, as a licensed adoption agency, accepts relinquishments from parents who wish to make a plan of adoption for their child. The major focus of the program, however, is on behalf of children in foster care. A foster child becomes free to be adopted after the Juvenile Court has terminated parental rights and ordered a permanent plan of Adoption.

FCS social workers provide services related to the adoption of dependent children in the child welfare system. Social workers, in consultation with community service providers working with the families,

prepare the report for the WIC §366.26 Selection and Implementation hearing to terminate parental rights, and order a plan of adoption. Information is gathered from providers to complete a permanency planning assessment, which outlines the prospective adoptive caregiver's ability to meet the child's identified needs. FCS provides pre-adoption counseling to assist parents with permanency planning for their child or children. To provide for the timely finalization of adoptions, the Division also completes the Adoption Placement Agreement and finalization paperwork and files all necessary materials with the Court for its client families. The adoption is then finalized in Superior Court.

FCS also manages the Adoption Assistance Program (AAP), which provides a financial stipend for families who have adopted children. Through the AAP Program, adopting parents continue to receive referrals and counseling for post-adoption services. All adoption services are governed by state regulations, the Welfare and Institutions Code and the Family Code.

5E OTHER COUNTY PROGRAMS

FCS and JPD work with an array of other programs to meet their missions. The FCS Division has established Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) and Joint Protocols with Behavioral Health, Juvenile Probation, and CBOs. Separate agreements for various aspects of child welfare, including investigations and cross reporting, domestic violence, sexual abuse, commercial sexual exploitation of children, and juvenile sex offenders, delineate each party to the agreement's role(s) and responsibilities. The MOUs assist the agencies in working cooperatively in cases with overlap between agencies.

The County has sponsored cross training between child welfare, probation, law enforcement and CBO staff. The cross training has enabled greater understanding among the various agencies of the work of their colleagues, how to strengthen collaboration, avoid duplication of effort, increase consistency of response and continue to address how to better work together. It also should be noted that whenever possible we invite each other to trainings that each department holds that could benefit all staff.

Several important areas of collaboration include:

Law Enforcement:

FCS and local law enforcement partner on a variety of services that benefit the families and youth that we serve. One such agreement is for law enforcement to report all domestic violence incidents where children are involved. In addition, law enforcement collaborates with social workers when protective custodies occur or when a welfare check is requested. The partnership with Law Enforcement is especially evident during afterhours as social workers are able to call law enforcement for support when safety threats are unknown or have been identified.

Law Enforcement is instrumental when a child or youth is absent from placement and their whereabouts are unknown. When Law Enforcement receives information that a youth has gone AWOL, they enter the youth into the Missing Children's Database.

When there are joint investigations between Law Enforcement and FCS, interviews of children/youth are coordinated so that the child/youth is not interviewed multiple times. especially in cases where sexual or physical abuse are suspected. The majority of these interviews occur at the Law Enforcement SKY Center. The SKY — Safe Kids and Youth — Center is a safe, child-friendly place where child victims and witnesses can talk with law enforcement representatives, as well as Family and Children's Services professionals,

about their experiences. The facility is a space where a well-trained, empathetic professional team works with child victims and witnesses to offer a coordinated, efficient, consistent response that reduces trauma to the child.

The Santa Cruz County Multidisciplinary Team includes the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, Capitola Police Department, Santa Cruz Police Department, Scotts Valley Police Department, UCSC Police Department, Watsonville Police Department, California Highway Patrol, the Family and Children Services Division of the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, Santa Cruz County Health Department, Monarch Services and Walnut Avenue Family and Women's Center.

FCS also benefits from the relationship that law enforcement has with Children's Behavioral Health when a youth is placed into an STRTP and experiences disruptive behaviors. Law Enforcement will respond while Mental health specialists work with the youth to de-escalate the behaviors to avoid further system involvement or incarceration. CalWorks

The Family and Children's Services (FCS) is a division of the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD). Employment and Benefit Services is also a division of HSD. In March of 2014, Santa Cruz County implemented a Family Stabilization program to augment Santa Cruz County's CalWORKS program. The Family Stabilization program provides intensive case management and services that may be in addition to those provided by the County's Welfare to Work (WTW) program to CalWORKS clients who are experiencing crisis that is destabilizing the family and interfering with the adult clients' ability to participate in WTW activities and services. Family Stabilization Services are provided to address homelessness, adult mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, health related needs, SSI application support, parent education, and behavioral health needs for children.

In the case of Child Welfare families who are receiving Family Stabilization services, the services are included in the Child Welfare case plan.

While there are no formal liaison positions between FCS and CALWORKS, collaboration occurs as needed to identify process changes that need to be made that impact both programs. In addition, CALWORKS staff have seats on the Fatherhood Engagement Council which provides a venue for information sharing across programs.

Public Health

FCS works closely with Public Health Nursing to meet the needs of children. A Public Health Nurse who is an FCS employee provides direct and indirect public health nurse case management to help meet the medical, dental, mental, and developmental health needs of children in foster care. The Public Health Nurses primary job responsibilities include: collecting health information from birth families at the onset of removal, requesting birth/medical records, consulting with clients' pediatrician and/or medical specialists and/or CCS regarding specific services, assisting resource parents with obtaining appointments and locating specialists, providing caregivers with information about health related or developmental concerns, reviewing health and dental contact forms from resource parents after health visits, updating the health and education passport in CWS/CMS from information on health contact forms and other medical records, making referrals to the Stanford developmental clinic, and monitoring the use of psychotropic medication. The nurse's role is to gather medical histories from parents during an interview at the detention hearing and to gather medical records from providers, to create a medical case management plan. An additional Public Health Nurse manages the medical case plan for certain

dependent youth in Family Reunification, Permanency Placement, and all youth in Extended Foster Care. This collaboration is effective and critical to ensuring the well-being of children.

Alcohol and Drug Treatment

FCS and the Health Services Agency (HSA) are co-located in the same building and work together collaboratively. In addition, FCS purchases substance abuse assessment and treatment services through the HSA ADP program. HSD has recently increased the funding dedicated to this purpose, to ensure that appropriate treatment is available on demand for FCS parents. FCS dedicates approximately \$450,000 annually for this purpose. Mental Health Client Specialists that are assigned to parents for substance use disorder assessments are members of the family's Child and Family Team and often serve as advocates for parents as they navigate the Dependency system. Social workers initiate referrals for these services and maintain communication with these specialists to obtain substance use services for parents.

Behavioral Health

FCS and Behavioral Health are co-located in the same building and have a long-standing collaborative relationship through the County's Interagency System of Care, which began in 1989. As part of this collaboration FCS enjoys a close relationship with Children's Behavioral Health (CBH) management, supervisors and staff. All children who are removed from care are referred to CBH for assessment and treatment and social workers who initiate the referral, coordinate closely with CBH therapists on shared cases. In addition, CBH and FCS collaborate to provide Katie A. services to all children who meet the subclass requirements.

The Santa Cruz County Probation Department has worked with Children's Behavioral Health as a System of Care partner in an effort to provide the most comprehensive response to the treatment needs of the youth served in the probation department. Children's Behavioral Health also provides services in our Juvenile Hall and frequently participates in Child and Family Team Meetings with Probation. The Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings which are required part of the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) took the place of the longstanding Placement Screening Committee which used to meet two times a week to review cases and to formulate a plan to address the needs of the youth and family. The CFT's provide the youth and their family a much bigger opportunity to weigh in on the outcome of their case and court proceedings. The youth and family are invited and encouraged to attend and participate in the full discussion of their child's case offering their input to the recommendation. This plan is submitted to court in the form of a recommendation and is meant to guide continued probation supervision.

Santa Cruz County Juvenile Probation operates a Wraparound program. The program is a collaborative effort by the Probation Department and Encompass Youth Services. The program serves up to 30 to 50 youth and their families on an annual basis; the target population is for any youth with moderate to high level of mental health and/or substance misuse challenges and are on wardship. The goal in each Wraparound case is to preserve and strengthen the home environment and increase a family's capacity to engage natural supports in order for children to continue to live in their home environments and prevent removal from their family of origin.

SECTION 6: Child Welfare / Probation Placement Initiatives

Santa Cruz County Family & Children’s Services is participating in several federal and state initiatives. These initiatives are briefly summarized below.

FCS and Probation jointly opted to the Family First Prevention Services Act on April 26, 2022, and are actively working with state consultants, AB 2083 System of Care partners and Child Abuse Prevention Workgroup (CAPW) to develop the required Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) that was submitted to the State in July 2023 and was subsequently approved. CS and Probation received approximately \$1 million in State block grant funds to assist with the development and implementation of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary prevention services. Since that time, a Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet has been established including our system partners, community-based organizations and those with lived experience. The Wellbeing Cabinet has met monthly with the purpose of developing and implementing the Comprehensive Prevention Plan for Santa Cruz County. Members of the Cabinet include:

Public Health, Parents Center, CASA, Behavioral Health, First 5, United Way County office of Education, Monarch, Pajaro Valley Prevention Services Association, Community Action Board, Encompass, District Attorney’s Office, Public Defenders Office, Conflict Resolution Center, MENtors, Positive Discipline, Triple P, Community Bridges, Pajaro Valley Unified School District, A Better Way and Safe Families.

The Cabinet has begun implementing the training component of the CPP and FCS has contracted with three community partners (Positive Discipline, Triple P and MENtors) to increase the delivery of parenting education and fatherhood engagement within the county. Training and certification of additional facilitators will commence in June of 2024 with the goal of increasing the number of providers to deliver parenting education throughout the community.

Another focus of the Wellbeing Cabinet has been incorporating lived experience across the prevention spectrum. Efforts to contract with a community-based organization are underway to become the lead for this effort.

Family Finding Unit:

In December 2023, FCS and Probation opted in to the Excellence in Family Finding, Engagement and Support Program and received funding to support the following Family Finding caseload model:

STAFFING: The County of Santa Cruz, Family and Children's Services Division (FCS) has a staff of two full-time social workers in our Family Finding Unit (FFU), one supervisor and one Program

Manager. FCS will hire two additional full-time social workers in our FFU, doubling our efforts to identify, locate and engage persons related to children needing placement.

TOOLS: FCS will extend their research tools and offer training for these tools: Databases: FCS will subscribe to LexisNexis and make use of other tools such as genograms. Social Media: Staff will maintain an informative and educational social media presence such as FaceBook, Instagram, Twitter (X) and LinkedIn, for the FFU to inform, educate and contact the community.

ENGAGEMENT: Family Finding workers will utilize a caseload model where they are assigned a youth/child when they enter care. The Family Finding worker will work with that youth/child throughout the life of their involvement with FCS. They will immediately contact family in hopes of finding connections. They will assist the youth/children with making those connections (setting up visits, phone calls, etc.) and continue to look for relatives (via technology, talking to family members, including the youth) as long as the youth is in care. They will meet with the youth/child monthly to monitor the progress of the connections made and assist with any new connections they would like to pursue. Their family finding efforts will be child/youth specific.

Resource Family Recruitment Social Marketing Campaign: As part of FCS’s efforts to implement CCR and recruit more family-based settings for children and youth with high needs, the county entered into a contract with a social marketing firm (MIG, Inc.) to develop, implement, and evaluate an evidence-based social marketing campaign that can be replicated by FCS staff. Research shows that youth predominantly cared for in resource family homes have better outcomes than those who spend long periods in group care. There are three key phases to this campaign:

- Phase 1: Resource Family Support Research
- Phase 2: Implementation Plan Development
- Phase 3: Campaign Implementation and Evaluation

FCS is currently in Phase 3 of this project. However, due to challenges with hiring a resource parent recruiter, implementation goals have shifted and some of this work is being done through the establishment of a workgroup focusing on recruitment and retention of resource parents. FCS released an RFQ for a recruiter in 2023 and was unable to find a qualified applicant. Consequently, the decision was made to create a County position, and FCS is currently in the process of filling this position.

Katie A. and Continuum of Care Reform: Family & Children’s Services, in collaboration with Children’s Behavioral Health (CBH), has implemented Katie A services, primarily through the use of Child and Family Teams (CFTs). All child welfare social workers and juvenile probation officers have been trained on CFTs and have started conducting them. In 2022, facilitation of CFTs was transitioned to FCS staff with the creation of a specialized CFT unit for child welfare. A stakeholder group for CFT meets quarterly to evaluate and provide feedback on this process. RFA has been fully implemented and RFA staff meet with Foster Care Eligibility on a regular basis to troubleshoot any ongoing issues. Staff have been trained on the Level of Care tool and CANS which are being incorporated into CFT meetings. CBH conducts the CANS for FCS and efforts are underway to better align the CANS with court dates and CFTs.

Fostering Connections / After 18 Program: Santa Cruz County began providing After 18 program services in January of 2012. The goal of extended foster care is to assist foster youth in maintaining a safety net of support while experiencing independence in a secure and supervised living environment. The extended time as a non-minor dependent (NMD) can assist the youth in becoming better prepared for successful transition into adulthood and self-sufficiency through education and employment training. In Santa Cruz County, many foster youth are choosing to remain in foster care to receive extended supportive services as they venture into more independent living situations in their journey to adulthood. As of May 2019, 34 NMDs remained in care. Initiatives such as CSEC and CCR need to be modified for this population as they are adults in the child welfare system that have more autonomy and authority than children under the age of 18. The After 18 program is not the focus of any strategies in the current CSA-SIP cycle, as this program is already fully implemented.

Santa Cruz County has a CSEC MOU between FCS, Juvenile Probation, Public Health, Children’s Behavioral Health, Juvenile Justice Court and County Office of Education. This has been in effect since 2023 and

provides a framework for how Santa Cruz County agencies work together to serve commercially sexually exploited youth.

In addition, CSEC prevention and counseling services have been implemented within different parts of Santa Cruz County. FCS has partnered with Monarch Services to deliver an evidence-informed prevention curriculum called The Prevention Project (<http://www.prevention-project.org>). This curriculum has been rolled out at a local STRTP for young women and various high schools throughout Santa Cruz County. In addition, Monarch provides a psycho-education group for survivors of CSEC called Ending the Game, which is a survivor-informed curriculum (<http://endingthegame.com/>).

FCS has also partnered with The Diversity Center, the local LGBTQ+ agency to provide education and support at various schools in the county. As research shows, LGBTQ+ youth are at a high risk of being commercially sexually exploited.

FCS has partnered with Rising International, our local anti-poverty and anti-human trafficking agency, to provide the Safe and Sound workshop to high-school teenagers in Santa Cruz that looks to educate youth about traffickers and avoid being exploited.

FCS, in partnership with The Coalition to End Human Trafficking in Santa Cruz and Monterey Counties, conducted its 2nd annual CSEC awareness conference for the community. Approximately 100 people attended including service providers, community members, and youth. The majority of presenters and speakers at the conference were survivors of CSE/human trafficking.

Bringing Families Home: Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (HSD) has been awarded the Bringing Families Home (BFH) grant since 2017. The goal of BFH is to reduce the number of families in the child welfare system experiencing homelessness, increase the number of families reunifying, and to reduce foster care placements. HSD has partnered with a local homelessness services agency to provide housing case management and identification services to support families attain and maintain housing. To date, 96 families have found housing and over 70 families have been connected to a Family Unification Program voucher. Currently, BFH has funding through California Department of Social Services which will allow BFH to continue through June 2026 and serve additional families.

Housing and Urban Development – Youth Homeless Demonstration Project (YHDP): In 2017, Santa Cruz County was in the first cohort of communities to receive YHDP funds. Since then, YHDP funded agencies have provided outreach, housing problem solving/diversion, transitional housing, and rapid rehousing services to youth aged 15-24 years old countywide. A group of seven housing programs that serve youth, local government, the Continuum of Care, education partners, mental and physical health agencies, and FCS meet monthly as the YHDP collaborative to case conference, provide program updates, engage in system improvement work, and coordinate on countywide projects. FCS has played an instrumental role in helping connect former and current foster youth facing housing insecurity to services including Youth Family Unification Program and Foster Youth Independence vouchers.

Emergency Child Care Bridge: Santa Cruz County FCS opted into the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program, as established by Senate Bill 89. Effective January 1, 2018, resource families and families that have a child placed with them, including non-minor dependents, are eligible to receive a time-limited monthly payment or voucher for childcare and a childcare navigator. A childcare navigator assists with finding a childcare provider, securing a subsidized childcare placement if eligible, completing childcare program applications, and developing a plan for long-term childcare appropriate to the child's age and needs. The time limit is 6 months but can be approved for up to 12 months if long-term subsidized care is

not obtained by the 6- month period. In addition, childcare programs and providers serving children in the Bridge Program shall be provided with trauma-informed care training and coaching. FCS has served approximately 21 children in FY 22/23.

Countywide Differential Response: Families Together is a comprehensive child abuse early intervention and prevention program serving the entire county. This initiative, using a differential response model, is a collaborative effort between the FCS Division and Encompass Community Services. Funding from First 5 and Santa Cruz County Health Services and Human Services Departments (including CCTF, CAPIT, and PSSF Family Support) are braided together to support this program. It is an evidence-based program that utilizes home-based, individualized services with an emphasis on the parent-child relationship and child development and parent education. Goals of the program include:

- Improved parent-child relationship
- Improved family support
- Improved community engagement
- Improved child safety
- Improved child health and development
- Improved child well-being

Participation in Families Together is voluntary. Outcome measures for this program indicate positive results such as 100% of families that participated in Families Together for FY 22/23 did not have a substantiated allegation of abuse within 6 months of case closure.

CWS Flexible Fund: A flexible fund provides tangible support to families receiving Child Welfare Services, to facilitate reunification and family preservation by providing flexible, family-based, intensive time-limited, and culturally competent intervention and treatment services to families in crisis. This program is a critical support for families in Santa Cruz County where financial resources may be limited for CWS involved families.

Adoption Promotion and Support: This program provides culturally competent, bilingual counseling and support services that promote, support and encourage the adoption process for parents who are considering adoption, going through the adoption process, or have already adopted children from FCS.

Therapeutic Supervised Visitation: Therapeutic supervised visitation promotes and encourages healthy parent-child relationships and assists children and natural parents in the work of family reunification. A trained bilingual visit supervisor who is culturally competent supervises Court- ordered visits for families referred by FCS. The visit supervisor is supervised by a licensed or license-eligible clinician. This program incorporates Triple P, an evidence-based parenting education curriculum.

Case Reviews: The Child Family Services Review (CFSR) Quality Case Reviews is a key component to a CQI Model for child welfare services and understanding the qualitative nature of our performance. Santa Cruz began conducting reviews in April 2015 and has completed approximately 217 case reviews since that time. Up until the end of 2022, the case review team was stable and consistent with the same team of two reviewers and a manager that conducts the QA, averaging 5-6 reviews per quarter. However, since the end of 2022, there have been changes in reviewers three times, resulting in a significant slowdown of review completion. Currently, the team is averaging 2-3 reviews per quarter with just one reviewer, as they continue to try to fill the second position.

In addition to conducting reviews, case review team members participate in program workgroups and steering committees, providing the case review perspective and occasionally facilitate data discussions on

targeted topics. The team sends out periodic case review highlights throughout the year and annually presents on data and themes of case reviews. Always looking for ways to make case review information meaningful, the team continuously makes efforts to utilize the information being gathered through case review as part of the division's CQI efforts.

Safety Organized Practice (SOP): In January 2014, Santa Cruz County initiated Safety Organized Practice training for child welfare staff as a continuation of efforts to improve family engagement practice. Use of Safety Organized Practice (SOP), specifically safety mapping and family team meetings, engages families in safety decision making and case planning, thus obtaining their input and opinions. When families are engaged in such processes, they are more likely to follow-through with such decisions and case plan goals (Antle, Christensen, van Zyl, & Barbee, 2012). Additionally, time is spent to ensure families understand the harm and danger of circumstances that compromise child safety. With families further understanding safety and following through with well-thought-out decisions, they are less likely to experience re-entry, and children are more likely to achieve permanency. Through SOP, social workers have been able to apply a structured strategy designed to help all the key stakeholders involved with a child - the parents, the extended family, the child welfare worker, supervisor, managers, lawyers, judges, and other individuals, maintain their focus on assessing and enhancing child safety at all points in the case process. This practice model integrates the best *Signs of Safety* methodology, i.e., a strengths and solution focused child welfare approach that includes Structured Decision Making.

The FCS SOP workgroup which includes all levels of social work staff continues to meet monthly where it discusses overall implementation of SOP and addresses specific areas where SOP can be used. The SOP workgroup developed a roadmap to SOP implementation across the division that was implemented in February 2021. FCS adopted Plan Do Study Act model of implementing each piece of SOP practice and is currently implementing the final phase of SOP. All staff have received SOP training and SOP coaching has been available for FCS staff on a regular basis in partnership with the Bay Area Academy (Regional Training Academy).

SECTION 7: Board of Supervisors (BOS) Designated Commission, Board of Bodies

The BOS-Designated Public Agency

As the public agency designated by the Board of Supervisors to administer Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT), Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), and Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) funds, the Human Services Department provides program oversight and accountability, integration of local services, fiscal compliance, data collection, preparation of amendments to the county plan, preparation of annual reports, and outcomes evaluation.

The Children’s Network of Santa Cruz County serves as the Interagency Children’s Coordinating Council to oversee the distribution of CCTF, CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF funds. It reviews how these funding resources are being utilized and provides input on prevention efforts in the community. The Children’s Network is an independent countywide organization made up of members from the community and CBOs who are providing services to or have an interest in children in Santa Cruz County. This includes the Human Services Department, the Probation Department, law enforcement, the office of the District Attorney, and the courts. In addition, the prevention and treatment service communities, including medical and mental health services, community based social services, public and private schools, community representatives such as volunteers, civic organizations, and members of the religious community participate in the broad ranging group. The Children’s Network provides a venue for coordination of service delivery to children and families. Several of the members of the Children’s Network also participate on the FCS System Improvement Plan Steering Committee, where they provide recommendations for improvements in services to families.

Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC)

The Children’s Network was designated to serve as the Child Abuse Prevention Council for Santa Cruz County in 2008. The Children’s Network CAPC is comprised of volunteer members of the Children’s Network and provided with staff support through a contract with a non-profit service provider. The CAPC provides coordination of the county’s prevention and early intervention efforts by providing information about resources to families and to other members of the Children’s Network, for distribution to the families that they serve. The CAPC maintains a public website with prevention materials, resources and referral information. During Child Abuse Prevention Month, the CAPC coordinates a public media campaign to promote public awareness of the abuse and neglect of children, and the resources available for intervention and treatment.

County Children’s Trust Fund Commission, Board or Council

The Children’s Network serves as the required County Children’s Trust Fund (CCTF) Interagency Children’s Coordinating Council to provide oversight and recommendations for services funded by CCTF. The Human Services department is the fiscal agent for these funds. CCTF funds support the activities of the CAPC, as described above. The CAPC submits an annual report on their services and activities, which are submitted to a Human Services Department program analyst and included in the CDSS Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) annual report. These activities are also published in the Children’s Network annual report, which is submitted to the Board of Supervisors. The county deposits the full amount of the CBCAP allocation into the CCTF.

PSSF Collaborative

The Children’s Network is the PSSF Collaborative and Interagency Children’s Coordinating Council (ICSSC) that oversees funding from Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF). The Human Services department acts as the fiscal agent.

SECTION 8: Systemic Factors

8A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

CHILD WELFARE

The primary database used in the FCS Division is the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). In addition, the division uses a secondary database, SafeMeasures. SafeMeasures captures data from existing computerized files and links these data elements to key performance standards. Lastly, FCS uses Binti to track and record families in the Resource Family Approval (RFA) process. The use of these systems is described below.

CWS/CMS

Santa Cruz County has fully utilized CWS/CMS since October 2000. This means that FCS uses all five components of the application: Case Management, Client Management, Placement Management, Court Management and Service Management.

CWS/CMS is critical to FCS's ability to carry out its responsibilities. The system enables us to keep electronic records of all casework activities, and to measure client progress. CWS/CMS makes it possible to track the progress of a child or family through the child welfare system, from the initial face-to-face contact to court hearing dates, court reports, and the finalization of adoptions. Data collected from CWS/CMS is utilized to measure FCS's success in achieving outcome goals. Every level of staff within FCS uses CWS/CMS data. Social workers and clerical staff enter data regarding referrals, investigations, case plans, court hearings, delivered services, and client progress. Supervisors review and approve case data in CWS/CMS at key decision points such as the close of the investigation, prior to case transfer, at each six-month review, and when court reports/case plan updates are due.

FCS also uses Business Objects to extract data from CWS/CMS and produce monthly reports that are reviewed by supervisors and managers, and periodically runs Business Objects reports specific to a particular project. Managers also review cumulative data reports to better monitor program performance, activities, service delivery, caseloads, and staffing levels. Program Managers use SafeMeasures reports specific to their program's activities. To include, but not limited to:

- Time to investigation by referral- weekly
- Investigation time open based on first contact- weekly
- Timely referral closure (state standard)- weekly
- Referrals and investigations by primary race- monthly
- Face to Face Contacts- monthly
- Case Plan Status- monthly
- Upcoming Court Hearings - monthly
- PP Component Time Open - quarterly
- TILP Services - quarterly
- Ongoing CFTM Completion Status – monthly
- P3: Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24 Months or Longer - quarterly
- P5: Placement Stability - quarterly

In December of 2022, FCS and Probation submitted the Phase I Data Quality Review Plan in consultation with CDSS per ACIN I-85-20 in an effort to address duplicate, inaccurate and missing records in CWS/CMS. FCS and Probation are currently on Phase III of the Data Quality Plan. Efforts to date have been focused on reducing the number of data errors related to NYTD and AFCARS elements. The plan requires running quarterly reports on these elements and coordination with staff responsible for entering the missing information in CWS/CMS. FCS and Probation have both established processes for initial data cleanup and maintenance. These efforts have shown improvement in the reduction of data errors.

FCS has identified several areas of concern related to the CWS/CMS system, and they are centered on the fact that CWS/CMS is a statewide database; therefore, counties have very little control of it at the local level. Legislative and regulatory changes take weeks, months and sometimes years to be incorporated into the database. One of the primary areas of concern for FCS staff is the inability of more than one staff member to be in a single case simultaneously without loss of data. Staff who are sharing work in cases, communicate when they intend to enter the case to avoid conflicts which can cause delays in accessing the system. Another work around that staff use is to work on documents outside the system and then upload or transfer data into CWS/CMS. This can lead to data loss if staff do not remember to upload the documents. This also creates issues with not having access to critical information in a timely manner.

CWS/CMS is a 30-year-old system, being replaced in October 2026 with CARES. Barriers to full utilization include the technical limitations of the system. It is anticipated that CARES will facilitate full utilization and information exchange with County partners, including Probation and Employment Benefits Services Division (EBSD).

SafeMeasures

In early 2004, the FCS Division implemented SafeMeasures as a quality assurance tool, not only to track progress locally on the state and federal performance measures, but also as a means to see where we may be having data entry problems or case management issues. FCS has continued to utilize SafeMeasures to identify and remedy issues that, in the past, would have been extremely labor intensive to address.

FCS is using SafeMeasures to monitor compliance with the Division 31 regulations as well as with AB 636 outcome measures, including reviewing reports on Caseload Management, Compliance Summaries, Referrals & Investigations, Emergency Response, Family Maintenance, Family Reunification, Permanent Placement, Child Well-Being, and Federal CFR-3 Outcomes.

- The County Self-Assessment process identified areas of information that were unavailable and necessary to comprehensively assess the child welfare system. There is a lack of systematic data on the incidence and prevalence of substance abuse in child welfare involved families.
- Since the implementation of RFA, it has become more difficult to ascertain the types of home-based placement, specifically determining which placements are relatives/NREFMS and those that are traditional resource family homes.
- There is a lack of a systematic way to collect and analyze data on the presenting safety factor(s) that led to a case, for example substance abuse or domestic violence. This information is in the case plan, but it cannot be easily compiled in a CWS/CMS data report.

- There is a lack of information on how mothers, fathers, and youth were engaged in services. This information shows up in case review and was a focus area in the last System Improvement Plan but is not easily captured into CWS/CMS.
- There is a lack of information about who is in the family's network of support and what the nature of the relationship is and how they can support the family. This information is starting to be documented in Court Reports but cannot easily be compiled in a CWS/CMS data report.

Binti

In August 2017, Santa Cruz County FCS adopted the use of Binti, an online foster care recruiting and resource family/home approval system and database. Due to the new truncated timeframes for RFA where families needed to be approved within 90 days and the need for more home-based placements for older children/youth, FCS needed a tool to better track families moving through the RFA process. The goal of using Binti is to:

- Recruit more resource families
- Get families through the application process more quickly
- Let caseworkers do more social work and less paperwork
- Give the team real-time information and reports
- Let families take control of their own process
- Promote better outcomes for foster children and families

Since the implementation of Binti, RFA social workers have reported that the system frees up time processing paperwork and allows them to interact directly with resource parents. Resource parents have found the system to be easy to use and allows them to proceed with the process at their own pace and schedule. Resource parents are able to get through the approval process quicker using Binit, making them available to take placements which increase services to the families we serve. Spanish speaking resource parents are less likely to utilize Binti and social workers continue to assist them one on one.

PROBATION

Probation is responsible for entering information into the CWS/CMS database. Probation not only enters all the safety, child well-being and permanency outcomes for all placement youth, but Probation is also able to elicit child welfare history on all youth entering into the judicial system. Probation utilizes the CWS/CMS database for all youth that come into custody in order to determine what services and supports were offered to the family prior to the arrest. Probation also works in collaboration with the public health nurses to maintain data on medical, dental and any psychiatric attention needed by youth in foster care. In addition, the CWS/CMS database is used to maintain quality assurance for all non-minor dependents to support the best care and support for their wellbeing from ages 18-21.

One barrier with CWS/CMS is having the assigned officers enter their contacts in a timely fashion. Due to a shortage of placements within the county, most of the youth placed out of the home are placed outside of Santa Cruz County, and sometimes outside of California. In order to improve efficiency in this area the Department has created a process to have the Placement Clerk gather information from the caseload management system (Caseload Explorer-CE) and enter the notes directly into the CWS/CMS system. CE is the primary database used by Juvenile Probation to track all youth involved with the juvenile justice

system. It allows our staff to communicate effectively about each individual youth and family and support their successful termination from probation. Probation can run reports on data regarding all youth that are in custody, out of custody and residing with their family origin as well as youth in foster care-this database allows Probation Officers, Supervisors, Managers and Analyst to provide oversight and attention to all the details related to each youth on probation or going through the intake process. This has improved the timeliness of the documentation. This allows the Assistant Division Director to audit the cases in CWS/CMS more efficiently on a monthly basis.

8B COUNTY CASE REVIEW SYSTEM

CHILD WELFARE

Case Review continues to be a key area of focus for Santa Cruz County's Self-Assessment Process. In 2019 Santa Cruz County engaged in a comprehensive effort to gather information and input from community partners, caregivers, CASAs, parents, extended relatives and youth in an effort to ensure comprehensive community inclusion into the Self-Assessment. This effort gave stakeholders the opportunity to participate in focus groups or provide feedback at SIP Steering Committee/Stakeholder meetings.

Described below are the primary elements of the local court structure for Dependency Court. The Dependency Court in Santa Cruz County is convened by the Superior Court. Dependency matters are heard by one primary judge in the Santa Cruz County Courthouse located in Watsonville.

Counsel - All children are appointed an attorney at the outset of the dependency process and these attorneys remain in place until the dependency is dismissed. The local law firm of Patterson and Dews and Allison Cruz are on contract through the Administrative Office of the Courts to provide this service. Though they have large caseloads, the children's attorneys are active partners in the dependency process on behalf of their clients. With respect to parents, if their financial circumstances prevent them from affording an attorney, they can receive court-appointed representation. The law office of Evguenia Vatchkova represents the first parent to appear on the matter. If there are subsequent parents needing representation, two other attorneys, Warren Forrest and Liliana Diaz, represent them. All of these attorneys have worked within the Santa Cruz County dependency system for a number of years and are well respected as strong advocates on behalf of their clients. The FCS Division is represented by the office of the County Counsel.

Court Officer - FCS has a social worker assigned full-time in the role of Court Officer. The Court Officer appears in court on behalf of case-carrying social workers for the regular Tuesday/Thursday calendar, a practice that allows FCS staff to spend more time in direct service to clients. The Court Officer also files 387 and 388 petitions and tracks Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) and Interstate Compact for the Placement of Children (ICPC) cases. She works with County Counsel's office to ensure that FCS is meeting all legal requirements of ICWA and of ICPC. The Court Officer provides regular feedback to social work supervisors regarding current laws and procedures in these areas and ensures that social work practice is above reproach. By centralizing all ICWA noticing, contact with tribes and ICWA reporting to the court within one FCS position, the department has significantly lowered its exposure to appeals in this area and has established good, ethical practice with respect to children who fall within the purview of this law.

Advocacy and support – Almost all children involved in the Dependency Court process (family reunification and family maintenance) who need additional advocacy and support are paired with a Court

Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). FCS works closely with the local CASA agency and the court to ensure that children promptly receive a CASA. The relationship between FCS and CASA has strengthened significantly over the past several years and continues to be an area of focus for supporting permanency and educational outcomes for children and youth. In 2008 an MOU was established between CASA and FCS to ensure consistent practice with respect to communication and collaboration. FCS social workers and CASAs receive information on best communication practices. Both groups are consistently supported to work effectively with each other towards the best interests of the child. Additionally, specific structures were delineated regarding resolving conflicting opinions on cases. As a result, more issues are resolved at the social worker/advocate level. When appropriate, supervisors or managers from both agencies step in. Further, there are regular meetings (monthly) between CASA and FCS managers as a quality assurance measure and to seek resolution of extremely difficult case issues.

Dependency Court Systems Coordinating Meeting (DCS) - DCS is a bi-monthly meeting of representatives from all professional groups who touch the dependency system. It was initiated to support and improve the working relationships among all these parties, and to provide a venue for training on topics of mutual interest. Members include the Dependency Court Judge, Parents' Attorneys, Minors' Attorneys, CASA, FCS staff, Superior Court Clerk and County Counsel. All parties agree that this is a useful forum to share information and increase collaboration.

Court partners continue to agree that collaboration between and among the parties is constant and effective. As stated above, there is already a written MOU that establishes communication practices between FCS and CASA. Additionally, FCS management and the dependency judge maintain contact as needed in an effort to address general department/court practice issues.

Hearings

The dependency calendar is held each Tuesday and Thursday. The calendar includes matters set for arraignments, jurisdiction/disposition hearings, 388s, status reviews for family maintenance, family reunification and permanency planning cases, 366.26 hearings, AB12 matters and interim reviews. Detention hearings are held daily as needed. Trials, settlement conferences and mediations are scheduled in the intervening times. The physical structure of the courtroom and the courthouse is family friendly and accessible by public transportation. The courthouse is located on the southernmost end of the county. This places a burden on families who live in the Santa Cruz Mountains, because they often need to make multiple bus changes in order to get to the courthouse by the 8:30 am calendar.

FCS offers transportation stipends and bus passes to assist parents with transportation needs. During the height of the pandemic, court hearings were held virtually. The option to appear virtually can be approved in certain circumstances but is an exception to the rule.

Frequency of Hearings – Following is a summary of the typical pattern of setting hearings:

Detentions – These hearings are held within 72 hours of protective custody. While it is possible for detentions to be continued for a contested hearing, these continuances are rare in Santa Cruz. The judge and the attorneys typically have enough information from FCS to fully vet the situation and make a determination about detention on the date it is set.

Jurisdiction/Disposition Hearings – The initial hearing for these matters typically begins within the appropriate statutory timeframe of 15 days following the detention hearing, but many times occurs earlier as they must fall on a Tuesday per Dependency Court procedures. This hearing is considered the “Receipt of Report” hearing (ROR) and then the following week the Jurisdiction/Disposition hearing is held.

However, many of these matters are set for a settlement conference and/or trial. Given the Court's availability, there are times when these trials do not resolve within the 60 day statutory timeframe. The attorneys and FCS staff work informally, prior to these hearings, in order to resolve or narrow the trial related issues, so as to expedite the process. When the court determines the disposition of the case is family reunification, the judge alerts the parent, on the record, about the reunification timeframes applicable to the case. If there is a child under the age of 3, the court sets an interim review at 90 days in order to assess the parents' progress towards reunification, prior to having to make a determination about permanency at the six-month status review. This gives the court an additional opportunity to remind the parents and FCS of the need to determine who the "forever family" will be for the child, due to that child's young age.

Status Review Hearings – All matters for which the court has taken jurisdiction are set for status review hearings at six-month intervals (see the administrative review section below for the exception to the six month interval process). There are times when these status reviews fall just outside of the statutory timeframes, due to court calendar lack of availability, requests from attorneys to move a matter by one week, requests by FCS for an additional week or two to determine the most appropriate recommendation for a child, etc. The permanency needs of the child, as guided by the statutory timeframes that apply to that child, are considered and specifically addressed at each status review. It is uncommon for any child to exceed 12 months of family reunification services, prior to moving the focus specifically to permanency. If there is a substantial probability of return if family reunification services are extended, the Court can order 18 months of family reunification services.

366.26 Hearings – These permanency hearings are consistently set within 120 days. Santa Cruz County has avoided the need for continuances for technical reasons, in large part, due to the fact that the County Counsel's office effects notice for these hearings in order to ensure notice is proper. Santa Cruz County consistently performs above the national goal for adoptions. This is in large part due to the effective teaming between FCS and the court that began in 2008 when FCS was awarded a five year federal grant, specifically focused on permanency, that spearheaded systemic change, not only procedurally, but in the perceptions of permanency held by those who are charged with facilitating it. Though both the court and FCS have specifically focused on the need for life-long permanency for all children who have not been able to reunify with their parents, both the court and FCS are reluctant to terminate parental rights for any child who does not have an identified adoptive home. In those cases, the court continues to monitor FCS' efforts to identify a permanent home for the child, during each status review hearing.

Continuances - FCS social workers produce court reports one week in advance of jurisdiction/disposition hearings, two weeks in advance of status review, post-permanency hearings, and 266.26 hearings. This practice greatly reduces the need for continuances by allowing parties significant preparation time.

When continuances are requested, the dependency court judge grants these continuances only after reaching a legal finding of "good cause." The typical reasons for continuances are as follows: pending necessary information has not been received by the social worker, ensuring ICWA noticing compliance, attorneys have not had sufficient time or opportunity to speak with their clients prior to the hearing, parent illness the day of the hearing, or the parent has not read the court report prior to coming to the hearing. Most continuances are for one to two weeks.

Santa Cruz County Superior Court does not currently track the percentage of cases that are granted continuances.

Termination of Parental Rights - Federal law has codified the goal of permanency for children by requiring the dependency court to consider termination of parental rights for all cases where children have been in out-of-home care in 15 of the previous 22 months of dependency. The State of California stipulates that status review hearings must occur at six and twelve months after disposition but that a third status review hearing must happen no later than eighteen months after removal. To that end, the Santa Cruz County Dependency Court does consider the permanency needs of children at the six-month review for children under the age of three and at the twelve-month review for children over the age of three. Additionally, FCS and the Santa Cruz County Dependency Court also consider whether W&I Code sec. 361.5 bypass of reunification services criteria apply to any out-of-home pre-disposition case, thereby hastening permanency for children and youth whose family circumstances fit those extreme criteria.

As noted above, FCS has made an extensive effort to address the importance of permanency on every level from written policies and procedures to in depth social worker discussions about child welfare practice, ethics and values. This process was significantly bolstered by the receipt of the five-year federal Adoption Opportunities: Diligent Recruitment grant aimed at increasing real permanency for children and youth. During the grant period from 2008 to 2013, FCS engaged the services of several permanency and permanency-related experts to assist in deconstructing practices and beliefs about permanency in child welfare in Santa Cruz County. One of these experts described child welfare practice in Santa Cruz County as “reunification at all costs” and that social workers see themselves as failures if reunification is not successful. As a result, significant efforts were made to address a needed culture shift so children and youth can achieve true permanency.

Some of these efforts included the following;; better policies and procedures with respect to concurrent planning and case transfer processes; a more clear policy regarding 361.5 bypass cases; established policies regarding specific steps for assessing readiness for reunification (within the CFT policy and procedure); use of CFT prior to moving to overnight visitation with parents; educating the court on the desirability of adoption as the only true permanent alternative to reunification; establishing court orders for using adoption websites such as Adopt US kids in the pursuit of permanent homes; establishing practices for youth readiness for adoption; and engaging in general, targeted and specific recruitment efforts for permanent homes for youth and children.

Though these efforts constituted a significant change in the way social workers practice and in the way supervisors supervise their staff with respect to the permanency needs of children, FCS continued to identify barriers to successful permanency for all children. One of these barriers includes placing with a safe relative at the beginning of the dependency does not necessarily constitute the best permanent placement to meet the child’s overall well-being needs for the rest of his or her life. Another barrier is that social workers have the desire to achieve a practice focused on the permanency needs of children, however, Ongoing social workers are often times unable to consistently practice concurrent planning tasks due to the need to focus on the “reasonable services” requirements in family reunification cases

Due to these issues, FCS concluded the following: When permanency is everyone’s secondary work, it’s no one’s work.

Consequently, in September 2014 FCS conducted its second redistribution of social worker tasks in two years. This second one was specifically aimed at improving permanency outcomes for all children. As of September 2014, all families entering the Santa Cruz County child welfare system will experience an Investigations social worker (who conducts the initial and the jurisdictional investigation) and a post-disposition worker (who actually is assigned to the case prior to disposition in an effort to engage the

family in the case planning process). This one post-disposition worker will carry the case from disposition until termination of family reunification services, after which it is transferred to a Permanency worker.

FCS is currently undergoing a restructure of post dispositional services to improve concurrent planning during the period a family is receiving reunification services. We have expanded our Family Finding program in an effort to locate and notify any absent parents and/or relatives as early as possible. We make concerted efforts to engage relatives in Child and Family Team meetings throughout the life of reunification services and beyond, to foster and support children and youth's family connections and to seek a permanent home in the event reunification services are not successful.

Use of Alternative Dispute Resolution

Staff of the Family Court Mediation program provides mediation services on dependency cases. The court will refer cases to mediation if there is a likelihood the parties could resolve their differences and trial could be avoided. If mediation does not resolve a conflict, Santa Cruz County uses settlement conferences with the judge in order to narrow the trial issues. If there is indication that a settlement conference will not resolve the conflict, a trial date will be set for the same day.

Process for Timely Notification

As required by law, FCS informs all parties of hearings. Given the different noticing requirements for each hearing, a Policy and Procedure was established in 2006 to assist social workers in proper noticing techniques.

For the **detention hearing**, all parties (parents, children and caregivers) are noticed in person or via telephone. Social workers document their efforts to notice parents in the detention report and document their efforts to notice the caregivers in CWS/CMS case notes. Caregivers are reminded of their right to be present at the detention hearing. Both FCS and children's attorneys ensure that children/youth are aware of their right to be present at detention hearings.

The Santa Cruz County Superior Court provides notices for the **jurisdiction/disposition** hearing to the social worker at the time of the detention hearing. The social worker notices all parties (parents, children and attorneys) present at the detention hearing for the jurisdiction/disposition hearing. If there are some parties not present at the detention hearing, the Santa Cruz County Superior Court notices those parties at their last known address via mail.

Social workers verbally notice caregivers for the jurisdiction/disposition hearing. Caregivers are reminded of their right to be present at the jurisdiction/disposition hearing.

Four weeks prior to each **status review** hearing, the clerks send a "notification list" and judge's confidential proof" to the case carrying social worker. The social worker edits the list to ensure that all parties and their addresses are accurate.

Two weeks in advance of each **status review**, interim review or administrative review hearing, FCS mails parents, children, siblings, attorneys, tribes, and other "parties to the action" the "Notice of Review Hearing – Juvenile" for a court hearing, or "Administrative Review Panel Notice of Hearing" for an administrative review. FCS court clerks maintain a "court calendar" which tracks upcoming reviews and notification dates. **Caregivers** also receive the "Notice of Review Hearing – Juvenile" for a court hearing, or "Administrative Review Panel Notice of Hearing" for an administrative review. Via these last two documents, resource/foster parents and relative/non-related extended family member caregivers,

including pre-adoptive parents, are reminded of their right to be present at these hearings and reviews. FCS includes the “Caretaker Information Form” (JV-290) with the notice of hearings to caregivers. This State of California form solicits input from the resource/foster parents and relative/non-related extended family member caregivers, including pre-adoptive parents, on behalf of the child, for the court to have direct communication from the caregiver. Instructions regarding how to provide this form to the court are included with each notice and lead the caregiver to forward the information directly to the clerk’s office. In this way, the caregiver can be assured that the communication goes to the judge without third party interference. The information provided by resource/foster parents and relative/non-related extended family member caregivers, including pre-adoptive parents, is an important component in giving the court a current picture of the specific foster child’s needs and well-being. However, few caregivers avail themselves of the opportunity to provide input in the Caretaker Information Form and its predecessor, the Caretaker Statement to the Court.

The Division adheres to state law and regulation requirements for determining whether children have American Indian heritage to ensure compliance with the **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)**. Investigations social workers are trained to ask parents about their ancestry at the time children are removed from their parent or guardian. Once a child is identified as potentially coming within ICWA regulation, the Division has a designated coordinator, the Court Officer, who tracks required notifications and documentation to/from the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The Division adheres to direction from the Bureau of Indian Affairs or a specific tribe regarding placement of children with an Indian family. There are few ICWA cases in Santa Cruz County. Of those cases, FCS and the court make a concerted effort to ensure tribal participation in hearings. If the applicable individuals are not able to make personal appearances at hearings, their feedback is gathered prior to hearings by FCS and reported to the court. Additionally, the court allows tribal appearances by telephone.

FCS notices all parties to an action, including caretakers as noted above, children, biological parents or guardians, de facto parents, minor’s counsel, parent’s counsel and CASA, in a timely manner.

FCS consistently properly notices parties to an action, and it is rare that improper notice causes hearing delays. However, there are times when the Department requests continuances in order to achieve proper notice for the Indian Child Welfare Act if information from the family is not received by FCS in a timely manner.

Process for Parent/Youth Participation in Case Planning

The FCS Division focus in case planning is on the welfare of the child. If the needs of the parent, guardian, or other caregiver are affecting the welfare of the child, then those needs will be addressed by designing a case plan unique to the needs of that family. FCS has a philosophy of strength-based, family-centered practice. This includes a tenet of client involvement in case planning and assessment of progress.

In 2006, FCS implemented a case planning policy and procedure designed to provide guidance and instruction to social workers about case planning at all phases of the dependency process. This policy includes instructions to social workers on how to incorporate identified needs into specific case plan goals and activities. Child and family teaming has become a part of the case planning process since the implementation of CCR. FCS policies require Child and Family Team meetings (CFTm’s) for all children in out of home care with follow up CFTm’s either every 6 months, every 3 months (Katie A), and/or whenever there is a change in circumstances. CFTm’s have been ramping up in phases so that all children in out of home care are receiving them.

CFTS remain a robust practice at FCS. Since the last CSA, FCS has developed an in house CFT Unit and no longer outsources this service. CFTms are now facilitated by two dedicated Senior Social Workers. CFTms are conducted in English and Spanish based on the family's needs. Meetings are primarily held virtually which expands the ability of family and support network members to attend. Families are assigned to one CFT facilitator for the life of their case which allows for a more consistent and engaging meeting experience. Per recent state mandates, CFTms will be expanded to include Family Maintenance cases.

Parents

Santa Cruz County social workers strongly believe in the value of including parents in the case planning process. FCS has developed a Parent's Bill of Rights, which is provided to parents at the time that a child is removed, and this document informs the parent of his or her right to participate in the case planning process and of what is at stake should the parent fail to participate in ordered services.

As part of the current restructure, the task of case planning has shifted to the assigned court worker for the family. The court worker is assigned to the case through disposition, in order for that worker to begin engagement efforts with the family. This process includes helping the family to identify their own strengths and areas of need in order to build an applicable case plan. In this model Court social worker engages the family and develops suggested behaviorally based case plan language that is rooted in a Safety Organized Practice Framework and includes the danger statement and safety goal. Court workers review the suggested case plan language with parents prior to court.

Whenever possible, the family and any natural and/or formal supports are invited to participate in a Child and Family Team meeting to discuss and develop case plan objectives and activities prior to the development of the initial case plan.

Father Engagement

In most child welfare cases, the mother is the most immediately and easily identified parent, by virtue of having given birth to the children. However, efforts are made to engage fathers in the case plan, either as a single parent or a second parent. If the child is removed from the mother, efforts to locate a father are a primary focus. If a father becomes available for placement, FCS makes that placement whenever it is safe to do so.

Initially, the juvenile dependency judge makes the finding that a father has "presumed" status. The judge can make the finding based on birth certificate, parents' marriage, other court orders, or if the father has declared the child as his own. Once a father is elevated to "presumed" status, an Investigations worker has a lengthy interview with him about the allegations of child abuse and gathers information on the concerns and strengths of the family. The worker and father then talk about the case plan, and he is referred to needed services. He will then meet monthly with a social worker who will review his case plan progress and revise the case plan as necessary. If the father is the child's caregiver, the department works to assist the father with ameliorating the issues that brought the child or children to the court's attention. Reasons for fathers' exclusion from a case plan could include inability to identify or locate a birth father.

FCS launched the Father/Male Engagement Advisory Board in 2017, which consisted of male staff members, to evaluate how to incorporate best practices for father engagement into internal business processes and to collaborate with external partners. The purpose of this Advisory Board is to build a shared understanding of the issue of father/male engagement and review current policies, practices, and procedures in FCS that affect fathers/males in order to become a more father/male friendly agency. FCS also connected with Father's Corps, a program of First 5 Alameda to further support and guide the

agency's father engagement efforts. In addition, FCS is conducted data analysis via Case Reviews on how it has been engaging fathers to ascertain where the drop off points are with fathers and address those gaps. Specifically, Items 8, 11, 12, 13, and 15 were analyzed to see how fathers are engaged compared to mothers. The findings showed that mothers were engaged at higher rates than fathers. This data was then presented to all FCS staff in an effort to educate and motivate them to engage with fathers more.

The FCS Fatherhood Engagement Council was formed as a result of the CSA process and recommendation to increase engagement with fathers and became a strategy in the 2020-2025 System Improvement Plan. Accomplishments thus far are making office and visit spaces more father friendly and delivering father engagement specific trainings to staff on an ongoing basis. In 2023 an FCS Analyst was assigned to support this effort. In January 2024, the Fatherhood Council was re-booted and expanded to include community and county partners. The Council meets monthly. The expanded membership list includes representation from Public Health, MENtors, A Better Way (parent partner program) Probation, CASA, Employment and Benefits Services Division, the United Way and Cradle to Career. The engagement of community partners will provide the opportunity to assess current services available and determine gaps that exist for father specific services in Santa Cruz County. FCS celebrated fathers in June of 2024 with a fatherhood appreciation event at the Santa Cruz Boardwalk.

General Case Planning and Review – Child Welfare

Case Plans

FCS social work staff generates case plans designed to identify family strengths and needed services that will help parents keep their children safe and secure. State regulations require case plans for all families served by FCS.

FCS maintains a comprehensive case plan policy and procedure that outlines not only suggested content of the case plan but specific procedures and requirements regarding how to generate the document in CWS/CMS and the timeframes for completion.

FCS focuses much of its efforts towards early engagement of parents in needed services. Most often, parents receive information at the detention hearing about services suggested by the social worker. Immediately following the detention hearing, Investigations social workers make referrals for services so that parents do not have to wait until the implementation of their case plan by the court to get started. Many parents take advantage of these early referrals.

Case plans are legally due within 60 days of the beginning of a case, but Santa Cruz County court culture expects the case plan to be designed by the jurisdiction/disposition hearing just three weeks after removal of the child. In accordance with state law, case plans are updated at least once every six months thereafter. The Department tracks compliance with this requirement through various means. Supervisors approve the case plans in CWS/CMS and Safe Measures software generates, among other measures, continuously updated data on cases that are approaching a due date (60 days or six months). FCS supervisors review these reports monthly to track compliance. Additionally, the court expects to review an updated case plan at each status review hearing and case plan details are typically discussed at each hearing (visitation frequency and duration, the potential need for further or different services, whether or not a psychological evaluation points to additional services, etc.).

FCS has adopted Structured Decision-Making for use by all social work staff when conducting assessments of risk to children and when engaging in the case planning process. The tools provide specific guidelines for assessing level of risk in order to minimize the influence of subjective conclusions and social worker

bias. The CANS and/or the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment tool guides the case planning process to promote greater consistency and appropriateness of case plan activities designed to help parents overcome issues placing children at risk. Though the Family Strengths and Needs Assessment tool is designed to encourage social workers to prioritize services to refrain from overwhelming families, the court sometimes requires staff to increase the number of services within case plans. Some of these services do not necessarily coincide with prioritized needs identified in the SDM tool and potentially contribute to parental overwhelm. FCS and Court Partners have quarterly Dependency Court System Meetings to discuss issues such as these when they arise. The Dependency Court Systems members collaborate annually on Court and Partner Agreements, Protocols and Procedures where these topics are further resolved.

In 2017 FCS adopted the use of Child and Family Teaming as a method to engage families and their supports in the case planning process. SDM tools, and more recently CANS assessment results are discussed in the team meeting to focus the team on the highest areas of need.

Through the use of CFT meetings, families have a significant voice in the development of their case plans. Families are encouraged to choose their own service providers and to identify culturally specific services to meet their needs. As staff become more proficient in using SOP tools for engagement with families and transition to using behaviorally based case plans, families' voices will continue to be at the forefront of case planning.

In order to further promote fairness and equity, social workers and the court also take pains to ensure monolingual Spanish-speaking clients are not expected to participate in any service that is not available in their native language. If for some reason a service is ordered and then it becomes apparent that it is not available in Spanish, social workers will look for an alternative or seek the service in a surrounding county and provide resources for transportation for that client. There are occasions when families need resources in other languages such as American Sign Language or Mixteco. In these instances where a vast majority of the services will not be available in the person's dominant language, FCS ensures that there are appropriate interpreters who can accompany that family member to each service.

Social workers in Santa Cruz County have well-established relationships with most of the providers who serve FCS families. The service providers to whom FCS refers are well versed in the needs of the child welfare population and, often times are able to provide best practices to serve this population. Some of those best practices include the following: Triple P Parenting Education, Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), Matrix Substance Use Disorder treatment, Family Preservation Drug Court, and comprehensive developmental screening provided by the Stanford Neuro-Developmental Clinic. Trauma informed services within Mental Health environments include completion of the CANS that screens for trauma. The CANS is reviewed at the Child and Family Team Meeting and the team collaborates on service referrals that address the identified need.

All providers of services are aware in advance of the reporting needs of the court. Case plans are written such that both the client and the provider have a clear understanding of how FCS and the court will identify success. In this way, both the client and the provider are aware that merely participating in a service does not constitute successful resolution of the pertinent risk issues. Similarly, if a client does not necessarily participate in every service component, but is able to consistently demonstrate needed behavior change, the case plan is satisfied.

In early 2014, FCS began offering Safety Organized Practice training to social workers, supervisors and managers in an effort to further standardize practice around targeted behaviors and measurable behavior

change. Over the last year, FCS has increased the use of behaviorally based case plans as part of SOP implementation. FCS and Children’s Behavioral Health (CBH) engage in specific strategies to ensure children and youth are provided with excellent and relevant behavioral health services. Social workers and clinicians meet regularly with children and youth to engage those young people in identifying their needs. Child welfare and clinical supervisors meet monthly to ensure all children/youth in the child welfare system are being appropriately referred to CBH, assessed for services and closely followed by the team (including the clinician, the social worker and the family). FCS and Children’s Behavioral Health managers meet every other month to refine procedures and address barriers to serving children. In 2018 FCS and Children’s Behavioral Health developed a team approach to the use of the CANS assessment. The Behavioral Health clinician completes the CANS and shares the completed assessment with the FCS social worker. The CANS results are discussed in Child and Family Team meetings to address needs and develop case plan goals and objectives.

With respect to the specifics of the case plan document, all case plans detail frequency of visitation between the social worker and the child/youth and between the social worker and the parent. It is the expectation of the Department that children/youth are regularly seen in their home or placement as opposed to in the child welfare office, at visits or at school. However, there are certain circumstances under which one of these alternative contact scenarios may be used to better inform child safety and parent/child interaction. All case plans reflect a suggested visitation order between parent and child/youth for the court to adopt. Social workers use Safety Organized Practice skills when meeting with parents to assess progress and/or challenges parents are having with respect to their case plan objectives.

Social worker/caregiver (resource parent, relative caregiver, etc.) contact is also specified within the case plan. Though there are times when the caregiver’s needs are specifically addressed within the case plan document, it is not current practice to do this regularly. It is rare for the local court to order a caregiver to participate in services beyond what is needed to provide basic care for the child (maintaining school performance, participating in well child examinations, making the child available for visitation, etc.). In certain cases where a placement is considered to be the best suited for the child/youth, but that caregiver has unique needs, the Department seeks to address those needs outside of the purview of the case plan document. For example, the Department can refer the caregiver to counseling or assist the caregiver in seeking resources for a child’s unique abilities or interests. To that end, the Agency maintains flexible funds, such as the Kinship Emergency Fund, to address the resource needs of relative caregivers and resource parents. If, for instance, a relative caregiver needs a larger home to care for a child, the fund may provide one-time moving assistance. It can also pay for specialized equipment needed to care for a child. Other funds are maintained which address the various needs of children, parents and resource parents.

As to whether the child is placed in the least restrictive placement, that issue is not addressed in the case plan itself because the Santa Cruz County Court expects that detailed discussion to take place within each detention, jurisdiction/disposition, status review and 366.26 permanency report. There is significant support by the court and all attorneys to assist the Division in obtaining and maintaining kin placements. For that reason, Santa Cruz County consistently has a fairly high rate of kin placements (approximately 40% of all placements).

Significant steps are taken by Investigations social workers to obtain information on kin at the point of removal and to make every attempt to have an approved placement for that child, with someone the child knows, immediately. As stated above, FCS is now endeavoring to take the initial placement process to a higher level by assessing multiple relatives for the best well-being and permanency match for the child, as close to the outset of the dependency as possible.

As with the issue of least restrictive placement, efforts to make or finalize an adoption or other permanent plan are not addressed within the case plan document because those efforts are addressed within each court report. Within the Division, the Post-Disposition supervisory team tracks all relevant information pertaining to specific adoption efforts for children for whom reunification has either failed or has a high likelihood of failing, including the following: the acknowledgement, the child summary, the home study, obtaining medical records, full disclosure interview, consent and joinder and any post-adoption agreement. The status of these elements is discussed within the 366.26 report.

Permanency Hearings

For all family reunification cases, permanency hearings must be held within 12 months of the disposition hearing (within 6 months for children under the age of 3). To ensure compliance, the Santa Cruz Dependency Court sets the 6- and 12-month review hearing dates from the date of the dispositional hearing where family reunification services were ordered. In virtually every case, therefore, a permanency hearing is held within the required time frames.

At the permanency hearing, the court must first consider whether the child may be returned to the parent(s). For cases where reunification services have been unsuccessful, however, the court may either (1) continue reunification services for another 6 months if there is a substantial likelihood of return to the parent within the next 6 months or (2) end reunification services and set a hearing date to decide what should be the child's permanent plan (366.26 hearing). If concurrent planning efforts are successful, the child should have already been placed in the home that may become the child's permanent, preferably adoptive, placement.

The Division has facilitated several in-depth assessments of potential practice barriers to permanency and these assessments have indicated that both the Division and the court have had a history of tending to tip the scale too far away from permanency in favor of allowing for a slim chance of potential return to a parent in the future.

These assessments have led to significant restructuring of practice including deployment of staff; training regarding adoptions efforts for all youth not only for social work staff, but for court and community partners as well; a case review process for addressing barriers to permanence for specific children/youth; significant recruitment efforts for families willing to be "forever

families"; deployment of community contracts to support placements to become forever families; and use of technology and media to seek appropriate forever families for specific youth.

Santa Cruz social workers have understood that no supportive relationship takes the place of a permanent parental relationship. The Division minimizes the number of recommendations for non-permanence (such as legal guardianship or planned permanent living arrangement).

Concurrent Case Planning

Concurrent planning is a process of identification and early placement with a family that can become a permanent living situation for children should reunification with parents fail.

Traditionally, FCS had a policy that required social workers to begin the process of concurrent planning from the time the child is removed from the home and continue this active process until a concurrent plan is finalized. However, there were few guidelines as to how specifically social workers should engage in this process. Further, there was little guidance as to the On- going social worker's responsibilities and the

Adoptions social worker's responsibilities in the concurrent planning process. As a result, FCS had been focusing on ways to improve performance as it relates to California law that dictates a concurrent plan needs to be in place by disposition.

In order to address this challenge, FCS implemented relative placement and concurrent planning policies and procedures in 2007. The Relative Placement Policy and Procedure made a formalized structure for immediate identification of relatives at the time of removal with the goal of placing with a relative as the initial placement. These policies attempted to outline the roles and responsibilities of each social worker (Ongoing, Adoptions or Resource Family Approval) and what the expectations for ongoing communication are. Whether or not initial relative placement was achieved, a Home Finding social worker (through the RFA unit) was to work in conjunction with a family meeting facilitator to bring all known relatives and the parents together for a family meeting within days of removal. The intent of this meeting was for the family to identify the best and most concurrent relative placement for the child, with a strong emphasis on adoption. Unfortunately, due to budget constraints, the Department could not maintain all the positions necessary to fully implement these policies as they were written. In an effort to bolster concurrent planning efforts, the policy was re-written in 2010 and provided clear direction for each program. As to placement with relatives, they are identified through discussions with parents and youth, through the CFT process, through letters and phone calls to relatives, and through the use of computer database systems. It should be noted that efforts to locate possible non-offending parents is a primary focus of the case carrying social worker at this time. If this non-offending parent becomes available for placement, FCS makes that placement. If a petition has already been filed with the Dependency Court, the Agency makes efforts to assist the non-offending parent (if it is a father) in establishing paternity prior to dismissing the petition.

Improvement in this area is noted over the past five years. The current restructure effort has designated concurrent planning as a priority; Concurrent planning is identified as the Court Worker's responsibility. Having this designation, facilitates ownership by the Court Worker who works with the Family Finding unit in locating family who can serve as a concurrent plan. The Family Finding unit now has a structured format to search for relatives and to document these efforts in a central location can be used throughout the life of the case.

FCS has also developed a new case transfer procedure that has improved communication between the Ongoing and Permanency Unit. The increased communication has helped to identify gaps in the concurrent planning process. Challenges to concurrent planning include youth with complex behaviors and cases where it is difficult to locate family members.

With respect to the option of placing with paternal relatives, every effort is made to encourage fathers to appear at the detention hearing in order to be considered for presumed status. If a father's status is raised at that time, FCS may consider his relatives immediately. However, even if he waits until the jurisdictional/disposition hearing to have his status raised, the Division can make a placement with his relative at any time if it is the most appropriate placement for the youth.

Competing interests can pose barriers to concurrent planning. At times, appropriate relatives are located who reside a significant distance from Santa Cruz County, such that placement would make on-going visitation with parents' problematic. Although it falls short of the concurrent planning ideal of early placement, FCS will facilitate contact and visitation between the relative and the child in these cases.

FCS and Probation

FCS and the Santa Cruz County Juvenile Probation Department routinely work effectively to serve the individualized needs of youth.

Formalized structures – FCS and Probation engage in a joint protocol process to determine the appropriate jurisdiction when there is a question of which court should supervise the youth.

The social worker and the probation officer work closely to assess the youth’s criminal infractions against the backdrop of their family of origin issues. A joint report is produced and a joint recommendation for jurisdiction is made that includes the least restrictive environment that is family centered, trauma informed, and strength based. FCS and Probation also work closely with youth receiving extended foster care services who opt to remain in care after turning 18 up until their 21st birthday. FCS, Probation, Children’s Mental Health and the County Office of Education also work closely to jointly staff all youth being considered for Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP) with the Interagency Placement Committee (IPC).

FCS and Probation has partnered in supporting the development of the Comprehensive Prevention Plan as part of FFPSA (Family First Prevention Services Act) by gathering around 30 different community-based organization leaders and county leadership on a monthly basis. The goal is to develop a universally accepted practice that shifts our community’s mindset from mandated reporting to community supporting. This has required intensive planning, research, data analysis and relationship building between our agencies. The planning committee meets every two weeks to prepare for the monthly cabinet meetings-we meet in different locations around the county as well as online which allows for a larger participation by the many agencies involved.

Informal relationships – Probation has often been a resource for FCS with respect to providing an alert when a dependent child is processed into Juvenile Hall. They have also provided supervision and support during placement changes that have potential safety implications for staff. Probation placement staff has thorough knowledge of STRTP programs available around the state and provides information to FCS about the successes and challenges of different programs.

PROBATION

The Child and Family Team Meeting (CFTM) is the forum for which cases are assessed for additional services whether it is for Wraparound, the inclusion of Therapeutic Behavioral Services, private placement including out of home placement or step-down services. The CFTM’s role is to include family members in defining and reaching identified goals for the child. The individuals on the team work together to identify each family member’s strengths and needs, based on relevant life domains, to develop a child, youth, and family-centered case plan. The plan articulates specific strategies for achieving the child, youth, and/or family’s goals based on addressing identified needs, public safety, including following related court orders, and building on or developing functional strengths. The CFT typically conducts and coordinates its work through a CFT meeting (CFTM). The CFT is a group of people; a CFTM is a functional structured meeting and process of engaging the family and their service teams in thoughtful and effective planning that brings professionals, and the family’s natural supports together with a goal to minimize further involvement within the juvenile justice system.

The CFT process reflects a belief that families have capacity to address their problems and achieve success if given the opportunity and supports to do so. Assessing parents and youth for CFT meetings involves evaluating family dynamics, communication styles, cultural considerations, and any barriers to participation. The process also involves understanding the youth’s goals, identifying natural supports, and

assessing parental engagement and willingness to collaborate. By conducting thorough assessments, the CFT can be individually developed to promote positive outcomes, encourage family-driven solutions, and connect youth and families with appropriate resources for long-term success. Working with children, youth, and families as partners results in plans that are developed collaboratively and in a shared decision-making process. The family members hold a significant power of voice and choice when strategies are defined. The CFT process reflects the culture and preferences of children, youth, and families, building on their unique values and capacities and eliciting the participation of everyone on the team. It is important to recognize that at times the child, youth, and family have their own unique culture. In those cases, care must be taken to integrate their culture into the plan. Team members should help children, youth, and families recognize their strengths, and encourage them and support them to develop solutions that match their preferences. The team must respect and support the power of learning from mistakes when strategies do not work as intended so that the plan can be revised to improve outcomes.

Probation currently has four different case plans: the pre-placement case plan for those youth that are at imminent risk of removal, the Title IV-E placement and supplemental case plans for youth that are ordered into out of home placement and the JAIS case plans for youth that are not currently in placement or at imminent risk of removal but score moderate or high on the JAIS. The youth, their parent(s) and/or guardian(s) and the Probation Officer all work collectively to come up with goals for their case plans. The case plans are a working document and are reviewed with youth and family frequently and updated as needed. The case plans are reviewed and signed off by a supervisor at least once every six months, or when there is a change in services based in changes in the youth's circumstances and/or needs.

In the event that the youth being assessed in the CFT is in need of more services than available through the Wraparound program, the youth's case will be assessed for possible placement in an STRTP. At that point, a Qualitative Individual assessment referral will be made to Children's Behavioral Health for an evaluation of the youth's needs. If determined to be a fit for either Resource Family placement or STRTP, the Interagency Placement Committee (IPC) reviews the case. All parties need to agree to sign off on a case before it can be recommended to the court for an STRTP or Resource Family placement.

For the youth that get ordered into STRTP program, since there are few options in Santa Cruz and surrounding counties, family engagement and meetings can occur relatively easily and efficiently via virtual connection. Probation also encourages families to visit with their child in out of home placement and reimburses families for gas, food and lodging on a monthly basis. Planning for parent/child visitation occurs in the context of the CFT meetings informed by youth and family voice and choice. The team works with the youth and their family to set the frequency, focus and supports needed to carry out the visitation schedule while the youth is in care. During the monthly placement visits, Placement Probation Officers check in with the youth and formalize their plans for permanency.

Court reviews are scheduled a minimum of every six months. The Pre-Permanency Review Hearing is held within six months from the date the youth was originally removed from the home. In cases where the judicial process was delayed, some youth will have their Pre-Permanency Review Hearing shortly after entering placement.

8C FOSTER & ADOPTIVE PARENT LICENSING, RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

General Approval of Resource Families

The California Department of Social Services contracts with the county to approve resource family homes. The County RFA Unit is responsible for all aspects of approving resource family homes from application to approval. The county has an assigned liaison from the state. that is available for technical assistance if the County determines that an approval needs to be revoked. The contract with the state asl includes legal representation for the County, if needed. State RFA regulations outline the basis for assessing a resource parent on their home, provision of supervision and care, and attention to a child’s personal rights. The State the County RFA supervisor, and the RFA social worker evaluate compliance with the RFA standards for approving homes. Feedback from the RFA social worker, Resource Parent Recruiter/Retention Specialist, placing social workers, and service providers is a primary source of information upon which placement is recommended and accomplished.

Multiple factors are considered including, but not limited to, the reliability of the home, level of prior cooperation meeting a child’s needs, appropriateness to the well-being of the child, cooperation with the child’s service plan, ability to meet sibling placement needs, language issues, and household composition.

All potential resource parents and adult household members submit to a criminal background check. The placing social worker is responsible for completion of the background check. On those occasions when the background check is returned indicating a history of criminal activity, the criminal exemption process is put into effect as outlined by the Resource Family Approval Background Assessment Guide. Each exemption, whether simplified or standard, must be approved at the Division Director or Assistant Division Director level.

All potential resource parents must also complete a Comprehensive Family Assessment with Seneca or Wayfinder, pass a home and safety inspected conducted by the RFA Social worker, complete training requirements through the Foster Parent College, obtain a certificate for CPR & First Aid and must attend an RFA Orientation.

Although Santa Cruz County was once home to many Native Americans of the Ohlone and Costanoan tribes, currently only 1.8% of Santa Cruz residents report their ethnicity as Native American (US Census Bureau). We are not aware of any BIA recognized tribes in Santa Cruz County; on those occasions when a child coming into care is described as an Indian child, we work with the pertinent tribes by requesting confirmation of the child’s Native American status and provide notice of hearing to all required parties (references: Family Code, Section 8630 (g) and (h)). One of our senior social workers serves as a single-point-of-contact for all matters related to the Indian Child Welfare Act.

Cross-jurisdictional efforts to improve timeliness of adoptive and permanent placements include having social workers and supervisors participate in the Bay Area Supervisors of Adoptions (BASA) meetings and the Public Agency Adoption Services (PAAS) meetings, both of which provide opportunities for exchange of information regarding families waiting to adopt and children in need of permanent homes. Additionally, we utilize the Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC) process, as opportunities arise, to facilitate placement with relatives/NREFMs living outside of California, but within the United States.

In the event of needing to approve a relative or foster parent, the Probation Department has an agreement with Family and Children's Services to provide assistance with RFA process.

Recruitment

FCS currently has 26 approved resource homes, of which 21 homes are listed as concurrent homes which makes the need for continual recruitment of resource parents a priority for the County. As concurrent home become adoptive homes, they are often no longer taking additional placements. The number of

resource family homes recruited over the past several years has decreased, however targeted strategies to increase placement capacity of homes willing to take teenagers has been highly effective as the number of teens placed in resource family homes has increased by 27% over the last 4 years while placements in STRTPs have significantly decreased (from 10 in 2021 to 4 in 2024) In addition, FCS has a sufficient number Latino resource homes making it possible to place Latino children in culturally matched homes. It is more common for white children to be placed in the home of a Latino caregiver especially for emergency placements/afterhours. An area of continuing need is finding homes that can provide Intensive Services Foster Care to youth with the highest and complex needs. FCS entered into a contract with Pacific Clinics to secure 7 of these homes in Santa Cruz County. To date, Pacific Clinics has been unable to recruit Professional Parents or secure any homes within the County This will continue to be an area of focus for placement recruitment.

General Recruitment: County wide efforts to raise awareness of the needs of children in foster care and recruit quality foster and adoptive homes include:

- Monthly foster family orientations held in English throughout the year. Individualized orientations are held in Spanish as needed.
- The Department has formed a partnership with Fostering the Bay – a Bay Area Non- profit organization dedicated to working with local churches to recruit foster families from within their congregations.
- The Department maintains a website to promote foster care recruitment online.
- The Department manages a “Santa Cruz County Foster Care and Adoption” page on Facebook.

- The Department previously worked with a PR firm to fine-tune recruitment efforts. This has resulted an improved focus on the recruitment of caregivers for older youth.
- Recruitment efforts are evaluated by Resource Parent Orientation sign-in sheets and how many Resource Parents complete the RFA process.
- FCS is currently exploring working with CDSS’s Daily Solutions online social media recruitment campaign.

Targeted Recruitment: County wide efforts to raise awareness of particular groups of foster youth for whom a limited number of foster homes are currently available are ongoing. For Santa Cruz County this includes teens, LGBTQ-identified youth, sibling groups, and children with special needs. Targeted recruitment efforts include:

- Efforts to raise awareness of geographical locations within the county where there are currently an insufficient number of foster homes, and a high number of children removed.
- Creating promotional material focusing on the need for foster homes to serve the specific groups described above.
- Participating in Community events held in areas with high rates of removal to recruit foster homes so children can remain in their schools of origin and close to their neighborhood supports.
- Targeted recruitment is evaluated by the number of Resource Parents who identify their willingness to foster/parent teens, LGBTQ-identified youth, sibling groups, and children with special needs.

Child-Specific Recruitment: Outreach to individuals, such as relatives, extended family members, and others from within the child or youth’s existing support network. These efforts include:

- Outreach mindful of child/youth’s cultural identity and affiliations.
- Involving child/youth in recruitment efforts to find them a forever home

Retention of caregivers

FCS works to retain foster, adoptive, and relative caregivers by ensuring that RFA processes run smoothly, and that effective support is accessible to all caregivers. In 2023, the Resource Family Retention Workgroup was established to provide a forum for caregiver concerns to be heard and solutions to be developed. Support to Individual Caregivers

- All resource families are case managed by assigned RFA social workers. The assigned worker is tasked with offering ongoing guidance, monitoring and support to the resource family.
- Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP) – KSSP provides support and linkage to community resources to kinship families (i.e. relative caregivers and close family friends providing care to a foster child). A bilingual social worker case manages families interested in receiving KSSP services. These services might include In-home parenting support, trauma informed training, support in setting healthy boundaries with birth parents, assistance in identifying support system, and coping with the challenges tied to kinship care. The KSSP social worker facilitates a monthly support group for any kinship family interested in attending.
- A Public Health Nurse works closely with caregivers to provide needed assessments and referrals to meet children’s medical needs.
- Children’s Behavioral Health: if child is being seen by Children’s Behavioral Health, then a Mental Health Specialist in the Health Services Agency may provide therapeutic support to the caregiver and child if the specialist identifies a therapeutic need.
- The Bridge Program offers funding for full-time childcare to resource parents who have taken emergency placement of children aged 5 and under. Resource parents have the option of using their own childcare provider – or accessing the support of a provider trained in trauma-informed care.

Peer Support

The Mentor Program provides several peer-support strategies for caregivers. These strategies include access to an active group of parent mentors who partner with new resource parents to provide assistance to resource parents and offer support around general foster care issues, adoptive parenting, working with drug-exposed babies and building relationships with parents, relatives and non-relative extended family members. FCS currently has 5 Peer Mentors of which two are Spanish Speaking. All new resource parents are matched with a mentor. Caregivers can express challenges and concerns they are facing to their mentor who provides support and recommendations. Mentors who attend the RFA Recruitment and Retention Workgroup are able to share concerns to the RFA Unit.

FCS hosts two resource parent’s events throughout the year. An appreciation event is held each May along with a Winter holiday event.

Respite Care

Respite Care is a service the Department administers and provides directly to resource parents on a reimbursement basis. Twenty-Six hours of General respite care is available to all caregivers and additional respite care is provided for resource families who are caring for drug-exposed infants and have received certification through the Options for Recovery (OFR) program and to pre-adoptive families through the STAP program.

Training

Training is provided online through the Foster Parent College. The Foster Parent College Program works closely with the Santa Cruz County Human Services Department, particularly the Resource Family Approval Unit, to determine both the pre-licensing needs of resource families in the county and to provide this training described below:

- **Foundations** This is required 12-hour pre-approval resource parent training. For “matched” families who have taken an emergency placement (typically relatives or close family friends) Foundations must be completed within 90 days from the day the child being placed in the home. For “unmatched families” (those people typically thought of as traditional foster parents) Foundations must be completed before a child can be placed into their home. Foundations covers a range of topics such as child development, child trauma, cultural competency and working with FCS. Foundations is offered seven times a year in English, and twice a year in Spanish.

Training and Support to Relative/NREM Caregivers of Foster Youth:

Wayfair currently provides a monthly series that functions as both a venue for training and also ongoing support. Training topics focus on the issues and challenges tied to the care of foster youth. Resource parents are encouraged to select training topics. Time is reserved at each session to address any personal challenges that may have come up for resource parents in attendance. This series is offered in both English and Spanish.

Training and Support to other Caregivers of Foster Youth

In July 2023, FCS lost its contractor who provided ongoing support and training such as Understanding Substance Exposure (USE) for resource parents. The contractor also used to provide monthly training topics and support groups. FCS is currently unable to provide this service but is in the process of replacing the contracted services but has been unable to find a candidate.

8D STAFF, CAREGIVER AND SERVICE PROVIDER TRAINING

CHILD WELFARE

Staff, Caregiver and Service Provider Training

Staff Development in partnership with FCS provides training and professional development for social workers and supervisors to assist in the development of awareness, knowledge and skills for delivering front line services to families. In accordance with the Integrated Core Practice Mode (ICPM) training focuses on teaching social workers to engage families in order to provide safety and stability for children while respecting family culture, meeting Division 31 requirements, and achieving the best outcomes for children in the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being.

During a social worker’s first year of employment, workers receive entry-level induction training, which utilizes a structured curriculum of classroom and on-the-job activities. Social workers participate in 560 hours (12 weeks) of in-house induction training provided by the Department’s Staff Development division. This training focuses on county specific policies and procedures related to new practices and policies as related to the Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) and Families First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA); child welfare case management through the life cycle of a case; integration of Core Practice Model concepts and best practices; Federal case review; job shadowing and on-the-job training (OJT); Simulation activities; and incorporation of required state CORE training topics. Topics covered include: intake; interviewing; investigation; SDM; case planning and case management; child placement; Juvenile Court procedures;

court report writing and documentation; concurrent planning; permanency; after hours response; Division 31 Regulations; outcomes and accountability; California Law Enforcement Telecommunication System (CLETS); car seat safety; Field Safety; Trauma informed Practice; Secondary Trauma and Self Care; collaboration and partnership with CalWORKs and EBSD (crossover); customer service and addressing complaints and grievances; differential response; working with resource parents; time management; self-care; collaboration and partnership with client resources, providers, i.e. probation, children's mental health, Court partners, substance abuse treatment and parenting class service providers; personal safety; ethics; poverty; Child and Family Team Meetings CFT's); evidence based and promising practices in child welfare social work. Induction training also includes technology training on CWS/CMS, SDM, Safe Measures and Outlook. Cultural humility is incorporated into all segments of training. When subject matter is appropriate, race and equity data is shared to enhance awareness regarding the demographics of the families served. Social workers are provided examples of different aspects of culture and are encouraged to use a race and equity lens throughout their case management. Effectiveness of the training is evaluated through the use of written assignments, presentations, role-play and simulation activities, on- the-job training and ongoing supervisor and Child Welfare Trainer feedback.

In addition to the internally provided induction training, over trainees first year of employment, social workers participate in 19.5 days of CORE 3.5 classroom training, 10 E-Learning Modules provided by our regional training academy, Bay Area Academy. An additional 5 Field Based Training Activities (FBA) are part of CORE 3.5 and 3 are facilitated by the Training Supervisor and 2 by the assigned supervisor. The purpose of FBA is to provide a structure for transfer of learning activities and feedback regarding skill development. It serves as a guide for both field advisors and new social workers, providing an opportunity for trainees to practice new skills in a natural framework.

CORE 3.5 training topics include: Orientation to Child Welfare Practice, ICWA Introduction, Teaming, Collaboration, and Transparency, Trauma Informed Practice, Fairness and Equity, Court Procedures, CWS Documentation for use in the Legal System, Intimate Partner Violence, Behavioral Health, Substance Use Disorders , Critical Thinking and Assessment, Engagement and Interviewing, Concurrent Planning, Case Planning Basics, Purposeful Visitation, Writing Behavioral Objectives, Case Planning In a Team setting, Supporting Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being, Placement, Case Closure, Transition and After Care Plans, After 18, Documentation and Report Writing, Skillful Use of Authority, Federal and State Laws, Social Worker Safety, Child & Youth Development, Structured Decision Making, Child Maltreatment Identification, Worker Safety, Supporting Educational Rights & Achievement, Values & Ethics, CWS/CMS, Child Welfare Practice in a Multicultural Environment, , Indian Child Welfare Act, Family Engagement,. State CORE 3.5 training is offered cyclically, generally over a six to eight-month period within the Southern Bay Area Region (Monterey, San Benito, and Santa Cruz). Supervisors attend a Supervisor CORE training series, Foundations of Supervision, within the first year of promotion or hire. This training meets the State requirement for supervisor training. Supervisors also attend a monthly consultation 'Learning Collaborative' group, contracted through our regional training academy and facilitated by an experienced manager and leader in human services. This group provides ongoing training focused on core supervision issues for new supervisors in the field of Child Welfare.

Social workers and supervisors participate in advanced classroom training on specialized topics designed for skills enhancement and career development. An average of 700 hours of ongoing and advanced training is offered each year, in order to allow each social worker to meet the State requirement for 20 hours of continuing education annually, six of which are required to be in an ICPM topic area.

Topics are identified through the County's PQCR, and internal annual training needs assessment are addressed in advanced classroom training. Areas of need are also identified on an ongoing basis by FCS

management, supervisors, and social work staff. Areas of need are identified at staff meetings and elevated to the Leadership Team who works with the Staff Development Team to meet these needs. Additionally, training needs are identified by way of practice and legislative changes as the body of child welfare research grows and systems adapt to address legislation and policy changes at the federal and state level. Training is informed by evidence based and promising practices in child welfare. Cross training and training to multiple partners (i.e. service providers, resource parents etc.) and other stakeholders alongside child welfare staff is purposefully provided with the goals of increasing partnership in serving all youth and collaboratively identifying and treating trauma.

Some of the trainings provided in 2020–2024 were: Overview of Continuum of Care Reform (CCR); Overview of Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA); Safety Organized Practice (SOP) Advanced and Introductory Topics; Motivational Interviewing; Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) Engaging Youth about SOGIE & AB 959; Safety Mapping; Innovations for a Trauma Informed Practice; Preventing Homelessness for Youth & Young Adults with Child Welfare; Age-Appropriate, Medically Accurate Sexual Health; Statewide Technical Assistance for STRTP Leaders: Intake, assessment, and referral processing; Sexual and Reproductive Wellness for Youth in Foster Care; Foster Care Legislative Changes; Trauma Informed Care for Community Based & Residential Service Providers; Human Trafficking Education Summit 2019; Overview: Using the CANS in the California Integrated CPM; Psychotropic Medication; The Assessment of Young Children In Dependent Care; Working with Dually Involved Youth; Opiate Use: Behavioral Health Considerations for Recovery & Hope; Permanency Mapping and SOP Safety Networks, Safety Circles; CFT meeting Facilitation for Court, Family Reunification, and Family Maintenance; CFT Overview for Case Carrying Workers and Coordinators; CFT Overview for Case Carrying Workers and Coordinators; CFT Skills & SOP Integration; CFT Skills and SOP Integration: engagement, goal setting; Child Maltreatment International Conference; Ongoing After-Hours Training; Social Work Ethics; SOP Integration - Danger Statement and Safety Goal Practice for Case Closure Court Report Writing: Status Reviews, Selection & Implementation Reports, Jurisdiction-Disposition Reports; Adoption from a Child's Perspective; Adoptions Trainings for Supervisors & Leadership; Overview of Adoptions Practice in California; Field Based Training in Adoptions , Permanency & Concurrent Planning; SDM for supervisors and social workers, Hotline Assessments, Post-Disposition Tools, Fostering Connections, Beyond the Bench, Beyond Domestic Violence; Breaking Intergenerational cycles of Trauma & other Trauma Informed Practice Trainings; Case Plan Development; AAP; Safety Organized Practice; Advanced Investigation of Child Sexual Abuse and supporting the youth while working with non-offending and perpetrating parents, Advanced CWS/CMS Training, Adoptions, Referral and Intake; Father Engagement, Dependency Law Changes; Field Safety; Jail Orientations; Forensic Interviewing; Foster Ed Training; Fostering Connections to Success After 18; Implementation of SOP in CFT; Implementation of CANS in CFT; Katie A. (Pathways to Well-being) Trainings; Making Ethical Decisions in Child Welfare; Medical Assessment of Pediatric Injuries & Sexual Trauma; Mental Health Issues for Children in Foster Care; Psychotropic Medication in Foster Care; Level of Care Protocols; Supporting Father Involvement and Co-parenting; Professional Writing for Child Welfare; Staying Focused on Safety & Risk; Recognizing Drug Abuse in the Home; Restraining Orders; Child and Family Teaming, Child Adolescent Strengths & Needs (CANS) Assessment and Court Report Writing, Resource Family Approval, After Hours Response Refresher. Social workers are required to take 20 hours of continuing education once they have completed their probationary period. Staff are able to choose from a menu of training topics such as above. Training hours are also fulfilled by mandatory trainings such as Civil Rights Requirements, Sexual harassment and other topics identified by management as mandatory trainings.

Training that has been identified as a Family and Children's Services Division need for this fiscal year includes Structured Decision Making (SDM), Behavioral Case Plans, Teaming with Court Appointed Special

Advocates (CASA), Integrated Core Practice Model, Safety Organized practice (SOP), Understanding Addiction, Child and Family Team Meetings, CANS, and an after-hours response refresher. During this review period, staff were also offered training opportunities in Cultural Humility in Child Welfare Interviews, Fairness and Equity and Engagement and Interviewing which provided support for increasing Fatherhood Engagement. FCS will pursue these topics and other learning needs during FY 2024-2025. FCS continues to offer trainings virtually, in-person dependent on the subject matter.

Stakeholder Training

All CAPIT/CBCAP and PSSF funds are sub-contracted to provide support services or direct services to families. Santa Cruz County FCS routinely provides ongoing training opportunities for contracted service providers and parent consumers, including CAPIT/CBCAP and PSSF-funded contractors, using Title IVE or grant funds. The majority of provider training opportunities were offered through the regional training academy and as identified by Staff Development and Family and Children's Services.

FCS invites contracted providers, and court and youth probation partners to advanced classroom training on specialized topics designed for skill enhancement, practice changes, and legislative awareness. In the last few years, provider staff have been invited to attend FCS 101, Motivational Interviewing, Child and Adolescent Needs Assessment training, Sexual Reproduction and Wellness for Youth in Foster Care (SB89), Sexual Orientation Gender Identity Expression training (SOGIE), Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children (CSEC), Mandated Reporter, Child and Family Teaming Meeting Training, Dually Involved Youth (partnership with Juvenile Probation), Structured Decision Making, , ACT-Adoptions & Permanency Curriculum for Service Providers Working with Youth, Safety Organized Practice, Supporting Father Involvement & Co-Parenting, Positive Parenting Program (Triple P), Substance Use Disorder, and other key legislative and policy training that supports the shared missions of our department and contract providers. Resource Parents were invited to attend a variety of the above-mentioned training, in addition to Resource Family Approval training specific to onboarding new resource families supporting youth in the foster care system.

In addition to these FCS-sponsored trainings, FCS has and continues to collaborate with First 5 of Santa Cruz County and the Health Services Agency, Children's Mental Health to provide a training and certification program for the Triple P Parenting Education curriculum to several providers who work with FCS families, including Parents Center, local school districts, Children's Mental Health therapists, workers at the La Manzana Family Resource Center, and Families Together service providers. Triple P is an evidence-based parenting education program. Triple P certified omen of theses service providers provide both individualized parenting education and standardized classroom parenting education.

FCS stakeholders also participate in trainings led by the Health Services Agency's Alcohol and Drug Program, particularly trainings associated with Family Preservation Court. Trainings were held on evidence-based outpatient substance abuse treatment and other issues related to substance abuse. Social Workers, Alcohol and Drug staff, community-based service providers, and parent mentor participated in the trainings.

PROBATION

Probation officers are mandated to complete a 160-hour Probation Core course and a 40-hour PC 832 Laws of Arrest training course on peace officer duties and responsibilities, both certified by the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) – Standards and Training in Corrections (STC), within the first year of hire. All probation supervisors are mandated to attend an 80-hour Supervisor Core training course

offered through an STC certified training facility. The Probation Department places an additional requirement that all supervisors attend and complete the County of Santa Cruz Leadership Academy pertaining to personnel related matters.

Placement Unit Supervisors are mandated to attend a 24-hour course specific to foster care and out of home placement state and federal regulations. Probation officers assigned to the placement unit are also mandated to attend a 51-hour course specifically designed for probation officers assigned to probation placement units.

All probation officers are mandated by STC to complete 40 hours of approved training annually. In order to meet this requirement, officers attend a variety of trainings related to their assignments, inclusive of legal updates, evidence-based practices and training courses offered by state, regional, and local agencies. Motivational Interviewing, Emotional Intelligence, legal updates, Foster Care and Dependency court systems trainings are offered annually. STC compliance trainings are focused on officer safety in the field, working with people impacted and affiliated by gangs, proper use of force, and in addition, field officer training is provided by Santa Cruz County probation officers with training they received to educate their peers working in the field. Training courses attended by each probation officer is verified with records monitored closely and updated regularly to ensure STC compliance. It should also be noted that in addition to state recommended and county mandated trainings, each year staff are surveyed regarding upcoming training they would like to have available for the upcoming year and attempts are made by the departments training manager to locate suggested trainings for staff. Additionally, staff are provided information on specific trainings that focus on reducing implicit bias, increasing awareness around being trauma informed and building a culturally responsive organization. Our Probation Training Manager keeps a detailed log of all trainings being offered as well as which staff are attending to provide evidence of staff participation in expected trainings. STC compliance trainings are attended by all sworn officers that need to obtain their 40 annual hours, and in cases where the training is not STC compliance but rather specific to the role, i.e. foster care collaboration and education summits, only specific officers will be required to attend like in the case with Placement Officers.

Skill development and capacity building for probation staff are continuously addressed and monitored in the annual employee performance evaluation. Supervisors and Managers include an update on all trainings attended in performance evaluations and plans are made when staff are either missing STC specific trainings the reach a minimum of 40 hours and/or specific trainings that will enhance their skills related to their specific roles and duties unique to their unit assignment.

In addition, the Placement Supervising Probation Officer Core is designed for newly assigned Probation Placement Unit Supervisors and others in a leadership role within probation. This course will encompass all aspects of the probation placement process for juvenile justice youth through the lens of a supervisor/manager. Some of the important aspects would include but not be limited to case planning, concurrent planning, family finding, permanency, FFPSA state and federal requirements and the supervisor's role in the Child and Family Services Review. This course is designed to give supervisors the expertise needed to ensure that their placement unit is compliant with Division 31 requirements, Title IV-E mandates, and aspects of the supervisory role.

8E AGENCY COLLABORATION

The Juvenile Probation Division and FCS have had an evolving collaboration. Staff utilize their respective managers to communicate and problem-solve situations arising in either agency/department. Collaboration has increased significantly due to the need to address specific issues such as CSEC and Dual Status youth. In addition, many staff collaborate during child and family team meetings. Both CSEC and Dual Status have joint protocols developed for FCS and Juvenile Probation to collaborate and share information with the goal to best serve children, youth, families, and communities in the county.

FCS and Probation have long had a joint protocol for collaborative case planning and communication between probation officers, social workers and judicial officers. As a result, the dependency and delinquency judicial officers have good communication regarding crossover youth and families and have an increased knowledge of both systems' philosophy and services available to families.

FCS, Probation, and ILP have a monthly AB12 conference call where they discuss youth between the ages of 17.5 and 21. This meeting is used to verify or facilitate a stronger connection between youth and ILP Providers, to review the availability of housing assistance, and to ensure that any CDSS mandatory data entry is completed. This meeting also serves as an information sharing session between the agencies to address transition planning, issues with meeting eligibility criteria, and other ILP related services/issues.

FCS and Probation have Finalized pathway and work plan for a collaborative with Juvenile Probation for Family Finding and Engagement, a 3.5-year partnership funded in part by CDSS, to provide family and connections in hopes of creating a network of support for foster youth and a subset of juvenile probation youth.

Family Finding workers will utilize a caseload model where they are assigned a youth/child when they enter care. The Family Finding worker will work with that youth/child throughout the life of their involvement with FCS. They will immediately contact family in hopes of finding connections. They will assist the youth/children with making those connections (setting up visits, phone calls, etc.) and continue to look for relatives (via technology, talking to family members, including the youth) as long as the youth is in care. They will meet with the youth/child monthly to monitor the progress of the connections made and assist with any new connections they would like to pursue. Their family finding efforts will be child/youth specific.

Collaboration with Stakeholders

FCS collaborates with an extensive array of stakeholders, including public agencies, court system partners, community-based agencies, and caregivers. The primary collaborations are described below.

Employment and Benefits Division of Human Services Department

The Human Services Department's Employment and Benefits Division (EBSB) and the FCS division collaborate to ensure that eligible families are receiving local, state and federal benefits they are entitled to in a coordinated manner. At the time a child is referred to child welfare, it is determined whether the family is receiving benefits or services from EBSB. If FCS works with the family in any capacity and the family does not have benefits but may be eligible, FCS Social Workers refer the family to EBSB. The FCS social worker regularly asks parents and caregivers if they are enrolled in some type of healthcare coverage, and reviews possible options for healthcare with them. Parents and caregivers who may be eligible for MediCal and/or CalFRESH are referred to EBSB for enrollment.

If the family is involved in CalWORKs-Welfare to Work, case plan coordination occurs at initial case plan development and throughout the life of the case. The FCS case plan takes precedence over the employment services or Welfare to Work plan. A crossover data report is run every month, which lists all the cases actively open in FCS and Welfare to Work. Typically, about 100 children are in both an FCS case and Welfare to Work case. This report assists supervisors to monitor case plan coordination.

Health Services

FCS collaborates extensively with the Health Services Agency (HSA) of Santa Cruz County. Several of the divisions within the agency are key partners in providing needed services for children in families involved in child welfare. These partnerships are described below:

During the last SIP cycle, the FCS Division, the **HSA's Alcohol and Drug Program (ADP)**, and various community-based providers have successfully worked to increase and improve collaborative efforts to meet the needs of CWS clients struggling with substance abuse. This collaboration has resulted in on-demand substance abuse services that has eliminated any waiting lists for clients. FCS and ADP have continued to dedicate an AOD Specialist to be out-stationed in the FCS office. FCS has collaborated with ADP to implement and maintain an extensive enhancement of the Drug Dependency Court, which included incorporating an evidence-based outpatient model and expanding the numbers served. In addition, FCS and ADP management and line staff have met routinely to identify goals and work to mitigate any systemic issues. These efforts have greatly improved the collaboration between FCS and substance abuse administrators, managers and service providers.

Santa Cruz County's FCS Division, along with **HSA's Children's Mental Health (CMH) Division**, as well as the HSA's Alcohol and Drug Program, the Probation Department, County Office of Education, and a variety of community-based agency partners have a longstanding collaborative relationship through the County's interagency System of Care, which began in 1989. This partnership has grown over the years into a robust collaboration with a broad service array focused on helping to keep children and youth safely at home, in school, and out of trouble (the original System of Care goals). The collaboration supports screening, assessment, and enrollment into mental health treatment for children in foster care. In addition, regular manager/supervisor meetings are held to ensure effective service coordination.

FCS also works closely **Public Health Nursing** to meet the health care needs of children. One Public Health Nurse who is an FCS employee works with children at the time of removal from home. Her role is to gather medical histories from parents from interviews at detention hearings and to gather medical records from providers, to create a medical case management plan. An additional Public Health Nurse manages the medical care plan throughout the life of the case. This collaboration is effective and critical to ensuring the well-being of children.

Education

There has been much success in collaborating on educational issues in the last three years. The Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program developed a Memorandum of Understanding that has been signed by the County Office of Education (COE), FCS, the Juvenile Court, and school districts to delineate roles, responsibilities, and procedures for educational services to children in care as required under AB 490, using the FosterEd educational case management model. This MOU also outlines that every school-age student is assigned a FosterEd Liaison at the beginning of their dependency case.

FosterEd (originally an initiative of the National Center for Youth Law and now fully sustained by the COE) seeks to improve the educational outcomes of foster youth by ensuring each has an educational case plan,

an education team, and an educational champion supporting their success in school. FosterEd currently operates in various jurisdictions in California, Arizona and Indiana. FosterEd is a collaboration between a wide range of Santa Cruz County agencies and community organizations, including Santa Cruz County Human Services Department (FCS and Children’s Behavioral Health), Juvenile Dependency Court, CASA of Santa Cruz County, Encompass’ Transition Age Youth program, school districts, and Cabrillo College.

The goal of FosterEd involves the following critical steps:

- 1. Identifying the adult or adults who will serve as the student's educational champion.**
Educational champions are most often parents or relatives but will sometimes be resource parents. This is the identified adult who will most likely be the student’s long- term caregiver and will thus need to develop the tools and capacity to meet the student’s educational needs.
- 2. Identifying the educational strengths and needs of the student and educational champion.**
This is accomplished by careful consideration of education data such as attendance, GPA, test scores, and other school records; conversations with stakeholders such as parents, social workers and teachers; and education team meetings held at school sites.
- 3. Creating an “Education Team” for each student.** At intake, FosterEd pulls together key partners in the student’s life, including the student, school staff members, social worker, parent, caregiver, therapist, CASA and any other stakeholder with an interest in the student achieving educational success. The team creates an educational case plan. Based on identified strengths and needs, educational case plans are to ensure the child receives appropriate educational services and the educational champion receives appropriate training and technical assistance. These plans are developed, monitored and updated by the assigned FosterEd Liaison, with input from a diverse range of agencies, organizations and stakeholders, including the foster students themselves, if age appropriate.
- 4. Providing needed educational supports and services.** Monitoring by the FosterEd Liaison, a diverse range of Santa Cruz County agencies and community organizations implement the educational case plans, ensuring students in foster care and their educational champions receive the educational supports and services they need.
- 5. Continuously monitoring data to update and improve the educational case plan.** Educational case plans are regularly monitored and updated based on new education data, progress or newly identified strengths and needs.

In addition to the implementation of the FosterEd model, collaboration around education also is reflected in: the practice of consistently including FosterEd Liaisons in the Child and Family Teaming process; the participation of FCS and other community agencies in the Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program Executive Advisory Council; the continual use of the “parent’s educational report to court” and FosterEd Liaison educational updates in social worker reports to court; the development of transportation plans to ensure that foster students can remain in their school of origin; the inclusion of foster youth education-related provisions in school district local plans (LCAPs); and ongoing trainings on how to best support foster youth in education, offered to both schools and FCS.

Court Partners

Court partners in Santa Cruz County include the juvenile court judge, attorneys for parents and children, County Counsel, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), FCS staff, and the Court Clerk. The Dependency Court Systems Committee, comprised of these partners, meets bimonthly to address collaboration issues. All court participants have an opportunity to express their views and have them considered by the court. The court process is adversarial by nature. However, in spite of opposing

interests, court partners generally work well together and use both formal processes (such as settlement conferences and mediation) and informal opportunities to arrive at the best results for families.

In 2008, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed by FCS and CASA that delineates the roles and responsibilities of managers and workers in both organizations. This MOU detailed communication procedures including the joint supervisor and management meetings between CASA and FCS. In addition, the FCS Division Director and p program managers meet monthly with the CASA Director and Program Manager to address issues regarding the collaboration between FCS and CASA, and there are quarterly meetings among FCS supervisors and CASA supervisors.

Community-Wide Collaborations

The FCS Division collaborates with various community-based service providers to meet the service needs of children and families. Most of these organizations are discussed in more detail in the section on service array. Most are also members of the **Children’s Network**, a countywide body whose purpose is to “encourage the development of a comprehensive and collaborative service delivery system for children and youth.” The Children’s Network membership is made up of child welfare, health services, juvenile probation, schools, parks and recreation, law enforcement, courts, and service providers. The Children’s Network provides a venue for coordination of service delivery, launching new initiatives and makes recommendations for the distribution of CAPIT, CBCAP, PSSF and Children’s Trust Funds for services to children and families.

A major collaboration has been the county’s **Triple P Collaborative**, which has introduced the evidence-based Positive Parenting Program (Triple P) to Santa Cruz County. This collaborative was spearheaded by First 5, Children’s Mental Health, and FCS. The directors of these three entities meet regularly as the steering committee for the collaborative. In 2010 service providers were trained and certified in Triple P parent education levels 3, 4 and 5. The community now has several individual practitioners from various agencies/programs who are accredited to provide Levels 3, 4 and/or 5 of Triple P. The majority of child welfare parents participate in Triple P services as part of their case plan. The response from parents has been overwhelmingly positive. Many parents report that the Triple P class, in conjunction with Triple P-based coaching during supervised visits, has improved their confidence in their parenting skills. Several practitioners have shared examples of how Triple P has helped parents learn concrete and practical parenting skills, which has resulted in improved relationships with their children. The collaborative provides ongoing training to Triple P practitioners in the community.

The most recent collaboration is the **Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet of Santa Cruz County**. The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 and California’s related Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) Program offer an unprecedented opportunity to systematically shift from reactive responses to earlier and more proactive support. Through an inclusive planning process and the next steps to implement and monitor progress, counties in California have been offered a pathway to shift mindsets, policies, funding, and programming “upstream” through the continuum of prevention for children, youth, and families. In March of 2021, FCS and Probation jointly opted in to receive FFPSA funding for prevention efforts in Santa Cruz County and formed the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet.

Santa Cruz County public, community and family partners have made an unwavering commitment to work together to align government, community, and family stakeholders to maximize wellness for our county’s children and their families. The vision of Santa Cruz County’s Family First Prevention Services Program is thriving children and families living in a resilient, just community.

Family and Children Services (FCS) and Juvenile Probation are the county leads for the Child Youth and Family Well-Being Cabinet and the cross-sector Cabinet partners include the Office of Education, Behavioral Health Department, other health partners, parenting programs, local nonprofit and community based organizations, First 5, the Public Health Department, family resource centers, youth advocacy groups, the Public Defender’s office, school district representatives, and others who touch the lives of children and families in our community.

The Cabinet has been meeting monthly from September 2022 to the present. Together, the Cabinet developed a Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) to align with the California Department of Social Services Family First Prevention Program. The CPP describes the local approach to building systems for prevention so that more children and youth can stay safely in their homes and their communities and fewer children, and youth will become involved with child welfare systems. The CPP has been informed by needs, assets, and gaps, determined by quantitative and qualitative data, and prioritized through the guidance of the Cabinet. At the broadest level, this plan articulates and lifts up shared commitments to prevention, made possible through collaboration, related initiatives, funding, and continued attention to results. The plan was approved in August of 2023 and the Cabinet in engage in the initial steps of implementation.

Collaborations with Individual Community-Based Service Providers

The **Parents Center** has been a non-profit counseling agency in Santa Cruz County since 1975, with a mission to serve families with children from birth to 18 years. The Parents Center has had a contract with FCS to provide counseling services and parent education in both North and South County to referred families since 1977. The Parents Center has also provided court ordered supervised visitation services in both North and South County since 1982 and after-hours hotline services for the entire county for over 15 years. Parents Center and FCS meet monthly to review issues and challenges of providing services for families in the child welfare system.

Encompass Community Services provides services to many CWS families and children. The organization has served the Santa Cruz community for almost 25 years. Encompass has four service components: Child and Family Development Programs, Youth Services, Community Recovery Services, and Community Support Services. FCS contracts with Encompass to provide differential response services (discussed further below under Prevention Collaborations), as well as Independent Living Program and Transitional Housing Program-Plus services, and supportive services to AB12 youth. Encompass is a member of the System of Care and utilizes EPSDT funding to provide mental health services as a component of these programs. FCS enjoys a very close and effective collaboration with Encompass in operating these critical programs. The ILP and THP+ programs work seamlessly with FCS and have an excellent record of achieving positive outcomes for youth in the areas of education and employment. Regular meetings are held with the contractor to coordinate services and ensure that objectives are met. Encompass offers two other child abuse prevention programs in addition to Families Together. These three prevention programs are discussed below.

Prevention Collaborations

FCS’s collaborates with Encompass Community Services to provide two child abuse prevention programs as described below:

- **Families Together (FT)**, the Santa Cruz County differential response program, was launched a by public/private consortium that included FCS, Public Health, Children’s Mental Health, First 5 and Encompass. The program was planned and designed through an intensive collaborative effort

where all parties participated in the shaping and scope of the program. The program continues to collaborate closely with FCS on referrals, as all referrals to FT are received from FCS. Currently 25% of a Senior Social Worker is dedicated to assist with the engagement of referrals. Challenges do arise regarding the flow of referrals when referrals are not processed timely by FCS due to competing demands. Each time this has happened, the issue has been resolved; however, this process will continue to be monitored closely to ensure timely referrals. HSD also provides evaluation support to the program by analyzing data on the occurrence of substantiated allegations for those who have completed FT services. These data are used in evaluation reports provided to First 5 by a local evaluator.

- **PAPÁS/Supporting Father Involvement**, described earlier in this report, is locally funded. As noted in the service array section, the program provides multiple services centered on an evidence-based parent education model that emphasizes fathers' relationships with their children and families. Beginning in 2003, FCS spearheaded the project and was the fiscal agent for an initial OCAP grant, but since 2007 it has been fully based in the community as a program of Encompass. PAPÁS receives regular referrals from Families Together and from FCS. FCS is working towards a more formal relationship with PAPÁS in order to share information on father progress and coordinate efforts to increase father engagement by other family serving agencies.

Local Tribes

There are no Bureau of Indian Affairs recognized tribes in Santa Cruz County. FCS is currently working towards engaging the local tribal community. However, a tribal representative from the Esselen Tribe provided feedback during the Stakeholder Kickoff meeting.

System Improvement Planning Collaboration

The SIP Steering Committee was established in 2006 and has operated continuously since that time. This committee has approximately 20-25 members representing public and private stakeholders in the child welfare system. The committee is chaired by a member of the Board of Supervisors and provides ongoing oversight to the County's child welfare system improvement work. During the development of the CSA and SIP, the committee provides extensive guidance and input into the process. Once the SIP is developed, the steering committee receives quarterly updates on the progress of improvement strategy implementation and provides feedback to the Division and partners.

8F SERVICE ARRAY

CHILD WELFARE

Overview

Santa Cruz County is a community that benefits from a wide array of services. FCS and its partner providers refer families to a host of services within the community. In addition, since 2010, Santa Cruz County United Way has maintained a 211 service for access to resource and services information via the telephone, text or online search. Any caller can get information 24 hours a day about local resources and supportive services. Services in the community that are regularly accessed by child welfare families include:

Child/Youth Development:

- Developmental Assessment
- Educational Support
- Independent Living Training & Support

- Children and Foster Youth Advocacy

Parenting Education:

- Purposeful (including therapeutic) Supervised Visitation
- Parenting Classes and Support Groups
- Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)

Substance Use:

- Assessment & Testing
- Outpatient Alcohol and Drug Treatment
- Inpatient/Residential Alcohol and Drug Treatment/Sober Living Environments
- Prenatal Alcohol and Drug Screening and Referral

Behavioral Health:

- Screening & Assessment
- Counseling (individual or group)
- Inpatient/Residential Services
- Katie A. Services

Physical Health:

- Screening & Assessment
- Public Health Nurse Home Visits
- Public Health Nurse Medical Case Management

Intimate Partner Violence:

- Shelter
- Counseling & Education
- Family Support
- Home Visits/Case Management

Economic Support and Services:

- Rental Subsidies
- Transitional Housing
- Income and Basic Needs Support
- Job Search Support
- Job Training
- Benefits Application Assistance
- Food Assistance

Assessment

A variety of assessment tools are used to assist workers in ensuring that family needs are met. FCS primarily uses Structured Decision Making (SDM) Tools for internal assessments. This is a set of online assessment tools developed by the Children’s Research Center. The SDM Hotline Tools, as well as Risk and Safety Assessments, are research-based and are used to determine the level and immediacy of the initial response and as a basis for recommendations in Court reports. The Family Strengths and Needs Assessment identifies the priority needs and strengths of a family in order to build an effective case plan. After these assessments, FCS Social Workers refer the parent and/or child for comprehensive assessments in specific areas. The following is a list of the primary assessments utilized:

- **Child Behavioral Health:** Court workers submit referrals for all children and youth within three business days of opening a child welfare case. Once the referral has been received, the Behavioral Health intake therapist completes the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment tool to assess the well-being of children and youth, identify their strengths and needs, inform support care coordination, aid in case planning activities, and inform decisions about placement. The caregiver has the option of completing a Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL) if desired, but the CANS is comprehensive as to include any of the CBCL concepts. If the child is 12 or older, s/he also completes an Ohio Scales (Youth version) to assess problems, functioning and satisfaction from the youth perspective.
- **Child Development:** Children under 5 whose parents are participating in the Family Preservation Court, receive an Ages and Stages Questionnaire which is a developmental screening that provides information on whether the child should be assessed for delays.
- **Neurodevelopment:** When warranted, a comprehensive assessment is completed by the Stanford Neuro-Developmental Foster Care Clinic. This clinic consists of a neuro- developmental assessment team which includes a Stanford pediatric fellow and a developmental psychologist from the Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital. The clinic provides a comprehensive assessment of the social-emotional development of a young child, as well as service planning and case management. In addition, children presenting with significant developmental delays are referred to San Andreas Regional Center whose staff assesses children for profound developmental disabilities.
- **Adult Substance Abuse:** FCS social workers refer individuals who present with substance abuse issues to be assessed by Health Services Agency (HSA) Alcohol and Drug Specialists. These specialists use the Screening and Assessment for Substance Use Disorder (ASAM) Criteria to assess the presence and severity of addiction. The specialist then refers the individual to appropriate treatment, which is funded by MediCal or by CWS allocation and realignment funds. Parents who participate in Family Preservation Court, a specialized court that processes cases where drug or alcohol abuse is a significant contributing factor in child abuse or neglect, receive ongoing assessment and case management by an HSA Alcohol and Drug Specialist.
- **Adult Behavioral Health:** Assessments for counseling services and ongoing treatment are provided for most parents at the Parents Center, a local non-profit counseling agency that serves FCS families who reside throughout the County. Parents with a higher level of need are served by Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency’s Behavioral Health Division.
- **Adult and Child Physical Health:** A Public Health Nurse (PHN) who is an FCS employee works with children who are involved in the dependency court system and gathers medical histories from parents and medical records from providers. She then creates a medical case management plan. The FCS PHN handles all Family Maintenance cases, and the HAS PHN handles all Supportive Transition (AB12) cases. Cases that are in Family Reunification and Permanency Planning may be followed by either the FCS PHN or the HSA public health nurse who manages the medical case plan throughout the life of the case. Children are referred to local clinics and hospitals for any needed medical intervention.
- **Probation Assessments:** In the event that a dependent youth is involved with the Juvenile Justice system, probation completes the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS), a multidimensional assessment and supervision tool that includes a risk and needs assessment to help workers develop appropriate intervention strategies for each youth at intake. The probation placement unit reviews all assessments (such as San Andreas Regional Center assessments, Behavioral Health assessments, psychological and/or neuropsychological evaluations, substance use disorder assessments), individual learning plans and social and educational history available for appropriate level of care placement. Additionally, the placement alternative Wraparound program performs an assessment of needs and risks, a Behavioral Health assessment and a

thorough review of all educational records. Staff works closely with the educational system and parent/guardian(s) to identify the need for an IEP update or other assessment(s)/services if appropriate.

- **Service Provider Assessments:** Each service provider typically conducts an assessment particular to the outcome they are working to achieve with the client, for example parent education programs typically conduct assessments on parenting knowledge, skills and attitudes.

Service Descriptions

Families receive a combination of services directly provided by FCS Social Work Staff and those provided by other public agencies as well as private agencies. FCS social workers assess family needs and broker services for children and families. Numerous public and private organizations offer a wide array of services to children and families involved with FCS. Service referrals are made dependent on the needs of children and parents that are determined in the assessments mentioned above. In terms of gaps in the service array, there is a need for access to services during evenings and weekends, crisis response outside of traditional work hours, respite homes, and therapeutic foster homes.

Population Based Services

Specific services are designed to serve specific ethnic or gender-based populations. These are listed and described below.

Ethnic Minorities

By far, the largest ethnic/minority population in Santa Cruz County consists of Latinx. Within this group, there is also a significant monolingual Spanish-speaking population. Virtually every service provider offers culturally competent services in Spanish as well as English. Some have additional resources to provide services in other languages such as Tagalog and Mixteco. Family and Children's Services (FCS) provides child welfare assessment and case management services in English and Spanish by trained culturally competent staff. Services can be provided in other languages via translation services. Several key service providers located in the major population centers in Santa Cruz County also provide culturally competent services to ethnic/minority populations. Feedback from stakeholders, staff and families that while services are available, there are often long wait lists for parents to engage in services which can have an impact on timely reunification. Community service providers specializing in minority populations are Santa Cruz County has very small populations of black and Asian Americans resulting in limited local services to serve these populations, Social workers work with parents and caregivers to identify culturally appropriate services.

- **Family Resource Centers (FRC)** are centrally located in the five distinct geographical locations of the county. Each of the FRCs have trained culturally competent staff providing an easily accessible, comprehensive array of services designed to meet the unique needs of the residents in the community they serve. Each of the resource centers provides both direct services and information and referral, including parenting education, health advocacy, resource distribution, case management, counseling and community organizing/empowerment services. In southern Santa Cruz County in the city of Watsonville, where the largest numbers of Latinx residents live, La Manzana FRC is housed in a central and easily accessible downtown location. Several programs are situated around a large, enclosed plaza. The FRC provides legal and financial referrals, childcare access, family advocacy, support groups, parent and child counseling, assistance with public benefits applications for SSI, TANF, MediCal, Food Stamps, Healthy Families, Healthy Kids, and passport applications. Parenting education is offered through a variety of programs including

Triple P, Cara y Corazon which is designed to meet the unique needs of the Latinx population, Play and Learn and Renacer, a support group for parents of children with special needs. Family education services are also available, many of which are specific to the needs of Latinxs such as adult Spanish literacy and English classes. In northern Santa Cruz County, Familia Center FRC is dedicated to serving low income Latinx families and provides a similar wide array of services, including those designed to ease access to social services through advocacy, form and application assistance, translation assistance, information and referral and direct services such as topical and relevant education workshops, parenting education classes in Spanish (Triple P), homework clubs and recreational opportunities for children, and food distribution. All of the FRCs conduct outreach to their local communities through distribution of written material and engagement events in order to reach the underserved in their communities.

- **Substance Use Disorder Treatment:** Alto South Outpatient Services in Watsonville provides culturally competent, bilingual drug and/or alcohol abuse treatment services to adults. Services include individual, family and group counseling, SUD education, early sobriety, relapse prevention, anger management, and domestic violence prevention. Services are based on a sliding fee scale, but no one is denied services due to inability to pay. Si Se Puede is a residential substance abuse treatment program providing SUD services designed to be culturally sensitive to the needs of Latinx men. Services include residential treatment, on-going assessment, education, aftercare and exit planning. All treatment programs within the county, including Sobriety Works, Alto, Janus, and New Life have at least one bilingual/bicultural staff member.
- **Intimate Partner Violence:** Monarch Services offers services to end and prevent domestic violence and sexual assault by providing intervention and prevention services in a culturally sensitive way. Services are available in Spanish and include crisis intervention, emergency shelter, community education and services to children and youth. Walnut Avenue Women’s Center (WAWC) is a non-profit organization dedicated to improving the quality of life for women, children and families in the local community. The WAWC has full-time and volunteer advocates available to support victims of intimate partner violence (IPV). The advocates are trained and certified IPV counselors. They offer a 24-hour bilingual domestic violence crisis hotline, one-on-one peer advocacy, legal advocacy, support groups, an emergency interim shelter, and clinical counseling. All support services are provided in English and Spanish.
- **Youth Services:** Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA) provides education, training, counseling and prevention services to students, families and staff of the Pajaro Valley Unified School District in Watsonville (which has a large Latinx student population), with the goals of preventing criminal behavior, gang involvement, truancy, and drug, alcohol and tobacco use. With its south county location and with its bilingual, culturally competent staff, PVPSA serves a significant Latinx population with bilingual, culturally competent staff. PVPSA provides alcohol, drug and tobacco prevention and education programs for youth and adults, youth and family counseling, violence prevention and intervention, community-based prevention efforts, school dropout prevention and parenting education. Barrios Unidos seeks to prevent and curtail violence among youth in Santa Cruz County by providing culturally competent, esteem enhancing and self-affirming educational activities and services for youth.
- **Father Support:** MENtors/ Supporting Father Involvement is a local program designed to find the most effective ways to increase father participation in families and community. MENtors is located in Watsonville and draws much of its client base from the local Latino population. Fathers participate in highly structured group sessions centered on activities to promote self-esteem, relationship building with the mother and child, recognizing generational family patterns, and dealing with stress and stress reduction. Fathers also receive a Family Worker who assists in brokering needed services and resources in the community.

- **Bilingual Legal Services:** The Santa Cruz County Immigration Project provides immigration legal services including naturalization, appeals, waivers, information & referral and community education & advocacy for persons legalizing under IRCA & related immigration programs. California Rural Legal Assistance serves the rural poor in Santa Cruz County with a mission to strive for economic justice and human rights on behalf of the rural poor (many of whom are ethnic/minority group members) by providing no-cost legal services and a variety of community education and outreach programs. CRLA serves individuals but also takes on multi-client cases that grapple with the root causes of poverty.
- **Community-based Health Services.** Salud Para La Gente is located in South Santa Cruz County and provides free/low cost primary health care services to the underserved populations including ethnic/minority populations in Santa Cruz County. Staff members speak a number of languages including Spanish, Tagalog, Mixteco and English. Services include medical and dental care, eye care, Obstetrics and Gynecology, elder care and community outreach.

Services to Native American Children

Very few children served by FCS are identified as having American Indian heritage. However, the department adheres to state law and regulation requirements for determining whether children have American Indian heritage to ensure compliance with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA). Client needs are assessed to assure that the unique needs of each child and family are met. This assessment is accomplished by direct interview of the child and family, review of available history, consultation with other agencies or individuals who have had contact with the child or family, and consultation with experts in specific topic areas.

Native TANF provides services to Native Americans residing in Santa Cruz County, offering cash assistance and supportive services to eligible needy Native American families with children in need of temporary aid and services. Services also include job preparation, employment opportunities, and other support services to increase self-sufficiency. The four purposes of the Native TANF Program are to provide assistance to needy families so their children may be cared for in their own homes, end the dependence of needy parents on government benefits by promoting job preparation, work and marriage, prevent and reduce out of wedlock pregnancies and encourage the formation and maintenance of two parent families. Cultural sensitivity is built into the service delivery models as Native families may be more comfortable with culturally relevant based programs which specifically address their needs.

As indicated in other areas of this report, Santa Cruz County has no federally recognized tribes and low numbers of Native American Families that come into contact with FCS. When Native American children come into care, Tribal Authorities are notified but do not often choose to participate in case planning activities. Due to limited resources, social workers have to be creative in finding activities when tribes do make recommendations. Such as finding online resources that aren't available in the community.

Services by Geographical Area

Santa Cruz County, which is geographically the second smallest county in California (though there are many counties with smaller populations), has two social service centers located in the two largest population centers: the cities of Santa Cruz and Watsonville. Additionally, many services are provided in local Family Resource Centers strategically placed throughout the county in more localized population centers. They are the Davenport Family Resource Center serving the north coast region, Mountain Community Resource Center serving the San Lorenzo Valley and mountain communities, La Familia FRC serving greater Santa Cruz, Live Oak FRC serving the mid-county communities, and La Manzana FRC serving Watsonville and the south county communities. As already mentioned, these FRCs specialize in

providing many direct services to meet needs particular to the communities they serve and in easing access to resources not directly provided by the centers.

Services are fairly accessible to families in the majority of locations in the County. Families residing in the San Lorenzo Valley are impacted by transportation issues and often times weather events. Social workers use the family's network of support to identify issues and work with them to address barriers the family experiences accessing services.

Services for children with Disabilities

In the summer of 2010, FCS began referring children under five with suspected developmental delays to the Stanford Neuro-Development Clinic. This service provides intensive multi-disciplinary assessment of physical, developmental and psychological needs. Additionally, FCS screens for developmental delays utilizing the ASQ assessment tool for children whose parents are participating in the Dependency Drug Court (locally called "Family Preservation Court"). For all other children, social workers may make a referral to the public health nurse who utilizes the Denver II Developmental Screening Test to assess developmental milestones/issues.

Any child served by FCS who presents with developmental delays is referred to San Andreas Regional Center for assessment for Early Start services, or Regional Center services for children with developmental disabilities as defined by the Lanterman Act. Early Start provides family-centered early intervention services for children ages 0 to 3 who have or are at risk of having disabilities. Early Start provides assessments, counseling, and development of an individualized Family Service Plan. Regional Center Services are available for children with a (profound) disability recognized by the Lanterman Act, which usually is only applicable to children aged 3 and above due to diagnostic limitations associated with younger children. Services include assessment, case management, service coordination, respite, residential placement, behavior modification and adaptive skills training case management, referrals, and follow-up at 3 months and 12 months after the initial visit.

The application process for children and youth to receive services through the Regional Center can be lengthy and initial applications can be denied creating the need to appeal which further delays receiving necessary services. Children's Behavioral Health is utilized to try to fill the gap in services to prevent placement disruptions. Caregivers are referred to Special Parents Information Network (SPIN) who are in need of support and advocacy in dealing with children/youth with special needs.

Services for families and individuals who are unhoused

FCS social workers make referrals for any families or youth on their caseload who are unhoused or marginally housed and who can benefit from homeless services. The Homeless Services Center provides services to the homeless in Santa Cruz County. The Center includes several shelters, a Daytime Essential Services Center that provides meals, shower and laundry facilities, mail service, computer access, clothing, work-readiness workshops, and AA and NA meetings, and access to healthcare. Santa Cruz County Health Services Agency (HSA) provides health services to unhoused or marginally housed youth, adults and families with children through the Homeless Persons Health Project (HHPH). Services may include information and referral for health, Behavioral Health, substance abuse, shelter, social services, housing benefit programs, food and other services. Families in Transition (FIT) is another service provider that specializes in serving homeless families with children. FIT provides direct housing assistance and case management and collaborates closely with FCS to serve clients involved in the child welfare system.

Santa Cruz County FCS has been implementing the Bringing Families Home (BFH) program since May 2017. The goal of BFH is to reduce the number of families in the child welfare system experiencing homelessness, increase the number of families reunifying, and to reduce foster care placements. FCS has partnered with a local homelessness services agency, Housing Matters. Housing Matters provides housing case management services and housing navigation.

FCS is currently participating in a countywide effort to create a strategic plan to end homelessness in Santa Cruz County. The strategic plan will address the specific needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults and families. Multiple stakeholders from several sectors in the community are involved.

Other services available in Santa Cruz County include:

- Doran Center for the Blind provides evaluation, a low vision clinic, training in daily living skills, orientation and mobility, in-home volunteer support and social activities as well as training and support groups for families and caregivers.
- Special Parents Information Network (SPIN) is a parent-to-parent organization that provides support and advocacy on behalf of families that have children of any age with special needs.
- In-Home Supportive Services provides caregiver support for aged, blind and disabled individuals, including children, to enable them to remain at home and to avoid institutional care.
- Easter Seals of Central California provides information and referral, one-on-one educational assistants, educational programs, camps, mobility training, equipment loans, support groups, social and recreational programs for children and adults.
- BALANCE4kids is a local non-profit advocacy and service organization for students with disabilities. Services include one-to-one instructional assistants, respite workers, as well as sponsoring and providing funds for enhanced school-based services for children with special needs.

Prevention Services

A number of collaborative programs are working to prevent child abuse and neglect, and these programs are detailed below.

Families Together/Differential Response

Families Together is the only comprehensive child abuse early intervention and prevention program in the county. This initiative, using a differential response model, is a collaborative effort between the FCS Division and Encompass Community Services. Funding from First 5, and Santa Cruz County Health Services and Human Services Departments (including CCTF, CAPIT, and PSSF Family Support) are braided together to support this program. Families Together is an essential part of the Differential Response strategy developed in Santa Cruz County to reduce recurrence of child abuse and neglect. It is an innovative program that utilizes home-based, individualized services with an emphasis on the parent-child relationship and child development and parent education. Participation in Families Together is voluntary. Family and Children’s Services (FCS) refers parents and pregnant women to this program when they’ve been reported to FCS and the referral has been:

- assessed out
- investigated and the case has been closed and the outcome was substantiated or inconclusive.

Once a referral is identified, an FCS social worker contacts the family to engage them in voluntary community-based services. The program has been actively serving families since fall of 2007. Once the verbal consent is established, a Family Support Specialist meets with the family and works with them to determine which available services would be most beneficial to the family. For the families that participate

in the program, the results are extremely promising. On average, 100% of the children who receive these services remain in their home at the 6 month and 12-month mark after termination of services. Expansion of these service is in discussion; however, a capacity issue has been identified as the program is currently serving the maximum number of clients.

Triple P

Family and Children’s Services, along with many local service providers, has chosen Triple P as our primary approach to parent education. Classes are available in person and online and are offered in English and Spanish. Triple P is a comprehensive, evidence-based parenting and family support system designed to: 1) Increase parents’ confidence and competence in raising children; improve the quality of parent-child relationships; 2) de- stigmatize parenting information and family support and 3) make evidence-based parenting information and interventions widely accessible to parents. The Triple P system consists of five levels of interventions of increasing strength including:

- Level 1 – Universal (media-based parenting information campaign)
- Level 2 – Selected (information and advice about specific parenting concerns provided in 1-2 brief sessions or in large-group seminars)
- Level 3 – Primary Care (brief consultations about specific parenting concerns provided in 1-4 sessions)
- Level 4 - Standard or Group (intensive training in positive parenting skills, offered as 10-week sessions to individual families or 8-week group sessions).
- Level 5 – Enhanced or Pathways (additional modules for families where parenting difficulties are complicated by other sources of family distress (e.g., marital conflict, parental depression, anger management problems or high levels of stress).

Between 2020-2024, 18,000 parents and 34,300 children have participated in the program. Participating parents who completed assessments measuring her levels of parent skills and knowledge showed substantial improvements in all parenting domains. Parents with more serious parenting issues show the greatest level of improvements.

Thrive by Three

Thrive by Three (TBT) is a California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) Welfare to Work (WTW) Program that provides comprehensive child abuse early intervention and prevention services to the entire county. TBT is designed to help families with young children connect with supportive home visiting programs designed to improve knowledge about child development, parent-child attachment, and safety in the home. Eligibility for TBT is based on CalWORKs participation and are for those who are pregnant, parenting children ages 0-3, and/or child welfare impacted families receiving family maintenance services. TBT is connected to four nurse home visiting programs in the county: Families Together – TBT, Early Head Start (EHS), Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP) and Public Health Field Nursing (PHN) home visiting programs. This program is provided in collaboration with First 5.

Prevention Education

In September 2008 the County Board of Supervisors designated the Children’s Network as the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) for Santa Cruz County and contracted with United Way to provide child abuse prevention messaging to the community. The Children’s Trust Fund used to fund these CAPC services. Each year there is an intensive community education effort in April’s Child Abuse Prevention month including tabling at community events, spreading information via news media and print, publications, trainings, and social media. Information such as posters and parenting tips sheets are located at each

Family Resource Center and public agencies throughout the year. The Children’s Network is supported with Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP) funds.

Prevention Workgroup

In January 2019, OCAP invited counties to begin discussions on how to increase and coordinate prevention efforts throughout the state. Santa Cruz County sent a group consisting of FCS, Juvenile Probation, Children’s Behavioral Health, Public Health, First 5, County Office of Education, the Dependency Judge, Family Resource Centers (Community Bridges), and Families Together (Encompass). Since this convening, a Prevention Workgroup was established that meets monthly to coordinate prevention efforts and determine the breadth and depth of prevention-related services in the county. In 2022, the Prevention Workgroup merged with another prevention effort and became part of the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet.

The Child, Youth and Family Well-Being Cabinet

The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 and California’s related Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) Program offer an unprecedented opportunity to systematically shift from reactive responses to earlier and more proactive support. Through an inclusive planning process and the next steps to implement and monitor progress, counties in California have been offered a pathway to shift mindsets, policies, funding, and programming “upstream” through the continuum of prevention for children, youth, and families. In March of 2021, FCS and Probation jointly opted in to receive FFPSA funding for prevention efforts in Santa Cruz County and formed the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet.

Santa Cruz County public, community and family partners have made an unwavering commitment to work together to align government, community, and family stakeholders to maximize wellness for our county’s children and their families. The vision of Santa Cruz County’s Family First Prevention Services Program is thriving children and families living in a resilient, just community.

Family and Children Services (FCS) and Juvenile Probation are the county leads for the Child Youth and Family Well-Being Cabinet and the cross-sector Cabinet partners include the Office of Education, Behavioral Health Department, other health partners, parenting programs, local nonprofit and community based organizations, First 5, the Public Health Department, family resource centers, youth advocacy groups, the Public Defender’s office, school district representatives, and others who touch the lives of children and families in our community.

The Cabinet has been meeting monthly from September 2022 to the present. Together, the Cabinet developed a Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) to align with the California Department of Social Services Family First Prevention Program. The CPP describes the local approach to building systems for prevention so that more children and youth can stay safely in their homes and their communities and fewer children, and youth will become involved with child welfare systems. The CPP has been informed by needs, assets, and gaps, determined by quantitative and qualitative data, and prioritized through the guidance of the Cabinet. At the broadest level, this plan articulates and lifts up shared commitments to prevention, made possible through collaboration, related initiatives, funding, and continued attention to results. The plan was approved in August of 2023 and the Cabinet in engage in the initial steps of implementation. Areas of focus for the Cabinet compliment needs identified by the CSA process Specifically to increase services for parents exiting the child welfare system and identifying families at risk

for entering the system. Efforts are underway for increasing capacity for parenting education and to lift up the voices of parents with lived experience.

Intervention Services

FCS provides court-ordered family maintenance services when the child can safely remain at home with the provision of these services. The family works with their FCS Social Worker who provides case management and participates in an array of services described below. However, if a child cannot remain safely at home the child is placed in out of home care and services are provided to the family to support reunification.

Services provided directly by FCS staff include referral screening, referral investigation, dependency investigation, case planning and coordination, case management, permanency planning and adoption support. FCS coordinates a host of services implemented by other service providers which include parent education, behavioral health services, substance abuse treatment and support, health services, intimate partner violence intervention and prevention, employment support, and housing support.

Parent Education: Several parent education models are available in the county. The two that FCS involved parents typically participate in are described below:

- **Triple P: Parents Center**, a contracted provider, now uses the Triple P evidence-based parent education model for all its parenting classes. The response to this model from both service providers and families continues to be very positive. In addition to the Triple P classes, Parents Center visit supervisors and therapists also use Triple P principles and materials in their work with FCS clients. The majority of parents in FCS are required to participate in parent education provided by the Parents Center.
- **Positive Discipline for Parents in Recovery** is a parent education model based on Adlerian theory that human behavior is motivated by the need to feel a sense of connection and significance. The basic philosophy is that children thrive when they feel a sense of connection with others. Parents in Family Preservation Court, particularly is those with older children, sometimes participate in this parent education model as it is part of the larger system of services provided for drug dependency court participants.

Supervised Visitation: If a child cannot remain at home, in most cases the court orders supervised visitation for the parent and child(ren). FCS contracts with a local Behavioral Health provider, Parents Center, to provide all supervised visits, with the exception of cases where the detention hearing just occurred, for which FCS provides a visit supervisor. Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Time Limited Family Reunification funds are used to support this contract. Parents Center employs master's level and licensed clinicians to provide the supervised visits. The service model involves development of a visitation plan and family counseling within the supervised visit context. Parents Center has implemented a system of multiple levels of purposeful supervision, from the most intensively therapeutic to less intense mentoring/coaching interventions. Families move through these levels based on behavioral criteria observed during visits. As stated earlier, Triple P concepts that are presented in parent education classes are carried over and practiced during supervised visitation.

Substance Abuse Services: FCS collaborates with the Health Services Agency's Substance Use Disorder Services (SUDS) program to provide substance abuse services to parents. SUDS specialists first conduct assessments with referred parents, and then make a treatment recommendation. Depending on the parent's needs, he or she may be referred to detoxification services, methadone treatment, outpatient or inpatient treatment and/or 12 step meetings.

FCS is fortunate to have dedicated SUDS Specialists, who provides direct service to FCS parents and assists them in engaging in substance abuse services. Due to funding constraints, this SUDS specialist's target population is parents of young children. They make contact with the parents and schedules an assessment. If substance abuse treatment is identified as a need, they assist the parent in finding appropriate treatment and engaging in that treatment. In addition to the intake process, this SUDS Specialist also provides ongoing case management and support for parents who participate in the Dependency Drug Court. This court is described below.

Family Preservation Court (Drug Dependency Court): Parents in either Family Maintenance Services or Family Reunification Services who are substance involved may participate in Family Preservation Court (Drug Dependency Court) which is a voluntary treatment court whose purpose is to assist parents in addressing their substance abuse issues in order to prevent removal of their children due to abuse or neglect, or to increase their success of family reunification in the event that removal has already taken place. Candidates may be referred or recruited to consider participation. The service team includes a Parent Mentor who helps clarify the benefits of participation and assists the client in applying to become a part of the program. After having an opportunity to observe the Court, the candidate expresses willingness to join, and the team usually accepts the person into the program. Most participants are enrolled in the evidence-based Matrix treatment program at Sobriety Works; however, other treatment modalities are utilized, as needed. The program is one year long, and hearings are held every week. Participants attend hearings every two weeks to every two months depending on which phase of the program they are in. Requirements for graduation include 90 days sobriety, completion of parenting education, success in treatment, and compliance with a family maintenance or family reunification plan.

Behavioral Health Services for Children: For those children referred to Children's Behavioral Health, an intake therapist meets individually with the child, in either a play or discussion setting, depending on the child's age. The intake therapist also meets with the caregiver to gather information on the child's needs. The intake therapist then determines the child's level of need for behavioral health services.

Children's Behavioral Health therapists provide individual and family therapy to children presenting with high Behavioral Health needs. Children with moderate Behavioral Health needs are referred to the Parents Center, which provides individual and family therapy for these children. Other non-profit Behavioral Health organizations also serve some FCS children with moderate Behavioral Health needs; these providers include: Pajaro Valley Prevention and Student Assistance (PVPSA), Family Services, Encompass Community Services' Youth Services program, or other individual private providers.

Children under age 5 are referred to the Stanford Development Clinic (formerly known as the Dominican Child Development Clinic) for a complete developmental assessment as mentioned earlier. The clinic also coordinates needed services for the children and works in collaboration with FCS Social Workers to ensure these services are received.

Katie A. Behavioral Health services are provided for all children who meet the subclass criteria for these services. Child and family teams are established for these families, and the team meetings are facilitated by a Behavioral Health therapist, with participation by the FCS social worker, the family, other service providers and natural supports.

Behavioral Health Services for Parents: When children are served by Children's Behavioral Health or Parents Center, the parents/guardians are included in the initial assessment process, as well as in ongoing treatment. However, the emphasis is on the treatment needs of the child in the context of the family, rather than on the behavioral health issues of the adult. Since a majority of children are involved with FCS

because of neglect due to their parents' diagnosed substance abuse and/or behavioral health needs, there is a strong need for direct behavioral health treatment for the parents. Santa Cruz County contracts with Parents Center to provide individual, family, and group counseling to parents involved in the child welfare system. Parents Center has limited capacity to serve families outside of the child welfare system. In general, there are no waitlists for child welfare involved parents. Since most parents also attend Triple P parenting classes at the Parents Center and have their visits supervised by Parents Center staff, this provides an excellent opportunity for integration of counseling services with these other services using Triple P concepts.

Most parents receive their behavioral health services at the Parents Center, but two other avenues for treatment also exist:

- Adult Behavioral Health predominantly serves adults with a serious mental illness who are at risk of hospitalization and experience acute functional impairment. While the typical parent of a foster youth does not necessarily have a major diagnosis such as schizophrenia, those who do can be served by Adult Behavioral Health for their treatment needs.
- For parents who are MediCal beneficiaries but do not meet the acute target population above, HSA Behavioral Health can refer to individual panel providers for treatment, as well as provide treatment by a number of county clinicians through Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHC) funding.

Intimate Partner Violence: The Walnut Avenue Women's Center and Monarch Services provide services for victims of intimate partner violence. Through crisis counseling, safe shelter, legal assistance and advocacy, these organizations help victims of intimate partner violence and sexual assault to become survivors and repair their lives. Perpetrators of intimate partner violence have historically been referred to New View Learning Center which provides the traditional 52-week group. However, Monarch Services has embarked on a new treatment program called Positive Solutions. This program has an evidence-base that is focused on changing abusive patterns and building healthy relationships. Positive Solutions provides tools to stop abusive behavior, develops an appreciation of emotions, and changes the attitudes that have contributed to abusive behavior. This program launched spring 2020 and FCS has referred clients to this program.

Financial, Employment, and Housing Services: During Emergency Response investigations, social workers provide outreach information to inform parents about the CalWORKs, MediCal, and CalFRESH programs. Parents are referred to Santa Cruz County's CalWORKs program, which provides temporary financial assistance and employment services to economically disadvantaged families with dependent children. FCS social workers and CalWORKs eligibility workers coordinate case plans for parents who are co-enrolled in both child welfare services and CalWORKs. Parents with housing needs are referred to a local housing support organization, Families in Transition (FIT) which provides transitional housing assistance, Section 8 vouchers, and other forms of support to help families achieve stable housing and self-sufficiency. Another program to address housing is Bringing Families Home (BFH) which is focused on reducing the number of families in the child welfare system experiencing homelessness, increase the number of families reunifying, and to reduce foster care placements. BFH has housed more than 20 families for the last 2 years and has applied for additional funding to expand the program.

Housing Services for Foster Youth: The *Transitional Voucher Program (TVP)* is a joint program of Encompass Community Services' Transition Age Youth (TAY) Program and the Santa Cruz Housing Authority. Through TVP, the Housing Authority provides eight Section 8 Family Reunification

Vouchers to a small number of participants, ages 18-21. The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher allows ILP participants to secure private housing in the community and receive federal assistance in paying their rent for up to 18 months. To help participants be successful in their new housing and ultimately transition to paying for housing on their own, TAY Coordinators provide counseling, support, and empowerment to TVP participants in accessing resources and learning new skills.

In addition, the **Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP Plus)** is a supportive housing program that serves former foster and probation youth between the ages of 18-24. The program can serve up to 13 youth per month. THP Plus participants receive assistance securing independent housing in the community and meet regularly with their THP Plus Coordinators to work on independent living goals for a maximum period of 24 months. Throughout this process, participants receive financial assistance with rent, utilities, food and educational expenses while also saving money for when they leave the program. They also receive emotional support, life skills coaching, and connections to valuable community resources. Eligible participants have emancipated from the foster care system or an out of home probation placement and have some form of income to maintain housing as program subsidies decrease.

Transitional Housing Plus – Foster Care (THP+FC) is a placement option which became available for Non-minor Dependents with the passage of AB12. Santa Cruz County has two programs currently, a scattered site program run by Encompass and a single site program run by a local STRTP. There are several programs in adjoining counties and throughout the state in which Santa Cruz County NMDs could be placed. Another placement option enabled with the enactment of AB12 is the **Supported Independent Living Placement (SILP)** which allows youth to receive a monthly grant in support of their living independently in situations like shared housing, apartments and college dorms.

Health Services are provided by local medical providers such as the Health Services Agency, California Children’s Services, community clinics, private physicians, and local hospitals. A south county clinic, Salud Para La Gente, previously mentioned, provides low-cost medical services to low income residents who are largely Latinx.

Family Resource Centers (FRC) are centrally located in the five distinct geographical locations of the county. Each of the resource centers provide both direct services and information and referral, including youth advocacy, parenting education, healthcare access, resource distribution, case management, counseling, tutoring, foster family support and community organizing/empowerment services.

Independent Living Services for Foster Youth: The **Independent Living Program (ILP)** is a state mandated program, and the County has been contracting with Encompass Community Services since July 2001 for ILP services. The program assists current and former foster and probation placement youth aged 15-21 to develop independent living skills and achieve educational/vocational goals to successfully transition to self-sufficiency. ILP services include individualized assessments, one-on-one counseling, tutoring, and weekly workshops at Cabrillo College on topics such as money management, personal health, finding independent housing, and obtaining financial aid for college. The **Independent Living Resource Center** provides youth a central location to get resources and support from ILP staff. The Resource Center assists current and former foster and probation placement youth ages 15-24 in building the skills, self-esteem, and support system necessary to make a successful transition to independent living in the community. Center staff assist youth to obtain jobs, register for college, enroll in vocational training, find housing, learn budgeting skills, and make healthy decisions and choices for their futures. The Resource Center is equipped with a cozy living room, kitchen, laundry facility, and computer lab. The center also offers free tutoring services, counseling services, food and clothing donations, as well as a hot meal. Most importantly, the center is a safe place to go, and gain support from peers and ILP case managers.

In addition to the avenues that are available to all students through the educational system, such as Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and school tutoring programs, youth are supported by their Child and Family Team which includes their social worker, clinician ILP coordinator and any other identified support person, such as a resource parent, extended family or a CASA. This team works collaboratively with each other to ensure that the educational needs of the youth are being met. Specifically, ILP offers workshops in completing financial aid applications for college, assistance in completing college applications, and tutoring services. As always, youth can also receive individual assistance as needed. For youth attending Cabrillo, ILP also offers book vouchers.

Both Cabrillo and UCSC have well-established organizations that provide supportive services to former foster youth attending these colleges. At Cabrillo, it is the Guardian Scholars program and at UCSC it is the Smith Renaissance Society. ILP has a strong collaborative relationship with both programs.

Concrete Supports: FCS utilizes a flex fund for tangible, concrete supports for families receiving child welfare services. The contract is supported by Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Family Preservation funds. Concrete supports, such as rental deposits, furniture, or payment for after-school activities, assist families in need with open child welfare cases. 4Kids Foundation, a non-profit foundation, provides one-time basic needs assistance in areas of education, health and wellbeing for children and young adults birth through 20 years old. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) also assist with concrete supports for children and youth.

PERMANENCY SERVICES

Santa Cruz County FCS provides case management services to children and families by assigning a single social worker who manages the case from termination of FR Services until permanency is achieved. through permanency. Permanency social workers also work with children/youth for whom reunification services were not offered. **ADOPTION SERVICES**

Santa Cruz County FCS Permanency Social Workers provides adoption consultation services for FR and PP cases in order to support the development of a concurrent permanent plan for children in foster care. Once adoption has been identified as the goal, a Permanency social worker who specializes in adoption will work with the prospective adoptive parents until the adoption is finalized.

Guardianship

Santa Cruz County FCS Permanency Social Workers provide services to families to help them achieve guardianship and dismiss their dependency case or may continue working with the families until dismissal of the dependency can be achieved. FCS also provides ongoing management for Non-Dependent Legal Guardianship referred from probate court.

Permanent Planned Living Arrangement

Youth who do not have an identified goal of guardianship or adoption receive PPLA services. Permanency social workers work closely with youth and their caregivers to support permanent connections and help youth identify and achieve their goals towards independence when they reach the age of majority.

Supportive Transition

Permanency social workers who specialize working with Non-Minor Dependents provide ongoing support and referrals to services to assist young adults in developing independent living skills and assist them with finding permanent housing, applying to college, developing job skills and obtaining employment.

Post-Permanency

FCS has two adoptions assistance program social workers who support post-adoptive families when they are seeking therapeutic services for adoptive children in their care. These social workers assist families with referrals to family counseling, education services, out of home placement, when necessary, wraparound services and respite. These social workers also work with guardians receiving KinGAP to help them locate and access services.

Adoption Promotion and Support: FCS uses Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) Adoption Promotion and Support funds to contract with a group of local therapists who provide pre- and post-adoption counseling to caregivers, with a goal of supporting them to make a lifetime commitment to the children in their care.

PROBATION

The Santa Cruz County Juvenile Hall offers a significant number of programming opportunities which include the following:

HUMAN TRAFFICKING AWARENESS

Provider: Safe and Sound Offered: Weekly

Rising Safe and Sound Human Trafficking Prevention Workshop provides education and awareness to identify, understand, and navigate potential human trafficking situations.

POSITIVE PARENTING

Provider: Positive Discipline Resource Center Offered: As needed

Positive Parenting offers young fathers and mothers support and education surrounding their role as healthy parental figures. Youth learn parenting skills and techniques and solutions to solve current and future parenting problems with an emphasis on the building of strong families.

COMMUNITY SERVICES HOURS

Provider: Juvenile Hall Staff & Jacob's Heart Offered: As Needed

Young people are presented with opportunities to perform a variety of forms of community service that instill a lifelong habit of helping others. These opportunities encourage young people to look to the needs of their community while understanding that community service is about serving the community and keeping that value in mind will help you make the right choices in all that you do.

YOGA

Provider: County Office of Education Offered: Weekly

Through mindfulness practices, young people can benefit from the calming and therapeutic techniques of yoga. This health practice helps break the cycle of trauma, life stressors and detention. Equipped with mindfulness techniques, our young can return to their homes and communities with the vision of a very different life than they might have imagined for themselves. Yoga is offered weekly during school PE.

SELF CARE

Provider: Juvenile Hall Staff Offered: As Available

This is a staff led structured program that introduces young people to good hygiene habits and proper self-care exercises. This includes staff teaching young people proper use of face exfoliation techniques, face wash and hand care. Staff use soothing music in the background to create a space of relaxation and tranquility. Program supports and builds youth's understanding and appreciation of their unique beauty.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATIONS

Provider: Cakes with Care Offered: Monthly

The organization gives back to Santa Cruz each month providing baked goods free of charge to detained young people through a partnership with local agencies to exemplify care and promote joy within our community.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

Provider: Santa Cruz Community Credit Union Offered: Annually

An 8-week course towards financial freedom. Curriculum includes Banking Basics; Checking Accounts; Budgeting Your Way; Credit 101: What You Need to Know; Mobile Banking: Making Your Life Easier; Identity Theft Prevention; How You Can Attend College; and Buying a Car. At the completion of the course students have a graduation celebration and receive their own financial education passport.

CHILD FAMILY TEAM MEETING (CFTM)

Provider: Probation & Cross Sector of Partners Offered: As Needed

The CFTM allows for the young person to identify who they would like to be part of their CFTM which often addresses resources needed by the young person as part of their case and transition plan. In addition to the young person and their family, the CFTM provides an opportunity for natural supports to attend and participate and often includes multiple community-based providers, on-site partners, and other connected county agencies. The CFTM represents a "teamwork" approach that is a best practice in juvenile justice and a standard practice of the juvenile probation division.

PARENT TEEN MEDIATION (PTM)

Provider: Conflict Resolution Center Offered: As Needed

Parent Teen Mediations are offered to all our young people focus on family dynamics, communication skills, rebuilding trust, boundaries, accountability, and responsibility. PTM offer a safe place for young people and their families to discuss tough subjects like abusive behavior, risk behaviors and drug and alcohol use so that they can create a plan and agreement for moving forward together.

CAREER PANELS

Provider: County Office of Education Offered: As Available

Community members from various vocations are invited to speak to the youth about their careers and fields of study. This exposure to a variety of different career possibilities is often held in a classroom setting. The panel members speak for a few minutes and then allow the youth to ask questions for the remainder of the forum.

COLLEGE COURSES

Provider: County Office of Education Offered: As needed

Youth who have graduated high school can take online college courses. This is facilitated by the teaching staff and the young people complete and submit assignments using the computers in the school. Online courses offered by Cabrillo Junior College.

RISING SCHOLARS

Provider: COE, Probation, Cabrillo College Offered: As Needed

The program is committed to supporting justice-impacted students by providing support and services with the goal of removing barriers and building community with our students. The youth program coordinator works directly with the youth on site at the facility.

LIBRARY SERVICES

Provider: Santa Cruz Public Library Offered: Bi-Monthly

Santa Cruz Public Library provides a librarian and library services in the on-site library, for young people to discuss their literary interest and check out books. Literature provides opportunities for self-improvement and stress reliever. Library offers magazines and books on tape. Library program also provides guest speakers and educational curriculum.

LIVING UNCHAINED

Provider: Non-Profit Community Organization Offered: Throughout year

The canine teaching compassion program teaches young people to train homeless dogs in basic skills, manners, and socialization, helping the dogs be adopted into permanent homes. The young people develop values of patience, respect, and responsibility for themselves and others, through the trust and relationship building with dogs. Teaches the youth impulsivity control, mastery of a skill, and the value of restorative justice. Goal for young people to feel compassion and empathy towards animals in hopes that these values are transferred to human interaction creating healthy, positive, relationships as a stress relief, and support for youth with potential history of trauma.

WORK PROGRAMS

Provider: County Office of Education/ Probation Offered: Daily

Work assignments should be meaningful, constructive, and related to vocational training. These programs are offered to young people serving court ordered commitments. Some assignments are offered in conjunction with educational instruction and students can receive community service credit. The following tasks may be considered a work detail: painting, power washing, kitchen duties, yard work, recycling, and inventory. All assignments are designed to increase young people sense of responsibility and self-worth, learn a new skill while enhancing the facility.

TABLET TECHNOLOGY

Provider: Edovo Offered: Daily

Secure tablet technology delivers free access to educational programming. Technology is a valuable tool when youth return to community, supports one's education and career.

CHESS

Provider: Community Volunteers Offered: Weekly

A local "chess master" provides chess instruction to youth interested in mastering the complex game of chess. Instruction offered at all levels: beginner, intermediate and advanced.

MURALS

Provider: County Office of Education and Probation Offered: As available

Various mural projects are completed by youth. Offers youth a chance to learn from local artists outside the conventional classroom setting. Past projects are on display throughout the facility and youth are rewarded with a sense of accomplishment by taking part in the aesthetic improvements with long lasting impact. Past collaborations include artists from UCSC, local artists, and other professional artists.

MUSICAL INSTRUCTION AND APPRECIATION

Provider: Music in May & County Office of Education Offered: As available
Community musicians offer instruction in a group and individual setting. Instruments include drums, guitar, and piano. Guitar and piano are available on site and youth can practice. Rebecca Jackson and Music in May provide chamber music concerts. In addition, a school representative teaches young people how to use string instruments such as the ukulele and guitar. A 10-week Hip-Hop program and guitar/ukulele classes are available.

HOLIDAY CELEBRATIONS

Provider: Probation Offered: Throughout year

Holiday programming providing history of holiday and traditional celebrations. All special holiday programs are offered to all youth and participation is optional.

THE BEAT WITHIN

Provider: Non-Profit Community Organization Offered: Weekly

The Beat Within is a writing class where youth write a variety of material for inclusion in inmate publications. The Beat Within's goal is to provide youth with a consistent opportunity to share their ideas and life experiences. The program encourages literacy, self-expression, critical thinking skills, and healthy, supportive relationships with adults and the community. A newsletter is published that features writing and artwork from the youth and adults in detention statewide and provides positive recognition for those selected and published.

GARDENING

Provider: Volunteer and Juvenile Hall Staff Offered: Throughout year

Volunteers work with youth to educate about gardening, including health and mental health benefits. Growing plants in planter boxes to produce vegetables and herbs which will be used in the kitchen for preparing meals at the facility.

FAITH BASED SERVICES

Provider: Local Churches/Organizations Offered: Bi-Weekly

There are numerous local churches and church members from various denominations that provide religious services. They provide worship services, bible studies, literature distribution, spiritual mentoring, and holiday specific services. Our goal is to meet the religious needs and requests of the young people; any denomination not offered regularly can be obtained on a request basis.

CHAPLAIN SERVICES

Provider: Community Volunteer Offered: Weekly

Juvenile Hall volunteer Chaplains provide the following services: spiritual mentoring and pastoral care, requests for religious or secular books, and art ministries programs.

SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER

Provider: SafeRX Santa Cruz County Offered: Throughout school year

Opioids, Fentanyl, Narcan education and discussion to prevent overdose and death. trauma issues.

ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS/ NARCOTICS ANONYMOUS

12-step groups for those whom drugs or alcohol have become a major problem. Meetings are conducted by volunteers who share their personal experiences and answer questions. AA/NA literature states that

active addiction is marked by increased isolation and destruction of relationships. Successful recovery is often marked by increased AA/NA attendance and improved family relationships.

SAFE DATES

Provider: Walnut Avenue Family & Women's Center Offered: Bi-Weekly

This is a self-described as a nonprofessional, self-supporting, multiracial and apolitical fellowship. Membership is open to anyone who wants to do something about his or her drinking problem.

Probation Assessments:

The Probation Department has fully implemented use of a comprehensive risk assessment tool called the Juvenile Assessment and Intervention System (JAIS). This tool affords Probation Officers the ability to assess initial and ongoing risk levels of the youth being served in addition to assessing appropriate and effective supervision strategies to contribute to a reduction in recidivism. This tool identifies strengths and needs which allows for the development of individualized, relevant and effective case plans which guide probation supervision as well as the provision of services and/or interventions.

In the event that a youth has an Individual Education Plan (IEP) indicating a lower IQ or a recent history of exhibiting other behaviors identified by behavioral health staff, a formal assessment by the San Andreas Regional Center or an evaluation by a licensed psychologist will be requested through the Juvenile Justice Court. While these situations occur infrequently, the juvenile detention facility has limited access to a behavioral health clinician and a psychiatrist through the County Behavioral Health Department for early detection to avoid prolonged detention stays while pending evaluation for services. The probation placement unit reviews all assessments, individual education plans and social and educational history available for appropriate level of care placement. Additionally, the placement alternative Wraparound program performs an assessment of needs and risks, a behavioral health assessment and a thorough review of all educational records. Staff works closely with the educational system and parent/guardian(s) to identify the need for an IEP update or other assessment(s)/services as appropriate.

8G QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

CHILD WELFARE

Quality assurance refers to the overall system of quality, including identifying and documenting how to assure and improve quality processes and outcomes. Quality control is an important part of quality assurance, and it refers to the activities and observations that are required by the quality assurance plan in order to evaluate processes and outcomes for improvement. FCS undertakes regular case reviews, uses SafeMeasures as a key method of quality control and to review compliance, and reviews performance indicators.

In 2007 FCS adopted a comprehensive quality assurance policy and procedure that provided a background on quality assurance, identified eight key principles of quality and how each principle is linked to child welfare outcomes, incorporated the Council of Accreditation Standards of Practice and the Child Welfare League of America Standards of Excellence, and outlined quality control measures. The outcome was to ensure that children are in a safe and stable setting.

Fundamental elements of this procedure, and the status of their implementation, are defined below.

California began implementing **CFSR qualitative case reviews** in 2015, as part of a federally mandated requirement. At that time, Santa Cruz started building its case review team and subsequently began conducting reviews in early 2016. The child welfare case review team consists of the unit manager/supervisor (who conducts the first level Quality Assurance on all reviews), two full-time case reviewers, and the unit's administrative aide who provides support to the process. Case reviews take a comprehensive approach to assessing quality of social work practice and what concerted efforts were made to address the areas of safety, permanency, and well-being. Safety outcomes look at whether children are protected from abuse and neglect, and whether they are safely maintained in their homes when possible. Permanency outcomes are related to stability of children in their living situations and continuity of family connections. Well-being focuses on concerted efforts to provide/connect children and families to the appropriate services such as those with special needs.

Recommendations for **new/revised policies or procedures** are brought to the Leadership Team in FCS, which assigns a workgroup with an analyst as lead and a manager as the program expert. Recommendations typically align with new and updated ACLS and ACINS or shifts in internal processes. A spreadsheet of ACLs and ACINs is maintained by an FCS Analyst. FCS and County Counsel collaborate on a project list that have been identified to have implications on policy and procedure. Priorities are assigned based on timelines specified in ACLs and/or consultation with County Counsel. All completed policies are approved by the Division Director and posted online. A user-friendly Online Practice Guide (OPG) was launched in 2010 and is used for both training and ongoing reference.

State All County Letters, All County Information Notices, County Fiscal Letters, and County Fiscal Information Notices provide official information on how to operationalize new or revised laws and regulations. The relevant letters are reviewed by the Division Director, who assigns each letter to be reviewed as needed.

A fundamental way that Santa Cruz County ensures service delivery for children who are at risk of abuse or neglect is by use of **Structured Decision-Making Risk and Safety Assessment and the Child Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment (CANS)** Santa Cruz has fully implemented the tools and the department relies upon their use to ensure appropriate families have access to services and families who don't currently meet criteria, but may in the future, are referred to the County's differential response program, Families Together. Trauma needs are included in these screening tools and the department offers families the appropriate level of intervention and support. Concerns about mental health needs may result in referrals to mental health services or an order for psychological evaluation. The current CSA process has revealed that additional training on assessing and working with parents with mental health challenges is needed.

All staff are trained in the fundamentals of Safety Organized Practice and utilize a variety of related tools such as the Three Houses and other inquiries to assess for trauma. Once needs are identified, these are included in the case plan and monitored by the social worker. Social workers incorporate trauma informed language in case plans and in CFT meetings.

An example of this practice is a case where a youth had significant trauma due to the mother's emotional manipulation. The social worker completing the case plan was careful not to use language that the mother had used in the past to describe the youth's behavior. The social worker used solution focused language to describe areas where improvement was needed. In addition, the social work used the CFT as an opportunity to share how the youth's behavior was shaped by historical trauma to create better understanding of how to work with the youth. The social worker was intentional about communicating

with law enforcement on best ways to respond to the youth's fear based behaviors to avoid imposing additional trauma.

One important mechanism for implementing a quality assurance system is to be able to analyze key data elements in a timely manner. **SafeMeasures** is a sophisticated quality assurance reporting service that allows supervisors and managers to access useful and timely information. It provides a mechanism to ensure the needs of infants, toddlers, and youth are being met.

SafeMeasures captures data from CWS/CMS and SDM databases and links these data elements to key performance standards. Key personnel have been trained to use this resource for everyday caseload assessment. Consistent use of SafeMeasures is now an element in each supervisor's and manager's evaluation and has led to more consistent use of this powerful tool. Most social work staff have expressed that they appreciate how SafeMeasures details compliance for certain data elements because it allows them to immediately address data concerns.

Regular performance indicator **data reviews** include: (a) The HSD Planning and Evaluation unit compiles a monthly dashboard of key program and performance indicators. The FCS director and assistant director review this dashboard with the HSD director and at monthly meetings with the Department leadership team; (b) the Division Director and analyst review the quarterly state reports on performance indicators; (c) Business Analytics generates monthly reports to assist specific supervisors and managers to monitor aspects of service delivery; and (d) outcomes data are reviewed periodically with the Division supervisor team.

For children with Native American heritage and who are removed from their parents, the **Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)** provides important rights to the tribe when determining permanency. FCS has assigned one worker, the Court Officer, with specialized training to notice the tribes (or all tribes, if the specific tribe is not known, or the Bureau of Indian Affairs, if the type of heritage is not known) and receive the response. County Counsel double checks this process. There is a specific updated policy and procedure for ICWA compliance to ensure social work staff understand notice requirements as well as how to appropriately engage tribes when a child falls within the purview of ICWA.

Multi Ethnic Placement Act (MEPA), the federal law that prohibits racial profiling in placement and adoptions. The FCS MEPA policy is in compliance with federal law and social workers, including permanency workers, are familiar with it.

Any time a foster child/youth in Santa Cruz County is prescribed **psychotropic medications**, the prescribing doctor (typically, one of two County Health Services Agency (HSA) psychiatrists) prepares a JV-220 application which is filed with the court to authorize the use of these medications. All information regarding JV-220s is entered into CWS/CMS by the FCS Public Health Nurse.

In addition, the Public Health Nurse maintains a spreadsheet tracking the following information: Name, age, and gender of the child for whom the medication is prescribed, a list of each prescribed medication including dosage, condition being treated, and the name of the

prescribing doctor, child/youth's placement type, the child/youth's diagnoses, and the end date for the current authorization.

This allows us to have an up-to-the-minute snapshot of how many foster children served by FCS are being prescribed psychotropic medications at a given time. At the time of this writing, psychotropic medications

have been authorized for about 10% (27 of the 259 children/youth currently in foster care through Santa Cruz County) of our foster care population.

Plans are in place for meetings between County Children’s Mental Health, Family and Children’s Services, and HSA psychiatry to review all processes related to the identification, assessment, and treatment of children for whom the use of psychotropic medications is considered.

The FCS **concurrent planning policy** assists social workers in the steps needed to immediately involve parents and extended family members in identifying the most appropriate placement, with the recognition that it may become the permanent placement if efforts at reunification fail. This policy was updated in 2010 and is consistent with the other permanency efforts underway as outlined in the Case Review section of this document.

By law, each foster child 16 and over is required to have a **Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP)** to identify transition issues and supportive services. FCS policy specifies that any youth 15 and up is required to receive a TILP. Post-dispo supervisors use SafeMeasures each month to print a list of all youth in foster care who are 14 or older. Case-carrying workers are responsible for working with the youth to complete the TILP, which is attached to the court report. The TILP is also used as a basis for assigning the youth to an Independent Living Program Coordinator to receive transition supports and services.

By federal law, **Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)** need to be considered by the court for all children who have been in out of home care for 15 of the last 22 calendar months unless there are compelling reasons not to terminate parental rights. At the 12 month permanency hearing the court considers what the permanent plan should be for the child. If the court finds there is not a substantial probability for return to a parent, the court then ends FR services and sets a

366.26 hearing within 90 days to consider a permanent plan, including whether parental rights should be terminated. Compelling reasons are included in the court report. Parents are advised at the beginning of the case that reunification may not be feasible, depending on their progress meeting case plan objectives. As indicated in the Case Review section of this document, the department’s focus on termination of parental rights has shifted substantially since 2008. All social workers have received training regarding the benefits to the child of termination of parental rights in cases where reunification has failed.

Additionally, since there has been significant improvement in resources to support identifying forever families for children, the number of cases making “compelling reason” arguments for not terminating rights is likely to diminish over time. However, as stated in the Case Review section of this document, the department still has significant work to do with respect to educating court partners regarding the desirability of adoption as the most appropriate permanent plan if reunification efforts fail.

CFSR Quality Case Review and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)

Santa Cruz has a unique set up for the Federally mandated CFSR quality case reviews in that the case review team is part of the Quality Improvement (QI) unit that is situated in the Planning & Evaluation (P&E) division, not the child welfare division. Both divisions are part of the Human Services Department. P&E consists of three units that work collaboratively with all the program divisions. Staff within the QI Unit focus on specific social service programs (benefits, IHSS, child welfare), conducting reviews and collaborating with program on quality improvement efforts. QI staff are considered subject matter experts in their respective areas.

In April 2023, in preparation for Round 4 of the CFSRs, counties began using an updated tool for the case reviews and data is reported out from this updated tool separately from the Round 3 tool. Since that time, the case review team has completed a total of 23 reviews, averaging 2-3 per quarter (15 in the last year). Santa Cruz is designated as a small county and mandated to complete 20 reviews per year but has not been able to meet this requirement due to changes in staffing since the end of 2022.

Of the 23 reviews completed since April 2023:

- 2 were in home reviews
- 21 were out of home reviews
- All 23 reviews were of child welfare cases. (While out of home probation cases are part of the CFSR case reviews, they rarely show up in the case pull for Santa Cruz due to the extremely small number of placement cases in probation.)

In addition to reviewing documentation in CWS/CMS, the court files, and the case files, these case reviews require that all key stakeholders for the period under review (PUR) be interviewed. A total of 119 interviews were conducted on these 23 reviews, which included:

- 8 child/youth interviews*
- 17 mother interviews
- 10 father interviews
- 47 case worker interviews
- 2 supervisor interviews
- 34 resource parent interviews (18 of which were relatives)
- 7 other interviews (CASA, minor's attorney, relative)

*It should be noted that it is required to interview the target child/youth for each review. This was an unusually low number of child/youth interviews during this time period as 11 of the 23 target children were under the age of 5 and were not interviewed. Cases are randomly selected by the state and when a key participant, such as a child/youth, is unable to be interviewed, the reviewer must identify someone else that can speak to their experience. For the 15 children/youth not interviewed, the reviewer interviewed CASA's, minor's attorney, a relative support person, or deemed that the perspective of other key interviewees (i.e.: parent, foster parent) were sufficient.

The CSFR qualitative case review information is a key component of CQI for Santa Cruz County's child welfare programs. As such, concerted efforts have always been made to find ways to use case review data, themes, and concepts to improve practice. The case review team continued to engage in several of the same CQI efforts since the last CSA, as well developing some new ones. The following are some of those efforts:

- **Social Worker Induction Training:** Since 2016, the case review team has been part of the training series for new social workers, specifically facilitating a 2-3 hour module on Outcomes & Accountability with a focus on case review. The team has facilitated the training approximately 11 times, occasionally providing shorter individualized sessions as needed, as well as presenting to MSW interns.
- **Case Review Practice Highlight:** In April 2019, the case review team issued their first Practice Highlight as another way to engage staff in understanding case reviews and outcomes. Each practice highlight focuses on specific item or concept, sharing real case examples as appropriate. To date, the team has issued a total of 13 highlights, covering various items and themes, including

father engagement, maintaining connections, case worker visits, parent engagement after end of reunification services, the use of SOP as a concerted effort, CPI in RFA, and CFTMS as part of case planning. The practice highlight is sent out via email to all staff and posted on the intranet for reference any time.

- **Annual Case Review Data Presentation:** In January 2024, the Quality Improvement manager presented annual case review data from the prior year, focusing on 4 areas of strength and 4 areas needing improvement in relation to the review items. Additionally, the case review team identified the 5 key practice areas that were having the most significant negative impact on ratings and could inform areas to target improvements. This was the first time case review data was presented this way. The presentation was given to the extended leadership (managers and supervisors) and then again to all post-dispo staff. It was decided to make this an annual presentation and plans are currently being made to present at the beginning of 2025 for the extended leadership team with a modified version to be presented at an all division “year in review” half day meeting. While the specifics of this presentation are still undecided, there has been a commitment to have an annual presentation of case review data that is similar each year, to engage all staff in case review data and using outcomes to improve.
- **Target Reviews & Data Discussions:** In 2018, the case review team facilitated a deep dive into a target review on father engagement and despite various suggestions since that time about other potential target review topics of interests, no others had been completed until April 2024. In April, as part of Santa Cruz’s Comprehensive Prevention Plan and to help determine candidacy pathways for preventative services funded by Title IV-E fund, the case review team worked with an analyst from FCS to conduct a detailed target review on substance exposed infants. This led to a second exploration to identify a few other potential candidacy groups within child welfare and determine the potential group sizes. This collaboration helped set a format and process to engage in other target review topics that have been of interest for some time. In the coming year, the team is hoping to complete at least two target reviews, namely, one for the Race & Equity Core Team focusing on a specific population remaining in care longer, and one focusing on the prevention work done by the pre-dispo units for referrals that do not open to cases. Additionally, while not a formal target review, the case review manager has helped facilitate data discussions for groups such as the Race & Equity Core Team. Whether it is completing target reviews or facilitating data discussions on topics, this is becoming more of an ongoing CQI activity for which the case review team has a lead role.

Another way Santa Cruz uses case review information is to have at least one representative from the case review team participate in ongoing steering committees and workgroups. Currently, this includes representation in the following:

- SIP Steering Committee
- SOP Advisory Council
- Restructuring Workgroup
- Race & Equity Core Team
- Father Advisory Council
- Design Team

CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF

Santa Cruz County ensures effective fiscal and program accountability for the CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF vendor/contractor services in the following manner:

- **Families Together:** Children’s Trust Fund, CAPIT and PSSF funds are contracted out to support Families Together, a child abuse prevention program, and the differential response program in Santa Cruz County. The contractor provides bi-annual electronic and written reports to the county on their progress toward specified objectives. Progress toward meeting service objectives is used to determine quality and to indicate any strengths or weaknesses of the program. A program manager from FCS meets quarterly with the contractor to determine a strategy for addressing any concerns, and to ensure that any necessary corrective action was implemented. Client satisfaction is evaluated through the use of an exit interview and an anonymous client satisfaction survey provided after case closure. An annual participation survey is completed by the contractor and submitted to the program analyst for inclusion in the OCAP annual report.
- **Children’s Network of Santa Cruz County:** CBCAP funds are contracted out to provide support for the activities of the Children’s Network of Santa Cruz County, the local children’s services coordinating council and the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC). The Children’s Network submits an annual report of their activities to an FCS analyst, who monitors the contract to determine that support and technical assistance is provided to the Children’s Network members as needed.
- **CWS Flex Fund:** PSSF funds are utilized to provide flexible funding to meet emergency needs for families. All requests for funds are reviewed and approved by the FCS Analyst prior to being submitted to the Fiscal for payment. Requests are evaluated for need and relevance to the family’s case plan objectives. Fiscal accountability and oversight are maintained by the county Auditor’s office.
- **Adoption Promotion and Support:** PSSF funds are contracted out to provide counseling services to potential adoptive families and post-adoptive families. All referrals for adoption promotion and support services are followed up by an analyst to ensure that the family received services. Client satisfaction pre and post surveys are used to determine if services met the needs of the adoptive family. Program effectiveness is monitored by an analyst, who reviews the number of disrupted adoptive placements in SafeMeasures quarterly. Any areas of concern are addressed in regular meetings with the contractor. An annual participation survey is completed by the contractor and submitted to the program analyst for inclusion in the OCAP annual report.
- **Supervised Visitation:** A portion of FCS therapeutic supervised visitation program is supported with PSSF funds. The contracted service provider submits a written report summarizing the activity of each visit. Written reports are reviewed monthly by an FCS analyst and general qualitative feedback is given to the contractor. Client satisfaction is assessed during monthly contact between the FCS social worker and the family. Any concerns are reported to the Ongoing FCS program managers, who meet monthly with the contractor to discuss any program issues, strategize for any required program changes and ensure corrective action was implemented. The contractor submits an annual participation survey to the program analyst for inclusion in the OCAP annual report.

PROBATION DEPARTMENT

The Santa Cruz County Probation Department operates under the mandates of the Juvenile Justice Court and with the Court’s support, has embraced the use of alternatives aimed at the reduction in population and racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile detention facility and justice system while maintaining community safety. As a national model site for detention reform and disproportionate minority

confinement/contact, the Probation Department maintains a number of indicators and has implemented protocols as a means of quality assurance and for program utilization and oversight. Juvenile Probation managers, Intake Supervisor, and Alternatives to Detention staff meet to review the detention population weekly, examining each youth's length of stay, ensure compliance with any interim court orders and explore the use of detention alternatives (pre-and post-adjudication) and services for youth directly filed as an adult in court with lengthy stays in detention. The meeting also addresses transitional independent living plans as applicable to youth who may be transitioning from an STRTP and returning home. If it is determined a youth will be returning to an independent living situation then paperwork is immediately prepared by the Placement Supervisor to initiate the process of acquiring additional funding and other resources earmarked specific to this population. Additionally, the detention status and appropriateness are reviewed pertaining to any cross-system youth (youth involved with Children's Mental Health and/or Family and Children's services).

Specific statistical data for each caseload is updated and reviewed monthly. This data includes but is not limited to total of number of youth per caseload by race and ethnicity, total number of reports and detention assessments completed by officer, youth recidivism, recidivism while pending court, failures to appear for court, length of stay in detention, average daily population in detention and by program, program outcome data, probation violations by type and detention Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI) overrides. All indicators are disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity. This data depicts program/service utilization and is often used to examine the probation department's decision-making points for continual improvements and to drive departmental policy and procedures for improved processes and outcomes for youth. For example, a high override rate existed when the decision of a detention RAI override rested with probation supervisors. A change in policy was developed and implemented to have the decision made by a manager, which resulted in a reduction in detention override rate and an increased utilization of detention alternative services.

Additionally, the average daily population of youth in foster care and institutional placements is monitored closely to ensure fiscal targets, to examine program success by proximity and seeks to examine any potential racial and ethnic disparities. Unit indicators such as the monthly program cost, length of stay, length of stay in detention from disposition to placement, proximity of program, offense history and completion type/outcome data, all disaggregated by gender and race/ethnicity are tracked and reviewed monthly. In the event that an out of state placement is being considered by the Court or Probation, approval is obtained through the County Multi- Disciplinary team prior to making such recommendation to the court.

The Interagency Placement Committee serves as a formal quality assurance process that ensures youth are placed in the least restrictive environment, considering community safety and repairing the harm of victims and to review that community interventions have been offered and tried. This review process is the discretionary entry point for foster care and institutional placements as a recommendation stemming from probation and family participation in a multi- disciplinary committee. A probation officer brings a youth/family before this committee when considering removal from the home or intensive placement alternative services.

Recommendations by the committee are examined and analyzed monthly and compared with Court outcomes for each youth participating in the committee process. A probation manager participates and monitors all recommendations from the committee.

As a formal quality assurance process within the juvenile division of probation there is a service utilization review and evaluation meeting that occurs every other month to review key program utilization and unit

indicators, fiscal oversight and to examine trends or problem areas recognized through data review. This is a proactive process by managers as efforts to problem solve or make programmatic and/or fiscal adjustments if needed.

Santa Cruz County Probation in consultation with Children’s Mental Health seeks to resume regular System of Care review meetings involving justice system partners as Children’s Mental Health, County Office of Education – Alternative Education, Division of Alcohol and other Drugs and occasionally Family and Children’s Services. Programs and services will be reviewed to include data indicators, review of fidelity to program models, implementation of evidence-based practices, program census review and brainstorming surrounding system improvements or program enhancements.

The probation department also utilizes a case management system to meet the department’s needs of data collection, review and report building. Additionally, an updated risk assessment instrument has been implemented in the juvenile and adult divisions to aid in assessing appropriate levels of supervision.

SECTION 9: Critical Incident Review Process

If there is a determination that a child died or could have died due to abuse or neglect in Santa Cruz County, FCS takes the following steps:

- The screener along with the screening supervisor/manager reviews CWS/CMS to determine whether FCS is currently or has been in the past, involved with the family. If yes, the supervisor/manager reviews all documentation to:
- Determine if any other children are at risk in the situation and respond appropriately.
- Determine who is involved in the life of the child that may need to be notified and provided with support resources.
- Determine what staff members have worked with the child/family that may need to be notified and provided with support resources.
- Inform the court of the unknown circumstances (if the child is a dependent).
- Make contact with the pertinent law enforcement jurisdiction.
- Make contact with the pertinent medical professionals.
- Maintain open channels of communication with all persons involved in the investigation into the death/near death.
- Assess the case, through review of documentation and interviews with staff, to determine whether or not staff acted in accordance with FCS policies and procedures while working with the family.
- Assess FCS policies and procedures against the facts of the case to determine whether there are any changes needed to further support practices that help determine the presence or lack of child safety in their living situations.
- The Investigations Manager will ensure that a SOC826 (Child Fatality/Near Fatality County Statement of Findings and Information) is immediately filed with DCSS, in accordance with state policy.
- The Investigations Manager will attend the county's Child Death Review Team Meetings which are facilitated by the Sheriff's Office. The meetings are held quarterly with the District Attorney's Office, all the local law enforcement jurisdictions, local hospital staff, probation, County of Education and the County Coroner's Office in attendance. Any and all children who have died in the county during that time period are discussed. The review team ultimately comes up with recommendations in hopes of preventing a similar child death.
- The Investigations Program Manager will confirm all information sent to CDSS in this regard on a quarterly basis.

SECTION 10: National Resource Center Training & Tech. Assistance

Santa Cruz County has not received assistance from any National Resource Center.

SECTION 11: Stakeholder Input - Peer Review, Focus Groups, Stakeholder Meeting

OVERVIEW

This section includes the methodology and findings from three separate stakeholder input events: the week-long virtual Peer Review, the Kick-Off Meeting, and multiple Focus Groups. Each event is described separately, followed by a single findings reflection that brings together ideas and strategies gathered across all stakeholders (see Stakeholder Input Findings).

Santa Cruz reviewed baseline outcome data for children in care over the previous five years for both Child Welfare and Juvenile Probation. Data from each system illustrates the rationale for choosing these particular outcome measures along with details about opportunities for improvement going forward.

Table 44: Rationale for FCS & JPD Outcome Measure

	FCS	JPD
Outcome Measure	P4: Re-Entry Into Care	P1: Permanency in 12 months for youth entering foster care
National Performance	5.6%	35.2%
5-Year Avg. Performance	12%	35.8%

KICK-OFF MEETING

Background & Methodology

The Santa Cruz CSA Planning Team held an in-person event on June 20, 2024 with the following goals:

- Orient attendees to the goals, approach & timing of the continuous quality improvement cycle for the child welfare and juvenile probation systems in Santa Cruz County
- Review current trends in child and family outcome performance by the child welfare and juvenile probation systems
- Identify strengths and challenges within the current system as well as areas of focus to improve permanency and well-being outcomes in the future

Forty-three people from across the spectrum of Santa Cruz County stakeholders—community-based organizations, education, faith-based organizations, public health, behavioral health and more—participated in the lively event. The kick off featured whole group discussion, presentations by both the FCS and JPD Division Directors, and small group facilitated sessions that gathered participant wisdom, perspectives, and input about key outcome trends.

Background & Methodology

A core element of the County Self-Assessment is for the child welfare agency and probation department to jointly conduct a Peer Review in collaboration with CDSS. The Peer Review is the process by which the county learns, through qualitative examination of county practice, how to improve services for children and families with respect to their chosen outcome areas. During the review, staff from several peer counties interview host county case carrying social workers and probation officers regarding county practice. Utilizing peers from other counties promotes the exchange of best practice ideas between the host county and the peer counties.

The Peer Review was conducted over five consecutive days in person in Santa Cruz September 16-20, 2024. On the final day, results from the Peer Review were shared with internal stakeholders from around the county. The county utilized an outside consultant (Leslie Ann Hay, MSW of Hay Consulting) to team with CDSS to facilitate and coordinate the activities of the Peer Review. This included the orientation of peer reviewers and interviewees, coordination of the interviews, daily and final debriefs, and integration of the findings and recommendations into the CSA report. The interview tools used for the Peer Review can be found in the Appendix of this report.

Peer counties were chosen based on their demonstrated performance in P1 and P4. Participating counties included:

Table 45: Peer Review County Participants

County	Agency
Alameda	Child Welfare
Contra Costa	Child Welfare
Fresno	Child Welfare
Kings	Child Welfare
Merced	Child Welfare
Placer	Juvenile Probation
Sonoma	Juvenile Probation
Stanislaus	Child Welfare
Ventura	Child Welfare
Yolo	Juvenile Probation

Peer Review Cases

The cases used in the Peer Review represented a span of ages, gender identities and racial/ethnic identities. CDSS provided a listing of potential cases for FCS and JPD representing a combination of cases with permanency outcomes that either met the standard or did not. The selection criteria used to identify the case sample ensured representation on the basis of age, gender identity and race/ethnicity.

Table 46: Peer Review Cases

	Child Welfare Cases - 12	Probation Cases - 6
Age Range	50% (6) ages 2-5	33% (2) age 17

	17% (2) ages 6-9 33% (4) ages 13-18	67% (4) ages 19-20
Gender Identity	50% (6) male; 33% (4) female 17% (2) unknown	67% (4) male 33% (2) female
Racial/Ethnic Identity	67% (8) White 25% (3) Latino 8% (1) Biracial	83% (5) Latino 17% (1) White
Outcome	P4: 58% (7) Re-entered 42% (5) Did NOT Re-enter	P1: 17% (1) Achieved timely permanency 83% (5) Did NOT achieve timely permanency

Strengths, Challenges, Recommendations & Peer Practices

CHILD WELFARE

The following Peer Review findings focus on strengths and challenges across range of topics related to child welfare’s P4 outcome area: re-entry into care.

Background

Strengths

- Agency did a good job with connecting the parents with frequent (minimum 3x a week) visits with children and meeting basic needs (e.g., rent/housing, transportation (bus passes, gas vouchers, and assistance acquiring a car), utilities, substance abuse services, and childcare.
- Social workers were trained on and utilized Trauma-Informed case management approaches; most Social workers had significant experience with clients that have BH and trauma needs.
- Low case counts help Social workers focus on relational aspects of case.

Challenges

- A lack of “warm hand off” to newly assigned Social Worker, lack of notation from previous worker, and no summary of case information.
- Some inconsistency in common standards to guide decision-making in case planning across Social workers Supervisors and program to program.
- Turnover makes it difficult to maintain appropriate capacity and sufficient experienced staff in units.

Maintaining Connections

Strengths

- Prioritize placing within community network at initial removal, including relatives or similar geographical location.
- Creative Visitation Practice to accommodate parent and care provider’s needs. Ex: agency prioritized family connections by keeping children connected to parents living out of county, assist the noncustodial parent with building a relationship with the children via visitation and services, & maintaining sibling contact.
- Frequent CFTs with parents, children, service providers and extended family members.

Challenges

- Limited family finding efforts especially consideration of non-offending parents and paternal side of family.

- Limited fostering of natural support network for post-dismissal (including extended family or non-relative mentors).
- Limited efforts to maintain connections with extended family members or other important connections.

Engagement

Strengths

- Agency had good engagement with the parents in frequent contact, developing the case plan, transparency of expectations, utilizing SOP, and attending to the family's individual needs
- Frequent and ongoing CFT meetings created a forum for engagement to occur.
- Agency utilized strategic and creative ways to engage parents and children.

Challenges

- Agency/ Social workers struggled to work successfully with parents with severe MH issues due to a need for enhanced skill building.
- Social workers and the system as a whole need to create the conditions and recognize for trust to be built with parent who is initially distrustful of child welfare.
- Need for alignment between value of listening to family voice & choice and FCS policies and supervision (e.g., parent who wanted to relinquish services/parental rights).

Assessments & Services

Strengths

- Parents were connected to "Bringing Families Home," MAT, SUD, and received psychiatric evaluations.
- All service referrals were completed early on in the case, SW were proactive vs reactive.
- Child was connected to appropriate education and mental health services through comprehensive assessments. (Social/emotional school counselor, IEP support, foster education liaison, behavioral health counseling and CASA worker)

Challenges

- Lack of aftercare planning or referrals to ongoing services: Once the case was closed, all services ended and there was no aftercare follow through.
- Inconsistent comprehensive assessment of non-offending parents in order to consider them as a viable placement resource or for other supportive roles.
- Limited MH resources in the community is compounded by the agency's lack of prioritization of supporting parents to navigate access, assistance with intake processes, and helping them to engage in MH services.

Placement Matching

Strengths

- Agency ensured the family, extended family, and NREFM were considered for placement
- Youth's and parent's preferences regarding who within their family, extended family, and NREFM circle should be considered for placement.
- Agency considered family's language and culture in making a placement match.

Challenges

- Concurrent planning practice was inconsistent. (e.g., children were placed with a similarly MH challenged relative as the alternative to reunification and not a good option for permanency; parents exhausted suggestions for relative/NREFM options)
- Limited non-relative placement options. Not enough RFA homes.

- Need more emphasis on recruitment & retention of Resource Parents; resource parents may feel unsupported in their role.

Reunification

Strengths

- Parents were given frequent, quality visitation that helped build rapport with the child and helped them reunify faster.
- Agency supported families with basic needs (i.e., utility bills, house cleaning services, trash pickup, etc.) which expedited & maintained reunification.
- Social workers supported co-parenting arrangements that helped with the responsibility of parenting being shared.

Challenges

- Inconsistencies in the standards for returning home regarding safety planning and assessments contributed to re-entries.
- Lack of tight transfers from one worker to another creates case management gaps which contributed to delays in reunification.
- Agency struggled finding adequate mental health services to support complex mental health clients within the Court timelines.

Transition Home/Aftercare

Strengths

- The family received funding to support their needs after the case was closed via flex funding.
- Utilized parent's CalWORKs status to continue mental health service after child welfare case closed.
- The Agency utilizes extended visits to conduct a trial run of the transition home prior to the case going to family maintenance.

Challenges

- There is a lack of consistency of offering aftercare services to families.
- Transition CFT at case closure is optional; therefore, it does not support planful transition away from CWS.
- Agency struggles to build the rapport necessary to have families trust and utilize after care programs offered.

Re-Entry

Strengths

- Social workers met the families where they were at, completed comprehensive assessments, and the identified needs were met with appropriate services.
- Social workers did thorough assessments and service delivery, prior to case closure.
- Social workers offered strong support to help keep parents motivated toward case plan goals.

Challenges

- Lack of adequate MH support is de-stabilizing to a family and leads to re-involvement with FCS.
- Lack of transitional planning and using SDM to its fidelity.
- Lack of ongoing after care support at case closure.

Table 47: Social Worker Peer Reviewer Recommendations

PSW Recommendations

TRAINING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More mental health training: especially for staff working with parents with MH diagnoses • Improved RFA training: to improve collaboration between RFA & SWs; better training for RFAs • Offer training on bypass laws: for front end staff, court social workers, etc. • Increase community-focused prevention trainings: train parents in peer groups, educating community in harm reduction, mental health, motivational interviewing, etc
RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen transition & aftercare resources • Provide more prevention resources to avoid removal • Create mental health navigator resource role • Increase resources for contracting out service providers (e.g., for more severe issues)
POLICIES & PROCEDURES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigate policy changes related to providing aftercare • Strengthen family finding policies & procedures • Add policy for mandatory dismissal CFT to discuss prevention strategies • Clarify policies & procedures: re differentiating FM or FR cases, dispo decisions, what dictates whether child stays in home, etc. • Increase teaming of front-end workers about possible case paths
OTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen family-centered teaming and consistency around listening to/incorporating family's perspective • Increase recruitment of RFA families • Improve Qualified Individual (QI) process around STRTPs

Peer Promising Practices

CHILD WELFARE

Parent Advocates/Parent Partners (Alameda, Merced) – Two counties shared ideas for promoting permanency by utilizing former clients who successfully reunified with their own children to help families currently involved with child welfare better navigate the system.

- Merced recruits successfully reunified parents or former foster youth and hires them as **Parent Partners** with county employee status. Parents must have maintained post-reunification stability for at least six months to qualify. Both parent and youth candidates are typically referred by their previous social worker. Parent Partners receive the same core training as new social workers and are assigned a mentor (former Parent Partner) for coaching and support. Parent Partners work with families throughout the case lifespan and several previous Parent Partners have been promoted to social workers.
- Alameda utilizes **Parent Advocates** who are assigned at the start of the case and participate in the initial CFT meeting and typically work with families for 90 days. They are considered staff of the Parent Engagement program which is contracted to a community-based agency (A Better Way) for oversight and management in close collaboration with the child welfare division. Services provided to families by Parent Advocates include CFT meeting support, parent orientation classes, fatherhood circle (just for dads), help parents connect to community based services, assist with navigating case plan activities, and coach parents to advocate for themselves.

Family Finding (Fresno, Ventura) – A pair of counties have dedicated positions (internal or contracted) assigned to family finding that identify and locate extended family members on an ongoing, regular basis throughout the life of the case.

- Fresno maintains a **Family Finding Unit** within their child welfare agency. Referral to a family finder starts at investigation with continuous family finding conducted throughout the case lifespan. Communication between family finder and case team keeps everyone informed about child’s progress toward permanency. Family finder conducts diligent search for relatives and extended family members and documents results into the case record. Comprehensive documentation (e.g., contact information, relationship, preferred role in child’s life, other details of child-relative/NREFM history) helps to not lose track of child’s network of support.
- Ventura supports comprehensive family finding with an online [Connect Our Kids](#) search tool. This site links family finders to 300 databases and includes an engagement idea center along with templates to support outreach via email and phone. Ventura also has a sub-set of their social workers trained and supported by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption program [Wendy’s Wonderful Kids](#) to be Adoption Recruiters who are dedicated to finding adoptive homes for children in foster care who have been challenged to find permanency.

Voluntary Services (Contra Costa, Fresno, Kings) – Several counties work with families without court involvement to both keep children at home (voluntary family maintenance) or provide supportive placement opportunities for older youth (voluntary family reunification).

- Contra Costa’s **Voluntary Family Reunification** program supports parents of older youth with mental health challenges or other cooperative parents facing other safety issues. Participation usually involves 3-6 months of intensive services; short-term foster care placement; frequent (weekly) assessments, visitation, and consultation—all without the constraints of court involvement. Through this voluntary arrangement, the agency provides families/youth with flexible resources and supports they otherwise would not be able to obtain. Not being tied to a court hearing calendar helps youth return home more quickly. In addition, Contra Costa has a **Voluntary Family Maintenance** program that avoids court involvement and keeps children and youth at home. Intensive in home services help parents overcome barriers, improve parenting skills, and develop a community-based support network for the future.
- Kings has both **Voluntary Family Reunification** and **Voluntary Family Maintenance** programs. In the VFR program, there is tight coordination between biological parents and resource parents to support visitation. VFM program is housed in Family Preservation Unit integrated into Emergency Response. Assigns secondary worker to intensively work with family and offer an array of intensive in home services to help families remain together without court involvement.
- Fresno has a **Voluntary Family Maintenance** unit staffed by two social workers and one supervisor. The supervisor from the VFM unit attends initial CFT meetings for all FM cases to determine if the Juvenile Dependency Court needs to be involved. If not, the case is assigned to a VFM social worker for intensive, in-home intervention and support.

Intensive Service Strategies (Kings, Stanislaus, Merced, Ventura) – Peers shared various methods for providing targeted, rigorous interventions to promote permanency. A variety of strategies are described below.

- Both Kings and Stanislaus have implemented **Mandatory Warm Hand-offs** at all case transfer points. Whenever a case is transferred to a new SW, there is a transition meeting between the previous and new workers. The new worker is formally introduced to the family and other case

players by the previous worker. The result of this ‘warm hand off’ helps the new worker build better rapport with the child and family, ensures improved continuity with the case plan, and helps the team maintain momentum in working toward the case goals.

- Merced uses **Case Conferencing** to bring a team perspective to problem solve high need, complex cases. Prior to every court hearing, the social worker convenes with two supervisors, program coordinator, relevant services provider(s), and eligibility worker. Social workers brief the group on case background, SDM findings, service provider progress reports. Then group brainstorms how to improve permanency outcomes and what else can be done.
- Stanislaus has an **Intensive FR Worker** contracted by Center for Human Services (CHS) who is co-located at local child welfare office a few days per week. Focus on ensuring reasonable efforts have been made on cases. They help with complex cases and provide an extra level of support and consultation for the assigned social worker. To maximize matching this limited resource to the cases that are most in need, the assigned social worker submits a referral to CHS. Then CHS conducts an intake process to determine acceptance of the case.
- Ventura shared a couple of intensive service strategies:
- **Family Collaborative** approach for FM cases with complex needs who are at high risk of destabilization and potential placement. These families receive intensive coordinated services planned through CFT process and have weekly face-to-face contact with their assigned worker. This program can also be used as a transition from FR services for families who are moving toward reunification.
- **Cultivating Solutions Mapping** sessions after detention and before Juris/Dispo hearing. The case team (often including attorneys) gather to decide whether to move forward with Juris/Dispo or dismiss. Focus is on determining the exact areas of concern and assessing for risk/safety, then collaboratively develop plan or solutions to prevent entry into system. A Mapping session can also happen when a case is stuck at any point.

Staff Recruitment (Alameda) – Alameda engages in ongoing hiring of 1-2 workers at a time and provides each new hire with immediate on-the-job training. This process transpires while waiting for new hire cohorts to assemble and complete core training, offering a more flexible response to staffing shortages. Alameda also has an Employee Referral program that offers employees a cash incentive (\$1,000) if they refer a friend or family member for a DCYF opening and the person is hired.

Translation Services (Fresno, Ventura) – Two counties provided various approaches to improve language access for families.

- Fresno contracts with a third party translator service (**Language Line**); helps find interpretation services for less commonly spoken languages; and provides a **desk guide** to social workers including a directory of interpreters.
- Ventura partners with **Mixteco Community Organizing Project** for language translation and cultural services to families that speak Mixteco dialect. Also uses **International Liaison** program to translate culturally specific case plan, court report, or other case documents into native language (e.g., Arabic, Korean, etc.) and liaison connects with family to ensure they are being provided culturally appropriate services. Relies on **Stratus**—a language translation application—for all video conferences or virtual meetings that require interpretation.

Strengths, Challenges, Recommendations & Peer Practices

JUVENILE PROBATION

The following findings are the results of the Peer Review focus on strengths and challenges in a range of relevant topics for probation about P1: Permanency in 12 months for youth entering foster care.

Background

Strengths

- Great collaboration and communication between probation and CWS in dual status cases.
- POs built early rapport with the youth and remained assigned to case for majority of the case.
- Very manageable caseload size allowed for POs to be more involved and spend extra time on cases.

Challenges

- Agency had limited resources for an appropriate interpreter and resorted to utilizing minor family member for translation.
- Limited collaboration between placement and wraparound officers.
- Adult charges led to an adult Probation case but there was no collaboration between juvenile and adult probation.

Maintaining Connections

Strengths

- P.O. maintained healthy boundaries among family members by continuing to connect with the relative placement and extended family about the youth's involvement
- P.O. maintained consistent contact with the youth—above and beyond the required monthly contact
- P.O. made ongoing efforts to support connection with siblings who were both involved in juvenile probation system.

Challenges

- Unless family shares information about the extended family, the Agency does little to conduct formal family finding efforts.
- Agency struggled to maintain sibling visitation and the sibling relationship.

Engagement

Strengths

- CFTs are an effective forum of engagement: Youth engaged through the CFTs often as driven by the needs of the case and throughout the case.
- Good communication between the P.O. and services providers. They worked together to maintain participation and monitor progress of the youth in services.
- Strong engagement of youth: P.O. utilized effective communication strategies between P.O. and the youth, including meeting at different locations, and when the youth did not show, the P.O. made efforts to locate the youth.

Challenges

- P.O. conversations with the youth were heavily focused on compliance mandates, rather than incorporating the youth's daily accomplishments and goals into their conversations.
- P.O. was unable to offer services to the parents, despite parents' challenges with substance use disorder/trauma.
- Agency has limited interpreter services available in the county, especially for Mixteco language.

Assessments & Services

Strengths

- Youth was connected to ILP early on (incentivized minor's participation).
- The youth was placed **with family** and the P.O. set up and coordinated an "STRTP-like" set of services, rules, and expectation for the youth.
- P.O. had good cultural awareness and advocacy for the family. As a result, the monolingual parent received good connection to services in Spanish through "Cara Y Corazon".

Challenges

- Lack of services for non-English speaking parents.
- Inconsistent offering services to probation parents to help equip them with skills to manage their child's behaviors (e.g., family therapy, parenting).
- Lack of substance abuse counseling/treatment services specifically designed for youth.

Placement Matching

Strengths

- Youth voice included in placement decision making.
- P.O.s were able to match the youth to placement with a program with intense level of service the youth needed.
- P.O. identified an STRTP out of county in order to keep the youth away from the gang affiliations and toxic family system.

Challenges

- Lack of STRTP availability within the county delays permanency.
- Misalignment between Court placement order and P.O. assessment & recommendation: Because the STRTP was court ordered, the P.O. was unable to place the youth with identified family.
- Lack of knowledge transfers between P.O.s regarding the details of placement matching efforts resulting in delayed permanency.

Permanency

Strengths

- Agency continues to cultivate important family connections for Youth to maintain emotional permanency (e.g., youth in SILP with a relative)
- P.O. worked closely with maintaining close family relationships while the youth was placed in an STRTP. Ultimately, the youth was able to reunify.
- Promoted family connection as permanent placement connection.

Challenges

- Lack of services offered in the native language/dialect interfered with parent/youth counseling and other services to support with healing familial relationships.
- Lack of affordable, available housing for the youth and his family made it so the youth and family could not move away from an enabling environment.
- Agency struggling to help youth with substance abuse issues acted as a barrier for youth to maintain permanency.

Table 48: Recommendations from Probation Officer Interviewees

PO Recommendations

TRAINING & RESOURCES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more training in early interventions/identifying warning signs • Increase joint training & collaboration between POs and FCS • Increase internal training for POs prior to receiving caseload • Utilize outside CFT facilitator (not PO) • Increase housing & support resources for families
POLICIES/PROCEDURES & OTHER	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengthen access to mental health resources & providers • Increase WRAP and other resources to transitioning youth • Explore extending AB 12 services to family especially if goal is reunification • Address workforce workload/caseload issues

Peer Promising Practices

PROBATION

- **Enriched CFT Practice (Sonoma)** – Sonoma conducts facilitated CFT meetings for all Probation youth with dedicated facilitator position (non-case carrying DPO). Initial CFTM occurs within 30 days of intake and are repeated following any Probation violation and as needed. Minimum frequency of every six months to align with the court schedule; more frequent for placement cases. A primary focus at the initial CFTM is to ask the youth to bring people who are important to them to the table. This starts in motion engagement of a natural circle of support that the youth can rely on during and after their Probation involvement. Also helps with family finding and gathering information when limited from other sources.
- **Collaboration with Service Providers (Placer)** – At weekly unit meetings and monthly staffings various service providers (depending on current issues/needs) are invited to share about their program or new things they are doing. For example, a supervisor from the Kids First (works with CSEC youth) was embedded with a Case Unit on meeting day. This guest provider worked with the staff to design CSEC parenting program to meet specific needs identified by Probation staff. Officers consistently reach out and are in frequent communication with providers to maintain good relationships.
- **Youth-Centered Coordination (Yolo)** – County Probation is encouraged to view their department as a well-oiled machine as opposed to this unit vs that unit. Department wide collaboration is enhanced by sharing adult and juvenile court calendars every month. This improves coordination between adult/juvenile and a youth’s progress can be followed if they cross-over into adult court. Joint case conferencing occurs once a month. This practice also helps when youth and parent are both on probation.
- **Collaboration with RFA (Kings)** – The RFA unit reaches out and connects with juvenile probation regularly. Collaborative efforts include engaging in events focused on caregivers of probation youth, conducting home visits jointly (RFA worker and DPO), generally finding ways to work as a team around probation youth placements (e.g., minimizing disruptions, training and support for caregivers, facilitating parent-caregiver alliances).

FOCUS GROUPS

Background & Methodology

As part of Santa Cruz’s C-CFSR process, 18 focus group sessions were held with a total of 86 stakeholders from FCS, JPD and the greater community. Hay Consulting conducted these focus groups for both JPD and FCS through summer and fall of 2024. All focus groups elicited input into the strengths and obstacles facing both agencies and their partners in terms their target outcome: P4 for FCS and P1 for JPD.

Distinct stakeholder groups were identified as important contributors to the C-CFSR focus group process and outreach was conducted to encourage participation. Across both agencies, a total of approximately 86 participants contributed their input in these focus group sessions. Participants represented multiple aspects of the Child Welfare and Probation systems—from parents and youth to staff and management to courts and community partners.

Table 49: Focus Group Participants

FCS Focus Groups (39 participants)	JPD Focus Groups (30 participants)	Service Providers (13 serving both agencies)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clerical (7/16/24) • Social workers (7/17/24 & 8/8/24) • Supervisors (9/25/24) • Dependency court (7/31/24 & 8/16/24) • Resource parents - English & Spanish (7/18/24, 8/19/24) • Parents – English & Spanish (10/30/24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervisors (8/28/24) • Probation Officers (8.28.24) • Youth (8/7/24) • Delinquency Court Partners (10/8/24) • Parents (10/17/24) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service Providers (7/18/24, 7/23/24, 8/14/24)

A specific question set was developed for each focus group, designed to elicit the insights, opinions and experiences of those particular stakeholders. Questions explored during the sessions related to key topics central to the P4 and P1 outcome areas. A representative question set used in the focus groups is included in the Appendix.

The results of each focus group were analyzed individually with attention paid to the strengths, challenges and solutions identified by participants. Themes drawn across multiple focus groups, highlighting key overarching topics and viable strategies, have been integrated throughout this report. The final segment in this section highlights key ideas and strategies gathered across all stakeholder events, including focus groups.

THEMES & IDEAS FOR IMPROVEMENT FROM FOCUS GROUPS & STAKEHOLDER’S MEETING

Input from the Kick-Off meeting and focus groups has been analyzed altogether and is presented here as a set of themes. Each theme includes statements about what’s going well, what could be improved, and a specific list of suggestions for how to make those improvements.

CHILD WELFARE

Aftercare

FCS is making strong efforts to start early creating a robust support team of natural & professional champions for the family through consistent CFT practice. Social workers focus on building deep trust with parents to support their reunification success. However, across all stakeholders a significant area of concern and suspected contributor to re-entry is the way aftercare is set up. Both parents and youth often feel lost and abandoned by the abrupt cessation of services, supportive relationships, and accountability mechanisms established during their time with FCS. Some workers reported anticipating families would struggle because of the lack of aftercare services and attention post-reunification—during what is most often a very tender time. For parents with limited natural support networks or other vulnerabilities, rushed court timelines (or other reasons for case closure before readiness for reunification) contributed to greater risk for re-entry. Service providers try to pick up the slack, but a more systemic response is needed. Some ideas for improvement include connecting family with prevention network, provide some continuity of services, ongoing therapy with familiar practitioners and more robust supports for transition aged youth. Specific ideas for improvement include:

- Expand Parent Partner and Youth Advocates programs, including finding mentors for fathers
- Slow wind down/step down process to provide more supports/services; extend FR timelines & service plans
- Create more formal safety plans or exit plans in anticipation of reunifying families that includes post-case closure services: parent mentor, continuity with therapist using Medi-CAL, parenting education & supports, vocational training/jobs for youth, funds for college/housing
- Hire a Family Preservation contractor to work with families when transferred from FR to FM; - Implement warm handoffs between Ongoing & Permanency so youth needs, and caregiver skills continue to be matched
- Fortify supports for Transition Age Youth: create more transitional housing (like Tyler House) with supportive programming; offer workshops for building independent Living Skills like managing finances, buying a car, paying taxes etc.

Teaming

Child and Family Teams (CFTs) are a well-established and successful component of current child welfare practice. Across all stakeholder groups, CFTs are upheld as consistent and strengths-based, with particular commendation going to CFT facilitators. Most families respond well to being involved of CFTs and feel their voices are heard. Service providers concur that CFTs are useful for youth and parents. Youth and parents involved in decision-making likely contribute to more stable placements. A wider reach into a family's network of support could more frequently be included in CFTs. Similarly, service providers and resource parents request more consistent inclusion in CFTs and improvements in communication among participants and between meetings. Engaging youth or parents who feel reluctant or intimidated is an ongoing challenge of teaming. Potential suggestions include:

- Increase use of behaviorally based case plans for Family Maintenance & Family Reunification
- Increase efforts at full team participation in CFTs: extended family members, resource parents, providers and others from family's network of support
- Expand use of regular CFT meetings when case moves to Permanency; maintains consistency for youth and offers forum for engagement of permanency resources
- Encouraging youth contribution to team decisions: include in conversations about support network, social workers & supervisors use engagement skills to encourage youth participation in CFTMs
- Return to in-person CFTMs to build rapport, trust and better engage youth and parents

- Create communication structure for in between CFT meetings that includes updates, feedback about case, and adjustments

Collaborations

FCS has cultivated and maintains strong relationships with key partners (e.g. CASAs, Behavioral Health, Education) which contributes significantly to successful reunifications. Some collaborations could be greatly strengthened to reduce confusion for families, conflicts between providers, and lack of clarity about roles (e.g. SUDS). Need for bridging across systems (Law Enforcement and SUD) in ongoing coordination efforts. Cross system tensions interfere at the practice level and strain the capacity of social workers and supervisors beyond their authority to resolve these issues. Reducing such tensions requires intervention at the leadership level to resolve through establishing MOUs, cross-system agreements, or other arrangements. Most suggestions to improve collaboration at the practice level are aimed at the systems level. Potential ideas for improvement include:

- Create opportunities to share systemic information across agencies & CBOs: joint website, community gathering, use the Family, Youth & Children Well-Being Cabinet
- Leadership steps up to improve channels of communication across partnerships
- Formalized partnership agreements to enable smoother communication and increase mutual trust
- Create cross-education opportunities: e.g. FCS educating law enforcement about protective custody, petition filing, and other joint actions

Placement Options

Concerted efforts are made by FCS staff to place kids with relatives or people they know. However, certain types of placements are in short supply (e.g. emergency or shelter placements; STRTPs treatment foster homes; emergency placements; homes for teens and children less than 5 years old). Concurrent planning is a strong practice at FCS and resource parents (related or not) are supported and encouraged to provide a permanent home, if necessary. However, when such resources are unavailable for children, a lack of local placement options compromises youth's ability to maintain connections. Scarcity of affordable housing in Santa Cruz exacerbates this situation. Even though efforts to match according to youth's needs, identities, family circumstances, and other factors, scarce options contribute to delays and mismatches in placement. Youth often end up in care far from their network of support, school and other important connections. Visitation processes are generally very good. Yet, more transportation is needed for distant or difficult to access placement locations. Potential suggestions include:

- Focus RP recruitment on local high schools for families already with teens
- Create "Connection Maps" of network of permanency resources early in case; continue with family finding periodically thru case

Staff

There are some deeply skilled FCS staff who go above and beyond, making lasting connections with youth and providing skills and support to parents/caregivers. Many staff benefit from strong supervision and practice guidance and a collegial environment exists of staff supporting each other. Social worker IIs help case carrying workers with paperwork, scheduling and other administrative tasks. While efforts are made to balance the different strengths of workers within units to distribute the workload, the organizational climate is characterized by overwhelm, overwork, and overload. Cases are consistently more difficult, caseloads are higher, timeframes are tight and a big percentage of staff, while willing, are too new to

know how to juggle it all. Ideas for improvement include increasing the supportive infrastructure and strengthening the conditions for practice excellence. Additional suggestions include:

- Increase case support structures: Restart case transfer meetings, hold regular group supervision, include more than Ongoing in case staffings, include office assistant in development of Online Practice Guide
- Value line staff: pay social workers a more locally competitive wage, encourage good self-care, and support work-from-home options - Hire staff with facilitation skills & lived experience
- Offer additional trainings on topics such as de-escalation, individualized treatment plans, making clear requests for information from community partners, adhering to ICWA requirements, and permanency planning for youth

Responding to Families with Intensifying, Complex Needs

While there's a rich array of services for the typical challenges child welfare families face (e.g. addressing basic needs, therapy, parenting education), a more complicated need among families has emerged that the county's service array is not yet prepared to accommodate. Challenges youth & families face are significant, multi-faceted, & qualitatively different than other years. Specific needs include lack of housing (effecting vulnerable families & potential resource parents), strength/addictiveness of substances, severity of mental health issues (in both youth & parents), and lack of availability and engagement with preventive services. Improvements include additional training of social workers and resource parents in trauma, high needs issues, substance use & recovery, engaging persons with complex mental health issues; more treatment options locally; and expansion of parent advocates. Specific ideas for improvement include:

- Bring in experts/specialists to more thoroughly assess complex cases
- Expand Parent Partner program, including development of mentors for fathers
- Increase focus on engagement of natural support systems: provide supporters access to community services (e.g. warmline), provide trainings (e.g. post-reunification supports), include in safety planning meetings and CFT meetings
- Sponsor a coalition of prevention-focused community partners to create safer and healing spaces including Safe Living Environments for youth and family-friendly shelters for families
- Coordinate regionally to establish STRTP within Santa Cruz or the tri-county area (Monterey, Santa Cruz, Santa Clara)
- Offer accessible community mental health resources similar to substance abuse treatment services

Service Accessibility & Responsiveness

There are many effective services across the county from parenting education to sobriety programs to flexible funding that covers concrete needs. Stakeholders are especially grateful for the Parent Center, Parent Advocates, CASA volunteers, and Families Together. Unfortunately, some services are in short supply in the area of substance use treatment including detox facilities; treatment options to match strength of newer, more potent drugs; specialized treatment for dads or youth who are parents; and long-term recovery support programs. Other capacity gaps include mental health services and supports; respite care for vulnerable parents/caregivers; and grassroots, culturally aligned family support organizations. Recent budget cuts have reduced community services & provider capacity (e.g. providers unable to provide progress reports in time for court date). Other resources can be hard to access due to wait lists, lack of bilingual providers, and limited capacity to provide specialized programming for the child welfare

involved population. Youth who need treatment-focused placement do not have access to any local STRTP and must receive this care out of the area. Access to services is further compromised by lack of awareness among families, FCS staff and providers about what services exist throughout the community. Stakeholders attribute this knowledge gap to providers/programs operating in silos, lack of communication or marketing, and staff turnover. In short, a robust service array loses its potency if information about these resources is not widely known. Suggested improvements include a web-based resource portal of available services; "get to know you" community fairs where families, staff & providers can learn about community based resources, and navigators to help families find their way through the service system. Other suggestions include:

- Offer evening and weekend availability of parent supports & services to meet case plan requirements (e.g., crisis intervention team, drug testing, visitation supervision)
- Offer community events raising awareness of resources available to parents, caregivers, children and youth.
- Increase availability of education & trainings: co-parenting, youth independent living skills, and gender-specific programming.
- Increase availability of financial supports to parents: e.g., transportation stipends to meet case tasks, expansion of flex funds.
- Expand peer to peer network of support for youth and parents, including launching a mental health navigator system and building up youth advocates programs.

Culturally Responsive Practice

FCS takes pride and is recognized by others for being inclusive and understanding of the diverse community it serves. This includes social workers expressing humility and sensitivity toward farmworkers, immigrants, undocumented families, SOGIE individuals, fathers and others. BIPOC meetings and culturally focused affinity groups (e.g., Latina Social Workers) are helpful forums to share perspectives on race and culture. Despite these concerted efforts at cultural responsiveness, disproportionality exists at every point in the child welfare system. While some parents and youth report experiencing no discrimination, others shared a different reality. Undocumented parents find case plan requirements often put jobs and identity at risk. Some fathers feel left out of equity discussions altogether. Racial identity of Native American children and families is not always recognized and acknowledged. Further development of staff skills and relevant services for trans youth is another need. Potential ideas for improvement include:

- Improve access to Language Line services
- Hire bilingual clerical staff for translations in-person and of forms, court reports, and other important documents
- Continue with efforts to identify non-offensive collective language
- Use cultural brokers, culturally aligned guides, videos for specific cultures (e.g. Mixteco) to support families
- Expand definition of diversity to include disabilities, SOGIE, language, fathers, etc.

Resource Parent Support

Many helpful supports for resource parents exist in Santa Cruz such as providing resource parent mentors; making child care accessible for caregivers; receiving proactive, skilled support from the Placement Coordinator, especially during placement transitions; and partnering with social workers to help preserve a placement through tough times. However, challenges continue to strain both the resource parents themselves and the system designed to recruit, train, support and retain this vital resource. The RFA unit

is short staffed to meet the needs of caregivers and while skilled in the technical aspects of the RFA process, the more adaptive skills of family engagement are underdeveloped. Resource parents, FCS staff and dependency court stakeholders expressed concern about caregivers being unprepared for handling children with complex needs or urgent situations. This is compounded by a lack of available supports for resource parents caring for trans youth, teenagers, youth with substance use disorders, and kids with mental health issues. Moreover, relative caregivers struggle with particular support needs such as managing difficult family relationships, connecting with other kin caregivers for social support, and addressing barriers (e.g., economic stressors, attachment issues, and transportation). Expanded opportunities for peer-to-peer support, training on specialized or advanced topics, and formalized retention efforts are suggested areas for improvement.

- Expand RP training offerings using in-person formats to promote peer-to-peer support. Training topics include caring for youth with complex trauma histories, understanding ICWA, developmental theories, children's rights, and concurrent planning
- Offer evening or weekend Resource Parent support groups with childcare provided
- Increase ongoing training opportunities to support transitions, especially for relatives caregivers; focus on grief and loss, self-care and healthy boundaries
- Offer more respite care for Resource Parents - Cultivate supportive relationships, knowledge building and comradery between Resource Parents and bioparents by sponsoring trainings and joint activities

Prevention

Significant efforts to focus on prevention are in place in Santa Cruz. From engaging first time parents in the Family Partnership Program who are struggling with addiction to parenting classes that teach parents skills they can apply to younger siblings in the home. These collaborations are fueled by FCS' commitment to partnering around prevention with community based organizations and other public systems. While the Families First Prevention Services Act is a start at targeted funding for prevention activities, most funding is still structured around children being in placement making it difficult to secure any stabilization services for youth or parents prior to CWS involvement. In addition, fear of removal often keeps families from calling FCS for help. Suggestions for improvements include:

- Add voluntary FM and FR programs as an alternative to court involvement
- Help struggling parents prior to system involvement by offering respite; sending safe, trained adults as "parenting coaches" into the home
- Create a coordinated communication system between Community-Based Organizations, Family Resource Centers, Parks and Recreation, and other family-focused resources to coordinate stabilization services in support of vulnerable families
- Raise public awareness about non-FCS resources that families would be willing to call for prevention support, information and assistance

PROBATION

Many services across the county are lauded as making a big difference in the lives of JPD parents and youth. In particular, the CASA program has taken hold with great acclaim, to the point of being modelled in other CA counties. While there is a great variety of supportive community-based services, some of successful programs are only available to a limited clientele (e.g. those with private insurance, ease of transportation, flexible schedules). Services are limited in South County where the majority of JPD youth

are based. There's a lack of communication and overall knowledge across family-serving orgs about what services are available and for whom. Systems Alignment meetings are a successful way of sharing information about services across providers. Some suggestions for improvements include:

- Provide transportation to court for parents
- Shift contracts with CBOs with expectations about participation when youth is in custody
- Hold partners to higher quality & fidelity standards; evaluate in terms of outcomes & prevention
- Offer parent services & supports on evenings & weekends - Increase availability of transitional housing for youth
- Offer alternatives to talk therapy for youth (e.g. equine therapy, camp, acupuncture)

Preparing for Permanency

While the permanency outcome data may not show it, many Probation youth successfully return home after age 18 or live with a relative or other family member while they are receiving AB 12 benefits. More timely permanency efforts can be hampered by challenges to preparing parents for reunification. Most services provided through JPD (e.g. at STRTPs) focus on preparing youth for transition (whether it be independent living, alternative living settings or reunification). There often isn't a parallel effort to engage and prepare parents, which can create issues at reunification. Further complications include that many youth, being older, are uninterested in reunifying, and many JPD parents are burned-out or otherwise disinclined to work on their parenting due to multiple stressors. Stakeholders frequently mentioned Family Nights as being very successful parent engagement events and suggested they be replicated in North County. Ideas for improvement include:

- Create a Parent Advocate program for JPD parents like is in place for child welfare parents; recruit former juvenile justice involved families to mentor newly involved families to help them better navigate the process and prepare for success
- Provide more supports and services for parents to prepare them for reunification: family therapy, training, orientation, night classes, etc.
- Expand the experience of Family Nights to South County
- Strengthen CFTs: establish regular team communications between meetings, create better CFT database, assign CFT coordination to non-PO resource, include all players in CFTs

Placement Options

Placement POs put a lot of effort into understanding what's available, what youth need, and how to create the most successful placements possible. There are also effective diversion efforts such as Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) which has been very successful providing resources & preserving families to keep kids out of placement altogether. The Court also emphasizes consideration of placement as a last resort for juvenile justice involved youth. For the small number of youth who remain in need of placement, limited local placement options result in youth being placed out-of-county, often after long wait times. This compromises opportunities for visitation and maintaining connections with family or network of support, which in turn can impact reunification efforts. Not only is there a lack of therapeutic placements in the county, but as youth enter the system with more complex needs (e.g. mental health issues, substance use issues, serious criminal records, gang involvement), the ability to generate new placement resources is more difficult.

Post-Permanency Supports

Some post-permanency supports are very helpful: reunification supports are offered for 12 months, some youth receive supports like braces or household items, and CASAs can be extended until the youth is 21 years old. However, reunification in particular can be a formidable challenge for youth returning to impoverished environments with multiple stressors or responsibilities. Youth without family often have difficulty securing housing. Independent living resources are limited, and behavioral health services are often disrupted when youth return home. Suggested approaches include:

- Slow the pace of transition from system support to reunification and case closure; taper services slowly to allow time for adjustment to home and community
- Get buy-in from youth prior to 18 about planning for transition and aftercare services
Match youth to local resources upon return from STRTP with warm hand-offs to community based providers from STRTP team
- Consider alternatives to returning home for some youth as viable options in lieu of permanency (e.g., military, JobCorps, vocational training)
- For TAY youth, offer a Wraparound program centering on voice of youth
- Enhance aftercare supports to include financial supports/benefits, continuing CASA mentorship, apprenticeships or work opportunities through partnerships with other State programs (Dept of Rehabilitation Services)

Culturally Responsive Practice

Probation continues to train staff and attend to practices that welcome families across a range of social identities (e.g. racial identity, SOGIE, non-English speaker, etc.). There are quite a few bilingual JPD staff and agency forms/processes have been translated into Spanish. However, court processes remain limited to translation during hearings and are less responsive in terms of access to interpreters for less common languages, translation accuracy, consistent use of pronouns, etc. Non-English speaking families often don't understand court processes and aren't provided translated court documents that clients can take with them. The disproportionality among demographics of youth entering JPD is noticed but not significantly addressed.

Role of JPD

POs are well-regarded in their efforts & relationships with youth & families and enjoy a collaborative, collegial work environment. Numbers of youth entering JPD have decreased consistently & significantly over the past several years. This raises questions about the role of JPD in best serving SCC youth. Stakeholders appreciate the current shift for POs to take on more social work tasks, relationships & trainings (e.g. much of JPD staff has done trauma-informed training; POs now serve as mentors in schools). POs have done an excellent job of broadening their role from law enforcement only to also emphasizing case management, family engagement, and teaming. There's still a need for the public perception to fully recognize this evolving blended role of POs. Possible ideas for improvement include:

- Increase focus on community-oriented early intervention/prevention
- Provide additional trainings: more induction training for all new staff, CSEC training; continuity of training as POs rotate roles

SECTION 12: Outcome Data Measures

CHILD WELFARE OUTCOME DATA MEASURES

The source for the following data is the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) (Quarter 1 of 2024 in comparison to Quarter 1, 2020).

Measure S1: Maltreatment in Foster Care

This measure compares the total number of substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment during a foster care episode within the selected 12-month period to the total number of days spent in foster care.

Table 50: S1 Maltreatment in Foster Care (per 100,000 days in care)

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
M	34,916	2.86*	↑	56 pct pts	9.07

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From Q1 2020 to Q4 2024, the rate for children who had substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment during a foster care episode within the selected 12-month period to the total number of days spent in foster care increased from 1.83 to 2.86. Nonetheless, current performance well exceeds the Federal Standard (9.07).

Table 51: S1, Maltreatment in Foster Care - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

While Santa Cruz County is currently exceeding the national standard on this measure, we will continue to focus the issue of maltreatment in foster care. It is important to note that there have been fewer than 10 children counted in this Q1 measure each year since 2020. Factors that contribute to the County are the high number of placements where prior relationships exist between the child and caregiver. FCS also provides caregiver support with a dedicated RFA Unit who work with the families in addressing challenges and offer resources to aid relative and non-relative caregivers. This is an area that will continue to be an area of focus in the coming years with the formation of the Resource Family Recruitment and Retention Workgroup.

Measure S2 Recurrence of Maltreatment

This measure displays recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months of substantiations that occurred between April 2023 and March 2024.

Note: The most recent start and end dates in the table represent the 12-month period when the cohort had a substantiated allegation of maltreatment (April 2022-March 2023), so the 12-month recurrence period is 2024 Q1 (April 2023 – March 2024). (This is the way the start and end dates are represented in the CCWIP/CFSR tables.)

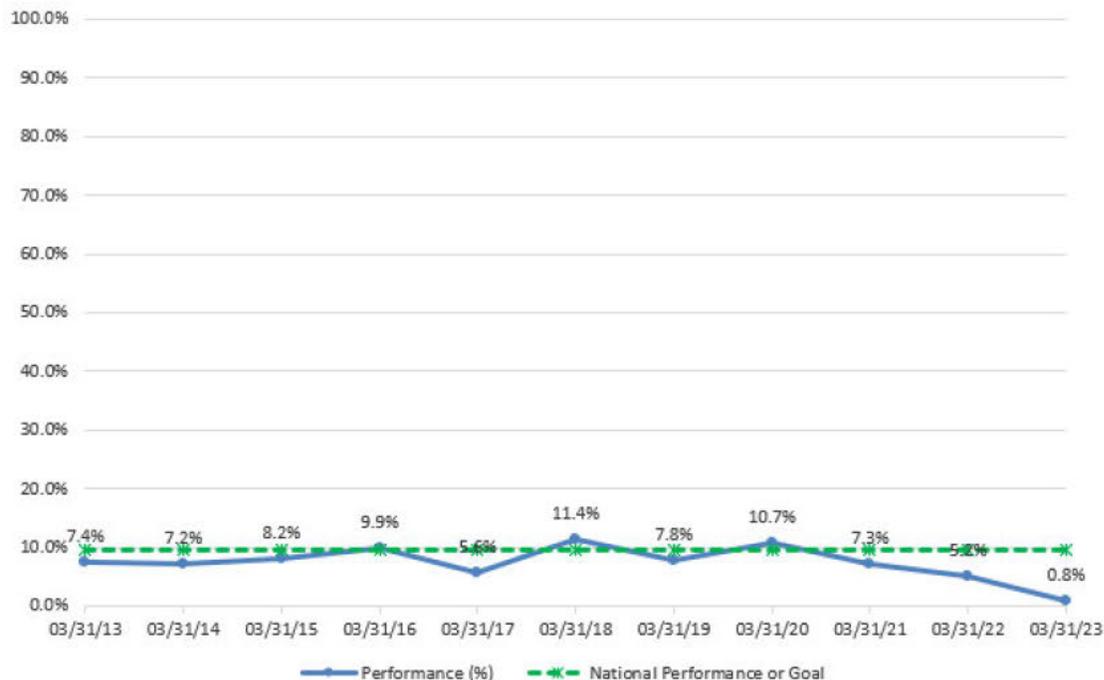
Table 52: S2 Recurrence of Maltreatment

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
M	131	0.8%	↓	7 pct pts	9.7%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the rate for children who had recurrence of maltreatment within 12 months of substantiations decreased from 7.8% to 0.8%. Current performance exceeds the Federal Standard (9.7%).

Table 53: S2 Recurrence of Maltreatment - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

While Santa Cruz County exceeds the national standard on this measure and has shown improvement three years in a row, we will continue to monitor this area as new efforts in child abuse prevention are implemented. Recent improvements in the performance may be linked to the increased use of SOP tools such as safety planning where the parent is able to proactively make a plan with their support network to mitigate risks of abuse and neglect. Additionally, the robust CFT program within FCS provides for a more thoughtful and support network inclusive exit plan for families upon case dismissal. Increased use of support networks and prevention strategies will be a focus for FCS in the coming years which will likely have a positive impact on performance in this area.

Measure P1 Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care

This measure looks at all children who entered foster care in the selected 12-month period and calculates the percent who achieved permanency within 12 months of their removal. Permanency is determined as reunification, adoption, or guardianship.

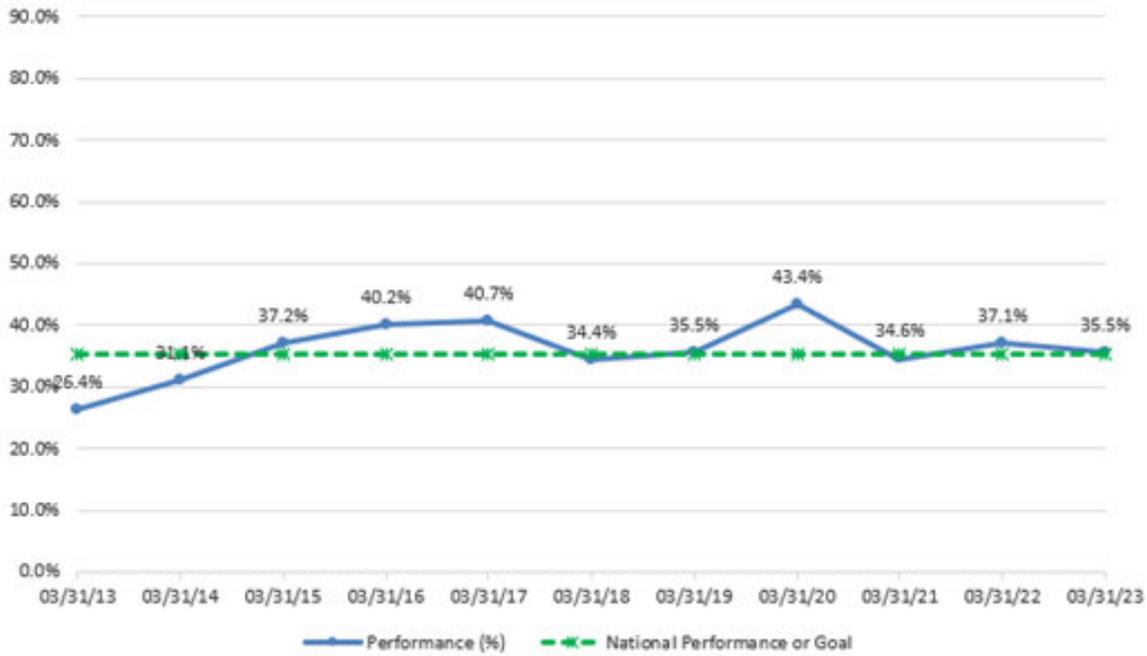
Table 54: P1 Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
22	62	35.5%	=	0 pct pts	35.2%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2019, the percentage of children achieving permanency who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer increased briefly as of Q1 2020 but has returned to the same percentage of 35.5%, just above the national standard of 35.2%.

Table 55: P1 Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care: Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

This measure was the central focus of the 2020-2025 System Improvement Plan. Multiple strategies have been implemented to improve performance in this area over the last four years to include: Improving Fatherhood Engagement, Enhancing Services to Birth Parents, Strengthening Implementation of the Integrated Core Practice Model, Increase Placement Capacity and Expanding Prevention Services.

The commitment to bring children into care as a last resort is reflected in the decrease in overall placement numbers. Additionally, the use of SOP, Safety Planning, Increasing Networks of Support and the continuation of virtual service delivery for greater participation in events such as CFTs has certainly contributed to FCS’s ability, despite tremendous challenges, to exceed the goal of increasing the rate of children achieving permanency. FCS is committed to scheduling CFTs as soon as a child/youth has been placed in protective custody for the purpose of creating safety plans with family members and other natural supports that allow the social worker to request a petition be dismissed or to avoid filing a petition in Court In cases where safety concerns still exist, families can be provided with Family Maintenance Services while keeping the family intact. This practice has contributed to decreasing the number of children placed in care.

Another practice that has increased the use of natural supports is the recent change in how information is collected from initial contact with FCS. In 2020, FCS changed the intake/screening form to include questions about natural supports for the families. This has provided the Investigations Social Worker with resources for the family from the onset of the investigation. Increasing knowledge of the families’ natural supports has provided for more robust safety planning earlier on and has decreased the need for court ordered services.

Over the review period, FCS, Juvenile Probation and multiple court partners have convened on a quarterly basis to discuss how to fully integrate natural supports throughout the life of the dependency case and to make recommendations for practice improvement. This collaboration has completed a targeted review of court reports for both FCS and Probation to determine the current level of documentation of natural supports providing a baseline to improve upon. FCS anticipates that increasing both the quantity and quality of natural supports involvement will support the ability to find options other than bringing children into care when safety threats are present.

The current performance for year four (39.7%) exceeds the national standard which places the county well on track to achieving the goal of meeting/exceeding the national standard consistently over the remaining years of the SIP cycle. It should be noted that FCS was able to increase performance on this measure from the baseline for all review periods. Implementation of SIP strategies, along with FCS’s promising practices in the first four years is likely having a positive impact on permanency rates.

Measure P2 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12-23 Months

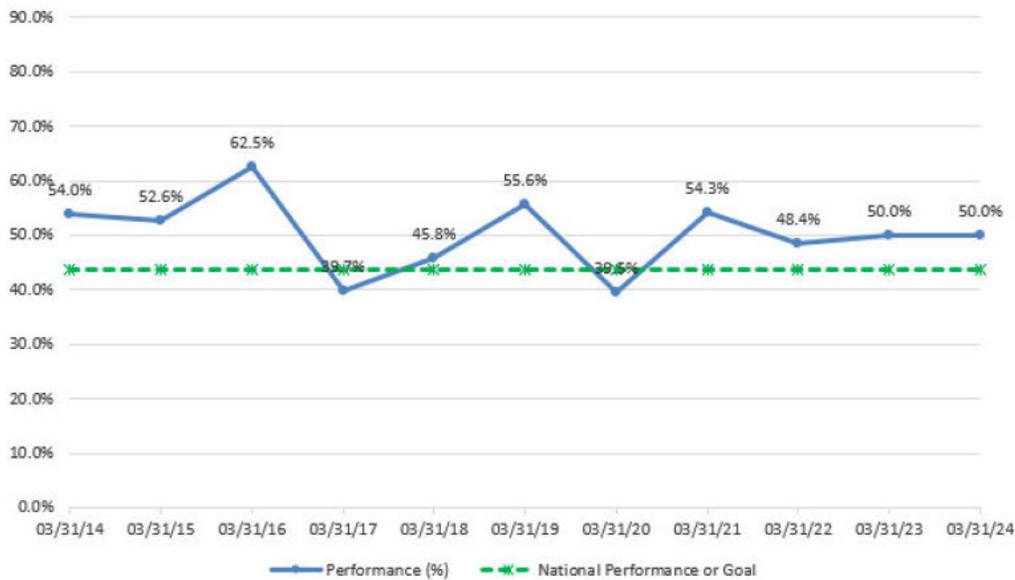
This measure looks at all children who have been in foster care for 12-23 months as of the first day of the selected 12-month period and determines what percentage was discharged to permanency within 12 months of the start of the period. Permanency is determined as reunification, adoption, or guardianship.

Table 56: P2 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12-23 Months

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
12	24	50.0%	No change	10.5 pct pts	43.8%

For the last four years, the percentage of children achieving permanency during the year who had been in foster care 12-23 months has remained between 48% and 54%, easily exceeding the national standard (43.8%). The percentage has increased 10.5 percentage points since Q1 2020. It is likely that the strategies discussed above to improve outcomes for P-1 have had a positive impact over the last four years in this measure as well

Table XX: P2 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12-23 Months: Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Measure P3 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24 Months or More

This measure looks at all children who have been in foster care for 24 months or more on the first day of the selected 12-month period and determines what percent were discharged to permanency within 12 months of the start of the period.

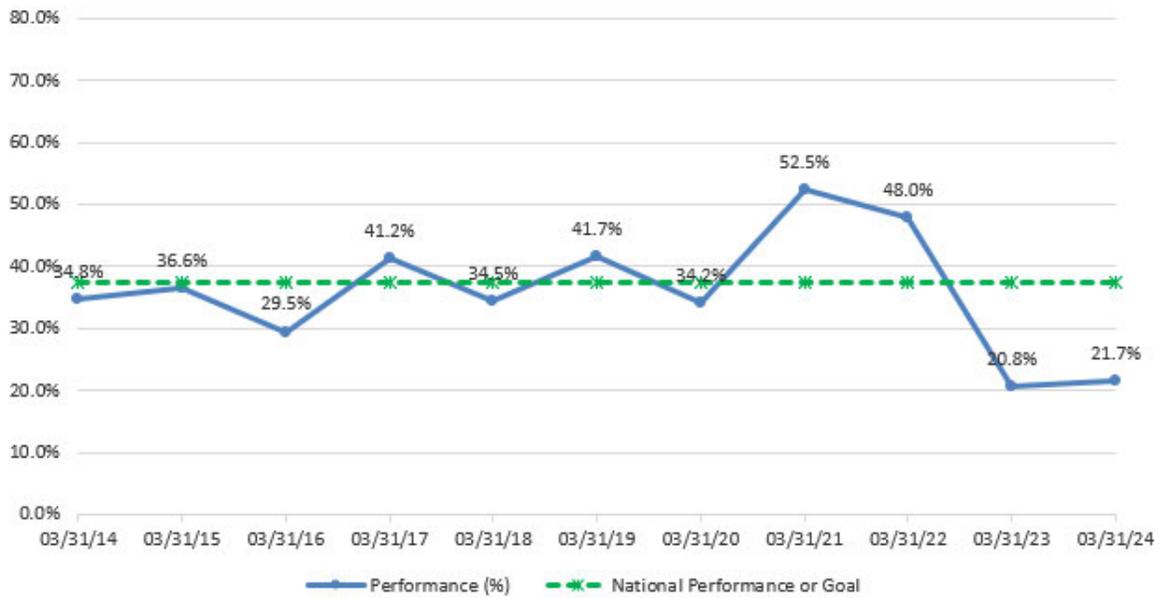
Table 57: P3 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24+ Months

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
M	23	21.7%	↓	12.5 pct pts	37.3%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

The percentage of children achieving permanency during the year who had been in foster care 24 months or more has declined since Q1 2020 and fallen below the national standard (37.3%) for the last two years after exceeding it in Q1 2021 and Q1 2022. As the chart below shows, this measure has fluctuated a great deal in recent years. This is likely due in part to the rapidly declining number of children who have remained in care for 24 months or more. The denominator for this measure has dropped from a high of 71 in Q1 2015 down to 23 by Q1 2024.

Table XX: P3 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24+ Months - Performance



B

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

A review of the cases included in this sample, indicated of the 20 youth, a number of the youth consisted of a sibling group which has impacted the achievement rate. While FCS fell below the standard for Round 4 measures, the trend for the prior three years exceeded the prior Round 3 measure of 30.3%. An analysis of FCS’s performance on this measure over a five-year period shows a positive trend and is an area where FCS consistently has performed above the prior standard. FCS will continue to monitor performance in this area, given the new Round 4 measures and anticipates that FCS will continue to make progress towards meeting the target goal. FCS has identified the P3 measure as a potential target outcome area for the next SIP cycle and anticipates developing strategies that will enable FCS to achieve the new compliance standard of 37.3%

Measure P1-P3 Analysis

Given our County’s relatively small numbers reflected in the P1-P3 measures, it is difficult to isolate singular factors contributing to performance rather, we believe there are numerous interconnected factors that can influence the data that require further analysis.

Over the previous five-year System Improvement Plan Cycle, the County has had a multitude of events that have most certainly caused fluctuations in performance.

Through the first two years of this SIP cycle, there were a range of issues from tremendous world events to developments within our agency which together influence how we interpret and measure progress on our SIP Goals. Working in a global pandemic environment had a profound and immediate impact on service delivery and client outcomes that necessitated extensive practice changes to address health and safety issues for all involved.

Year three of this SIP cycle welcomed a shift away from focus on dealing with imminent health and safety risks to adapting to a post-pandemic environment and return to a newly defined “normal.” In person interviews and visits returned while remnants of the pandemic that provided increased engagement and flexibility for families were embraced such as continuing the option for families to appear in court and CFTs virtually. FCS staff continued a hybrid work schedule providing for the majority of staff to work remotely a portion of the work week. Meetings, trainings and other convenings also continued to be a mix of in person and virtual venues as appropriate by topic. The flexibility and convenience of remote working environments continues to be the preference for staff and beneficial to staff who’s residential and working location are in separate communities.

In the midst of adapting to life in the aftermath of COVID-19, Santa Cruz County was also faced with a natural disaster that impacted a multitude of residents including staff and families served by FCS and Probation. Between January 2023 and March 2023, the county was subject to severe flooding events result in destruction of property, major power outages and displacement of families. FCS employees were called to serve as Disaster Service Workers as the Emergency Operations Centers were activated and need for disaster service work. Disaster Service work ranged from opening and operating temporary shelters and providing resource information to those most impacted by the flooding. FCS and probation staff made daily contact with child welfare families to assess their safety and provide resources and support to families already stretched from the 2020 Coronavirus Pandemic and the fires that ravaged the county in 2021 and 2022.

Internal factors include unprecedented instability in the Leadership of FCS. Between 2020-2023, the Director position turned over 5 times until the current Director was hired in 2023. During this same time period, all program managers were shifted to cover a new area of program creating a temporary loss of program expertise while program managers learned a new subject matter. In addition to program manager changes, several new supervisors and social workers were hired who required time to learn the specifics of their program assignments. While new social workers completed training, caseload coverage issues continued to exist and, in some cases, these responsibilities were shifted up to supervisors and managers. FCS was also down an analyst for this period of time. In spite of the instability Santa Cruz County has been able to perform well on the majority of Outcome Measures.

As to permanency specifically, there are numerous factors that can influence our performance including but not limited to: staff turnover at all levels, lower adoption rates, lingering impacts from the pandemic and the complexity of cases with severe substance abuse/mental health issues. To get a clearer picture, all of these factors need to be considered and potentially be explored further.

Measure P4 Re-entry to Foster Care

This measure looks at the number of children who entered foster care in the selected 12-month period, were discharged to reunification or guardianship within 12 months, and reentered foster care within 12 months of their discharge date. If child re-enters foster care multiple times within the 12-month period

following discharge, only the first re-entry date will be selected. Because the measure looks forward from the start of the placement, data are not displayed for the most recent 24 months.

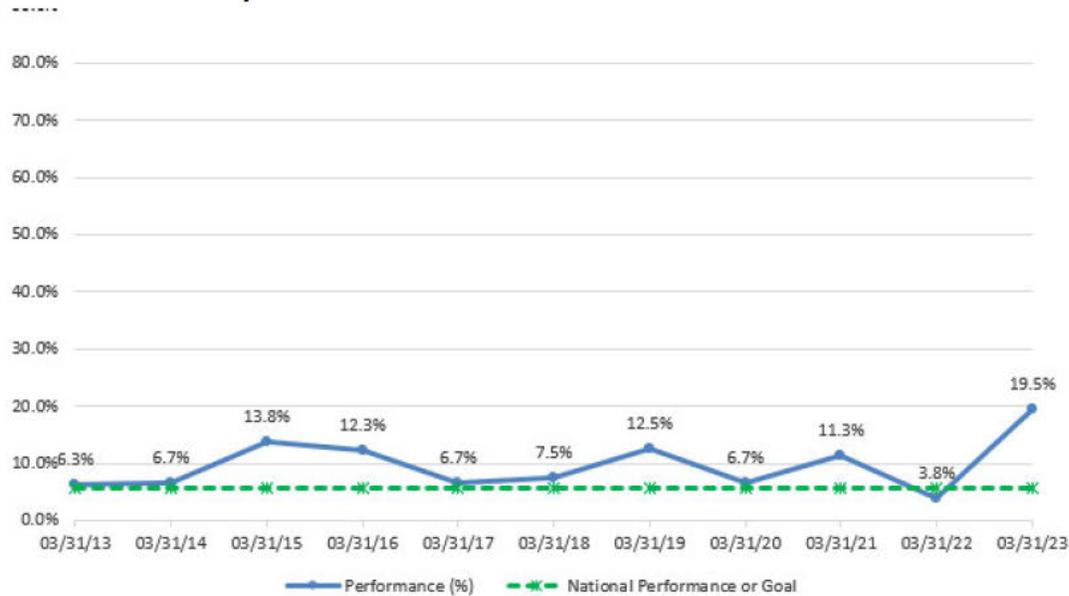
Table 58: P4 Re-entry to Foster Care

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
M	41	19.5%	↑	7.0 pct pts	5.6%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

In recent years the percentage of children re-entering foster care within 12 months of their discharge date has mostly remained higher than the national standard of 5.6%, including a recent jump from 3.8% in Q1 2022 to 19.5% as of Q1 2024.

Table 59: P4 Re-entry to Foster Care - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

In examining the reasons for re-entry, stakeholder input suggests that re-entry patterns match the original reason for entry into care. Specifically, this is reflected in substance use disorders violence. And mental health issues Parents with substance use disorders and mental health issues are most likely to re-enter. Cases selected for peer review that experienced a reentry all had a component of parental substance abuse and/or severe mental health issues. This draws attention to an opportunity to strengthen the resources made available to families at intake, as well as continued supportive services at case closure. Other contributors to re-entry include lack of voluntary FM/FR, limited Differential Response resources, and the pressure of multiple stressors on many families (e.g. unstable housing, unemployment). Also to be considered is the relationship between increased performance in the P-1 measure over the last 5 years and the current increase in re-entry rates.

An analysis of FCS’s performance on this measure over a five-year period shows a positive trend and decrease in children re-entering foster care on a consistent basis and that the total number of children re-entering care is relatively small (less than 10) children per review period. While the number of children

reentering care remains relatively small, FCS is committed to ensuring that no children reenter care. Given the new Round 4 measures, FCS has identified the P4 measure as a potential target outcome area for the next SIP Cycle and anticipates developing strategies that will enable FCS to achieve the new compliance standard of 5.6%.

Measure P5 Placement Stability

This measure displays the rate of placement moves per day of foster care for children who enter foster care in the selected 12-month period. This measure counts the total number of placements moves and the total number of days in foster care at the end of the selected 12-month period. This is then multiplied by 1,000 to determine the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days.

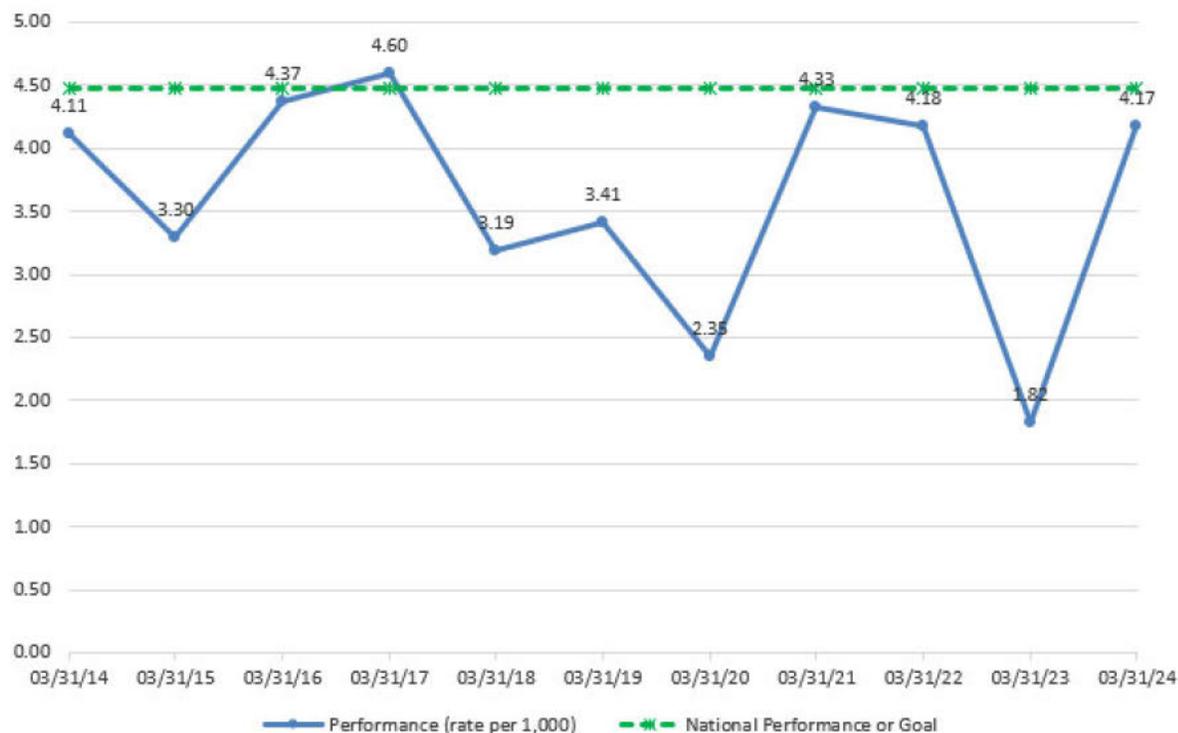
Table 60: P5 Placement Stability

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
35	8,388	4.17	↑	77 pct pts	4.48

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the rate of placement moves per 1,000 days of foster care for children entering foster care has fluctuated significantly from year to year though it has consistently remained below the national standard of 4.48. FCS’s commitment to placing with relatives first is reflected in the stability of placements as this has been a practice for many years. Recruitment efforts related to the 2020-2025 SIP to increase the number of foster parents that are willing to take teens and youth with complex needs have contributed to less placement disruption. In addition, the QI process has impacted placement moves by ensuring only qualified individuals are placed in group settings.

Table 61: P5 Placement Stability - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Measure 2B Referrals by Time to Investigation (Immediate)

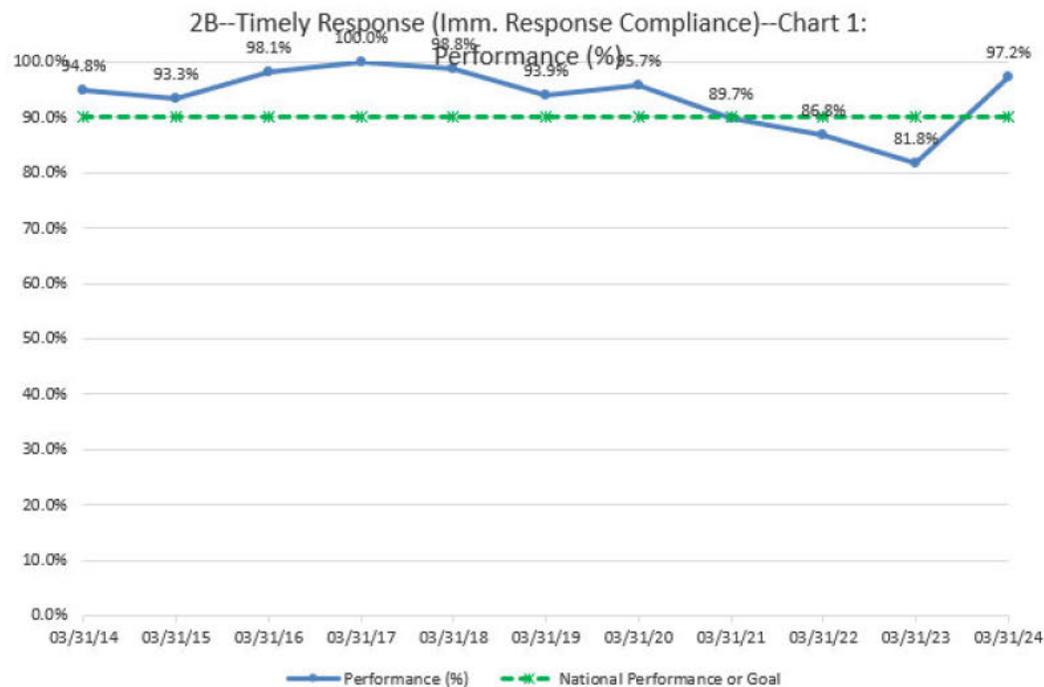
This measure answers the question regarding whether a qualified first contact was made in a timely manner for immediate referrals.

Table XX: 62Referrals by Time to Investigation (Immediate)

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
35	36	97.2%	↑	1.5 pct pts	90.0%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the rate for making first contact in a timely manner for immediate has increased from 95.7% to 97.2%. Current performance exceeds the national standard (90%). Table 63: 2B Referrals by Time to Investigation (Immediate) - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Measure 2B Referrals by Time to Investigation (10-day)

This measure answers the question regarding whether a qualified first contact made in a timely manner for ten-day referrals. Please note that this measure considers all contacts made within ten days to be in compliance.

Table 64: 2B Referrals by Time to Investigation – 10-day

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
161	165	97.6%	↑	8.2 pct pts	90.0%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the rate for making first contact in a timely manner for ten-day referrals increased from 89.4% to 97.6%. Current performance exceeds the national standard (90%).

The shift from a predominantly virtual world in 2020 to in person contacts with less health and safety concerns has increased the ability of investigations social workers to locate children and families in a timelier manner. Since the restructure of the Investigations Program, FCS is achieving even higher timelines rates as Investigations social workers are not managing as many front end tasks and have more dedicated time to complete investigations.

Table 65: 2B Referrals by Time to Investigation – 10-day - Performance



Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Measure 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Out-of-Home Visits

This measure is for children who have been in placement for at least one month during the selected period, this display shows how many received at least one qualified contact for each whole calendar month they were in placement. Compliance is based on contact in every eligible month.

Table 66: 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Out-of-Home Visits

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
1,026	1,082	94.8%	↑	7.0 pct pts	95.0%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the rate of children who received at least one qualified contact for each whole calendar month they were in placement increased from 87.8% to 94.8%. Current performance is just below the national standard (95%). FCS nearly met the standard for the current review cycle achieving a 94.8%, however shows an improvement over the past two years. Challenges to meeting this standard include children placed out of state with relatives, staffing shortages, health and safety concerns creating a barrier to in person visits and families being relocated due to natural disasters.

Measure 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Out-of-Home Visits in Client Residence

This measure looks for all clients with at least one recorded qualified contact in the selected timeframe, how many occurred in the client's residence. Compliance is based on whether the contact occurred in the client's residence.

Table 67: 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Out-of-Home Visits in Client Residence

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020	National standard
709	1,026	69.1%	↑	5.2 pct pts	50.0%

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the rate for making a qualified contact in the client's residence increased from 63.9% to 69.1%. Current performance exceeds the national standard (50%).

The Ongoing Unit who is responsible for the majority of these contacts has been historically understaffed both in social worker and supervisor capacity which has impacted compliance rates. Recent staffing changes have stabilized this unit which has contributed to higher achievement rates. The addition of Social Worker II positions, who are able to conduct face to face visits has also improved performance in this area.

Measure 4A Placement with Siblings (Some or All)

This measure shows what proportion of children were in a placement setting with all or some siblings. Siblings are counted if the relationship to the child in placement is whole, half, step- or maternal sibling.

Table 68: 4A Placement with Siblings (some or all)

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
33	50	66%	↓	5.4 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Since Q1 2020, the percentage of children in a placement setting with all or some siblings decreased slightly from 71.4% to 66.0%. (There is no national standard for this measure.) To address this, recruitment strategies have been targeted to identify resource parents who have the capacity to take sibling sets. The high cost of housing in the County impacts the number of children that can be placed in a single home due to state approval standards for resource family home approval.

Measure 4B Placement Entries (Relative/NREFM)

This measure shows the distribution of facilities for the first out-of-home placement in the first episode and the table below indicates the percentage placed in a relative/NREFM home as the first out-of-home placement.

Table 69: 4B Placement Entries (Relative/NREFM)

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
28	52	53.8%	↑	19.5 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From the baseline of Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the rate of children placed with a relative/NREFM as their first out-of-home placement increased almost 20 percentage points, from 34.4% to 53.8%. A commitment to family first placements and a robust practice around family finding and emergency placement approvals contributes to achievement in this area. Inquiry around relatives and NREFMs occurs at first contact with the Department when screeners attempt to get this information due to an updated more SOP friendly screening process and intake form.

Measure 4B Predominant Placement (Relative/NREFM)

This measure shows the distribution of the predominant placement type children entering into an out-of-home placement and the table below indicates the percentage placed in a relative/NREFM home as the predominant out-of-home placement type.

Table 70: 4B Predominant Placement (Relative/NREFM)

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
41	64	64.1%	↑	30.1 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

The rate of children entering foster care who are placed in an out-of-home placement that is predominantly a relative/NREFM home has increased from 34.0% to 64.1%.

Measure 4E(1) ICWA Placement Preferences – ICWA Eligible

This measure shows the distribution of placements for ICWA eligible children, broken down by the ethnicity of their substitute care provider for each age group of children as of July 1, 2024.

Table 71: 4E(1) ICWA Placement Preferences – ICWA Eligible

Placement Status	Age Group								Total
	< 1	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-17	18-21	Missing	
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Relatives	0	0	0	M	M	0	0	0	M
Non Relatives, Indian SCPs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non Relatives, Non-Indian SCPs	0	0	0	0	0	M	0	0	M
Non Relatives, SCP Ethnic Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
STRTPs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SILP	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	M	M	M	0	0	M

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Measure 4E(2) ICWA Placement Preferences – American Indian Ethnicity

This measure shows the distribution of placements for American Indian children (regardless of designated ICWA eligibility), broken down by the ethnicity of their substitute care provider for each age group of children as of July 1, 2024.

Table 72: 4E(1) ICWA Placement Preferences – American Indian Ethnicity

Placement Status	Age Group								Total
	< 1	1-2	3-5	6-10	11-15	16-17	18-21	Missing	
	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n	n
Relatives	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non Relatives, Indian SCPs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Non Relatives, Non-Indian SCPs	0	0	0	M	0	M	0	0	M
Non Relatives, SCP Ethnic Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
STRTPs	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
SILP	0	0	0	0	0	0	M	0	M
Other	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	0	0	0	M	0	M	0	0	M

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

These two charts for Measures 4E(1) and (2) represent point-in-time data. There is no baseline or comparison data. As there are no federally recognized Indian Tribes in Santa Cruz County, there is generally a small number of ICWA eligible children in care. Santa Cruz County continues to have no identified Indian resource families but has been able to place some children of multi-ethnicity including American Indian, with relatives.

Measure 5B(1) Physical Examinations

This measure looks at whether the client has been kept up to date with Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) medical exams. When a child is removed from a home, he/she should receive an initial CHDP medical exam within 30 days of removal. After the initial exam, workers are expected to ensure that the child receives a qualifying medical exam in accordance with the published exam periodicity schedule.

Table 73: 5B(1) Physical Examinations

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
68	102	66.7%	↓	0.8 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From the baseline of Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the rate of children with up-to-date CHDP medical exams decreased slightly from 67.5% to 66.7%. Since the height of the pandemic, medical appointments have been difficult to obtain. Appointments are being scheduled months after their due dates which has been reported to our Court. Cases with medical needs have been prioritized. We are working with our public health nurse to ensure medical needs are being met. **Measure 5B(2) Dental Examinations**

This measure looks at whether the client has been kept up to date with Child Health and Disability Prevention (CHDP) dental exams. When a child is removed from a home, he/she should receive an initial CHDP dental exam within 30 days of removal. After the initial exam, workers are expected to ensure that the child receives a qualifying dental exam in accordance with the published exam periodicity schedule.

Table 74: Dental Examinations

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
57	97	58.8%	↑	5.3 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From the baseline of Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the rate of children with up-to-date CHDP medical exams increased from 53.5% to 58.8%.

Measure 5F Psychotropic Medication Authorization

This measure includes all children with open cases and open out-of-home placements in the Child Welfare Department. Placement episodes must be 31 days or longer.

Table 75: Psychotropic Medication Authorization

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
20	104	19.2%	↑	9.1 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

The measure was not available for Q1 2019 or Q1 2020, so the 9.1 percentage point increase in Q 2024 is compared to Q1 2021. This increase is not surprising as noted elsewhere in this report, children and youth coming into care have increased complex needs including those requiring psychotropic medication.

Measure 6B Individualized Education Plan

This measure shows if children in placement have had an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at any point during any placement episode.

Table 76: Individualized Education Plan

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
M	98	1.0%	n/a	0.9 pct pts

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

From the baseline of Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the percentage of children in placement with an IEP at any point during any placement episode decreased from 1.9% to 1.0%.

Measure 8A Completed High School or Equivalency

This measure answers the question: Of those youth exiting out of foster care, how many completed high school or equivalency?

Table 77: Completed High School or Equivalency

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Although there were no foster care exits in Q1 2024, there had already been high completion rates since 2020. Over the past four Q1 periods (2020 – 2023), 10 out of 11 18-21 year olds (91%) who exited foster care have completed high school or equivalency.

Measure 8A Obtained Employment

This measure answers the question: of those youth exiting out of foster care, how many of them obtained employment?

Table 78: Obtained Employment

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Although there were no foster care exits in Q1 2024, there had been high employment rates since 2020. Over the past four Q1 periods (2020 – 2023), 73% of the 18-21 year olds who exited foster care have obtained employment.

Measure 8A Have Housing Arrangements

This measure answers the question: Of those youth exiting out of foster care, what is the percentage who exited with housing arrangements?

Table 79: Housing Arrangements

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Although there were no foster care exits in Q1 2024, there had already been high housing rates since 2020. Over the past four Q1 periods (2020 – 2023), 11 out of 11 18-21 year olds (100%) who exited foster care have obtained housing.

Measure 8A Permanency Connection with an Adult

This measure answers the question: Of those youth exiting out of foster care, how many reported having a permanent connection with an adult?

Table 80: Permanency Connection with an Adult

Q1 2024 Numerator	Q1 2024 Denominator	Performance	Direction?	Percent change since Q1 2020
0	0	n/a	n/a	n/a

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Although there were no foster care exits in Q1 2024, there had already been high permanency connections since 2020. Over the past four Q1 periods (2020 – 2023), 11 out of 11 18-21 year olds (100%) who exited foster care have had permanent connections with an adult.

The permanency unit has been the most stable units with little social worker turnover. These workers from close relationships with youth on their caseload who benefit from having consistency with their assigned social worker. Permanency workers are able to identify challenges to youth achieving success in the areas noted above and work with the youth to eliminate barriers. Housing vouchers specific to youth in foster care are available to assist with housing concerns. Other supports are available through the Laptops for Youth program and the Flex Fund program to assist with basic and concrete supports. Youth also receive counseling and supportive services through community-based organizations. The CFT also support these youth to help with exit planning so that the youth’s needs are met prior to dismissal.

PROBATION OUTCOME DATA MEASURES

The source for the following data is the California Child Welfare Indicators Project (CCWIP) from Quarter 1 of 2024 in comparison to Quarter 1, 2020.

Measure S1: No Maltreatment in Foster Care

This measures the question: How many youth that were in placement in Santa Cruz County during the time frame between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 were identified as victims of substantiated maltreatment while in placement?

Table 81: S1 No Maltreatment in Foster Care (per 100,000 days in care)

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	0	365	0	=	N/A	9.07

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Comparing Q1 2020 to Q1 2024, the rate for children who had substantiated or indicated reports of maltreatment during a foster care episode within the selected 12-month period to the total number of days spent in foster care remained the same, zero.

Measure P1: Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care

This measure answers the question: How many youth that were discharged from placement during the time frame between April 1, 2022 and March 31, 2023 completed their placement within 12 months?

Table 82: P1 Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care

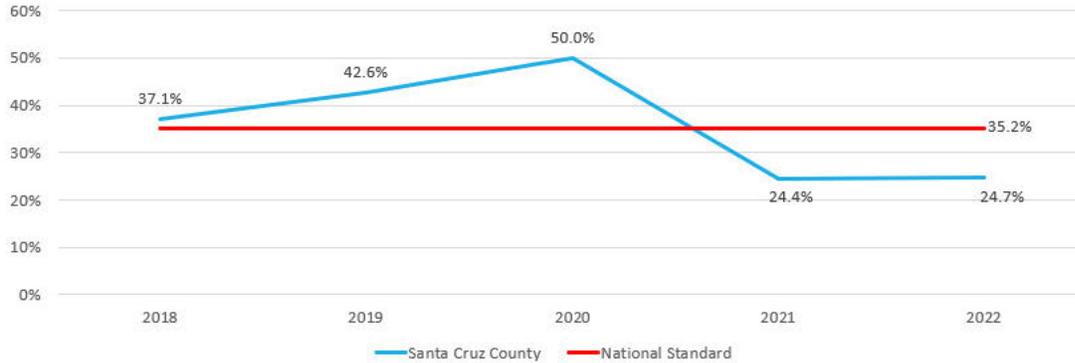
Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/22	3/31/23	0	1%	0	=	N/A	35.2

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

In 2022 the percentage of children achieving permanency who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer increased slightly to 24.7% but was still below the national standard of 35.2%. However, if you look at the past 5-year average, the percentage of children achieving permanency within 12 months was 35.8%, slightly above the national standard. Due to the small number of youth in care, Probation uses percentage to report on this outcome measure. It should be noted that the majority of probation youth entering

foster care facilities are 17 years old and do reach permanency within 12 months but are not included in this report due to the fact they have turned 18 at the time of permanency.

Table 83: P1 Permanency in 12 Months for Children Entering Care: Performance



Source: CFSR Q3 2023 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

The Probation Department utilizes a Risk, Needs and Responsivity Principle to determine desired outcomes for the youth we serve. This is then followed by selecting providers who have demonstrated high success rates for youth in need of specific services related to the youth’s needs. As we are using the STRTP model, the matching of treatment and the youth’s needs are an easier process than it was in the past.

Stakeholder themes reveal that despite the strong matching efforts for youth to receive programming that meets their needs, many barriers to permanency exist. Permanency is hard to establish for youth with serious criminal charges, who have been system involved for a long time, and who may have intimidating histories. In addition, there are few targeted resources for parents of juvenile justice youth, to learn tools to manage and support their youth returning home. While AB12 offers generous benefits for youth, none of those opportunities extend to families. Youth are required to live away from parent in order to qualify for AB12 supports, which works against permanency. At the same time, JPD works hard to find ways for AB12 youth to live with extended family.

Measure P2: Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12-23 Months

This measure answers the question: How many youth that were discharged from placement during the time frame between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 completed their placement within 12-23 months?

Table 84: P2 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 12-23 Months

Most start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	0	0	0	=	N/A	43.8

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

In Q1 of 2020 the average length of time spent in juvenile hall while awaiting placement from disposition to entering an STRTP program was 43 days. In comparison, the Q1 of 2024 average was 9 days and it was for one youth. The constantly decreasing number of probation youth going to foster care facilities can be

attributed to earlier interventions with families, referrals to community-based services, and utilization of less restrictive programs such as Wraparound to prevent removal from the home of origin.

Measure P3: Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24 Months or More

This measure answers the question: How many youth that were discharged from placement during the time frame between April 1, 2023 and March 31, 2024 completed their placement in 24 months or longer?

Table 85: P3 Permanency in 12 Months for Children in Foster Care 24+ Months

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	0	.4%	N/A	N/A	N/A	37.3

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

The numbers are historically low for this measure as most probation youth do not spend 24 or more months in placement. The reason for this is that the STRTP programs last on average between 6 - 12 months.

Measure P4: Re-entry to Foster Care

This measure answers the question: How many youth who were discharged within 12 months were brought back into the system of care?

Table 86: P4 Re-entry to Foster Care

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/22	3/31/23	0	0	0	=	N/A	5.6

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Analysis

A significant amount of effort is put into offering transition services to youth who complete placement in an STRTP program, and these efforts have seen positive results with youth not coming back into foster care within 12 months of discharge. A few examples of the work that is being done include the utilization of the Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTM) which are used with every youth and their family before a youth leaves for a placement, while youth are in placement, and when youth are ready to return home. This has contributed a great deal to youth identifying opportunities in the community to be successful before they ever return home. Some examples of this might be assistance with enrollment in a vocational or educational program, assistance with building job skills, and receiving techniques to interview more competitively. Stakeholder input confirmed the effectiveness of CFTMs, stating they have reduced the stigma around JPD, shifted family perspective about PO toward partnership and support, and aligned everyone around goals, expectations, service coordination. At the same time, stakeholders suggested strengthening youth voice and choice in decisions made at CFT meetings (e.g. CFT agendas based on staff-

generated rather than youth-inclusive goals). One suggestion to address this is to provide Motivational Interviewing training to POs and CFT facilitators.

Another is our STAR (Stable Transitions after Re-entry) Program. This program consists of two main components, Re-entry Planning and Whole Family Services, both of which aim to ensure that youth in confinement are able to transition back to their families, schools, and communities successfully. Because of these efforts, re-entry into foster care has dropped from one to zero youth in the past five years.

Measure P5: Placement Stability

This measure answers the question: What is the number of youth who entered foster care during a 12-month period and what is the subsequent number of placement moves during that 12-month period?

Table 87: P5 Placement Stability

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	0	0	0	N/A	N/A	4.48

Source: CFSR Q3 2023 data files provided by CCWIP.

It is a positive note that we do not get a lot of movement in and out of placement for the most part. There are many contributing factors to placement stability including the fact that our placement staff are very active in the placements and on-site regardless of the location at least every 30 days. Additionally, when on-site, our staff spend a great deal of time engaging our youth and trying to do everything possible to ensure the youth is adjusting well and are not being mistreated in any way. The CFTM has also increased placement stability, and the addition of our STAR re-entry services grant has increased contact with youth in out of home placement, along with their families, with a transition plan that requires staff to meet with the youth 90 days, 60 days and 30 days prior to release to work on their transition plan.

In 2020 there were 11 youth who entered foster care with two youth having a subsequent placement move. In comparison, there were 5 youth who entered foster care in 2024 with one having a subsequent placement move.

Measure 2F: Timely Monthly Caseworker Visits (Out-of-Home)

This measure answers the question: Were youth being seen in a timely manner and were monthly caseworker visits being completed?

Table 88: 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Out-of-Home Visits

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National Standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	.8%	1%	66.7	↑	9.1%	95.0

Source: CFSR Q1 2024 data files provided by CCWIP.

Placement officers are required to visit youth who have been removed from their homes a minimum of once per month. Although the CFSR data files reflect the county as not meeting the national standards, we discovered that the low number of contacts in that system are due to a lack of and/or delinquent data

entry. We have since increased awareness of this issue by holding monthly report reviews between the Assistant Division Director and the Office Assistant.

As a supplement to the CFSR data, the probation case management system (CE) reflects that out-of-home visits have increased (60 in 2020 compared to 166 in 2024) despite the fact that the number of youth in placement have decreased.

Measure 2F: Timely Monthly Caseworker Visits (Residence)

This measure answers the question: Were youth being seen in a timely manner and were monthly caseworker visits being completed at the residence?

Table 89: 2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Visits (Residence)

Most recent start date	Most recent end date	Most recent numerator	Most recent denominator	Most recent performance	Direction?	Percent change	National Standard
4/1/23	3/31/24	.8%	.8%	100	=	0%	50.0

Source: CFSR Q3 2023 data files provided by CCWIP.

Not only do our officers visit youth in the placement facilities but they also see youth in the residence to ensure that transition from placement back to home is as uneventful as possible. With the addition of the Student Success Project grant, officers also visit youth at their school to provide support wherever needed. In 2020 there were a total of 684 visits (567 at home, 60 at school) In 2024 there were a total of 595 visits (259 at home, 166 at school). The overall number of visits dropped from 2020 to 2024, and this is due to the steadily decreasing number of youth under supervision.

SECTION 13: Summary of Findings

This summary draws together highlights from the CSA process including reflections of the Planning Team that have guided their conclusions. The summary references key elements of the CSA such as stakeholder input, peer review findings and data trends.

The strengths and challenges of Santa Cruz county's child welfare and juvenile probation systems occur within the context of the county's high cost of living, extreme economic disparity of the client population, and the lack of local placement resources. There are vast differences in the economic resources available in the north focused on the city of Santa Cruz and south county centered around Watsonville. The cost of housing and other basic needs is very high in north county with a significant population of highly educated, affluent individuals, many of whom work in Silicon Valley or have chosen to retire in the Santa Cruz area. In contrast, Watsonville revolves around the agricultural industry drawing a large population of field workers (primarily Latinx immigrants) who are employed seasonally at relatively low wages.

CHILD WELFARE

Populations at Greatest Risk

The CSA revealed two FCS populations that seem most associated with being at risk of re-entry into care: (1) parents experiencing substance abuse and/or severe, chronic mental health issues and (2) vulnerable families with complex needs who reunify without sufficient aftercare support in place.

Substance abuse is prevalent in Santa Cruz and has been correlated with more intensive, addictive drugs that are harder to successfully stop using or treat. Since 2020, Santa Cruz has experienced an alarming rise in opioid-related overdose deaths, now ranking 6th highest in the state.

“How can we help parents with very severe substance use disorder achieve lasting sobriety and keep kids safe?”
FCS Social Worker

Other complicating factors include insufficient integration between child welfare and substance use disorder treatment providers and timelines for permanency that do not mesh with the pace of recovery. While efforts are made to mitigate harm to children, maintaining sobriety is a persistent, lifelong endeavor. When parents in recovery return to life outside of involvement with child welfare there is an insufficient safety net. A common theme in Peer Review was that the cases where children re-entered care often involved parents with chronic mental health issues and/or substance use disorders. Community data described in Section 4B of this report shows a higher demand since the pandemic for mental health services and insufficient capacity in Santa Cruz county to meet this growing need. Workers interviewed frequently expressed frustration with the lack of adequate treatment programs available to meet the unique needs of parents in recovery and/or parents managing chronic mental health conditions.

County Strengths

Following many transitions in leadership over the last five years, especially during the pandemic, there has been a concerted effort to rebuild a strong leadership infrastructure at FCS. Efforts to retain and grow leadership internally is aimed at developing champions to re-establish community partnerships, strengthen service delivery relationships and develop public trust. For example, in 2024, FCS created a public webpage where community can see the new faces of FCS leadership. This reinforces current and future strategic opportunities for a more positive, visible presence in the community.

Key strengths that have gained momentum in Santa Cruz over the last two to three years are relevant to improving both re-entry and permanency outcomes for FCS. Important program, practice and infrastructure strengths were identified by staff and management throughout the CSA process including:

- Resumed momentum with father engagement efforts following the pandemic
- In the last year, FCS showed an 8% increase in the percentage of fathers: engaged in case plans from the baseline of 71% and is currently at 79% which mirrors the percentage of mothers engaged in case plans.
- Rebuilding the FCS workforce by onboarding new staff to help fill staffing shortages:
- Of the 39 Senior Social Worker positions in 2024, 49% of staff are bi-lingual which matches the cultural demographics of Santa Cruz County
- Restructuring roles to improve casework manageability:
- Several non-case carrying Social Worker II positions were added since 2022 to perform essential supportive tasks for Senior Social Workers
- Building the knowledge base, confidence, and skills of new staff to perform their job
- Full implementation of Safety Organized Practice
- Strengthening efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of Child and Family Teaming
- Working toward full integration of CANS assessments into CFT practice

Other strengths reported by stakeholders participating in focus groups and peer review feedback include:

- Deeply skilled FCS staff who go above and beyond, making lasting connections with youth and providing skills and support to parents/caregivers
- CFTs were widely regarded as effective by parents, youth, staff and other partners
- FCS is recognized by families, providers and partners for being inclusive and understanding of the diverse community it serves
- Creativity and energy focused on prevention approaches that strengthen families
- Prioritized important family connections for children and youth in care through progressive visitation plans and concrete supports to maintain parent-child contact

Areas Needing Improvement

While important strides have been made in addressing recent organizational transitions and leadership changes, several areas of internal operations still need improvement. Efforts to continue stabilizing the workforce are needed to fully integrate new, less experienced staff with sufficient training, coaching and supervision. Staff participating in focus groups described the organizational climate as frequently overwhelming. Until the workforce environment is fully stabilized, staff talents are at risk of being underutilized.

There are critical areas of practice related to re-entry outcomes that need improvement. Focus group participants reported insufficient outreach, engagement and development of natural networks of

support for families throughout the case life cycle. This limits the circle of committed individuals who can support a family through meeting their case plan goals as well as their transition to reunification and beyond. This often results in destabilization and ultimately re-entry. Staff, parents and resource parents reported a lack of aftercare planning, limited referrals to ongoing post-reunification services and insufficient preparation of families for the transition to life after case closure. Even the trend in disrupted adoptions re-entering the system many years following childhood adoption may be a response to the lack of actionable aftercare planning and transition support as well.

Enhanced resources for effective out of home care is another area of improvement. Staff and resource parents reported the need for more robust efforts to recruit and retain local resource families. In addition, inconsistent support for those who are serving as RFA homes compromises the longevity of caregivers. For example, according to the Year 4 SIP Progress Report the numbers of resource parents willing to take teenagers—often a population with high needs—has decreased since the baseline period by almost half. FCS staff and dependency court stakeholders expressed concern about caregivers being unprepared or supported to meet the complex needs or urgent situations of the children placed in their care. Moreover, relative caregivers struggle with particular support needs such as managing difficult family relationships, connecting with other kin caregivers for social support, and addressing barriers (e.g., economic stressors, attachment issues, and transportation).

There is also a need for a more robust network of collaborative service partnerships. FCS staff and managers expressed the need for better relationships with specific partners such as county Office of Education, substance use disorder providers, housing assistance agencies, and community-based mental health providers. These relationships could be strengthened with awareness raising of shared values, collective responsibility for child well-being, and increased role clarity between partners. The aim is to replace historical patterns of interaction with agreements and norms aligned with current shared goals. Improved partnerships could also address the insufficient availability and specificity of appropriate drug treatment and behavioral health services required for the complex needs presented by child welfare parents and youth. Improved partnerships and a better match of services to needs were also expressed by service providers in focus groups and at the kick-off meeting.

The Race and Equity group is studying the origins of the disproportionality for families of color being over-reported at the Hotline. Attention is focused on the proportion of reports made for neglect primarily due to poverty. There is an indication that many mandated reporters may be unaware of where else to direct families to get the support they need within the community. Stakeholder input revealed inequities for several other populations at various stages of system involvement. Undocumented parents find case plan requirements often put jobs and identity at risk. Some fathers feel left out of equity discussions altogether. Racial identity of Native American children and youth is not always recognized and acknowledged. Further development of staff skills and relevant services for trans youth is another need.

Service Array Gaps & Needs

Several gaps exist within the service array that directly impact FCS' ability to address the needs of their service population. These include a lack of:

- substance use treatment including detox facilities; treatment options to match strength of newer, more potent drugs; specialized treatment for dads or youth who are parents; and long-term recovery support programs
- local STRTP placements

- mental health services and supports
- respite care for vulnerable parents/caregivers
- grassroots, culturally aligned family support organizations

Services can be hard to access due to wait lists; lack of bilingual providers; and lack of awareness among families, FCS staff, and providers about what services exist throughout the community. Stakeholders attribute this knowledge gap to providers/programs operating in silos, lack of communication or marketing, and staff turnover. In short, a robust service array loses its potency if information about these resources is not widely known.

Meeting the specialized needs of families involved in child welfare is also compromised by limitations in the service community providing specialized programming. There needs to be a stronger service integration and partnership between the substance use treatment community and FCS. While substance use providers are often invited to the table to help design new programs or troubleshoot existing interventions, providers in focus groups spoke of a lack of participation, cooperation, and collaboration. Other supportive resources for parents in recovery are dwindling. The court focus group shared that grant-based funding for Family Preservation Court—which has been very successful—ended last October thus cutting weekly court accountability hearings by half. This has impacted the consistency of the accountability structure necessary for recovery that includes peer support, frequent check-ins and monitoring of goals.

There is also limited aftercare planning for child welfare families exiting the system. Parents attending the Stakeholder Kick-Off, and both parents and youth in focus groups expressed a strong desire for enhanced aftercare programming. Specifically, parents wanted FCS to assign a community based accountability partner to help support parent’s recovery and sobriety efforts for up to one year following case closure. Unfortunately, some of the most successful programs, such as Families Together (community based case management and counseling), do not have sufficient capacity to expand their service reach. Additional funding is needed to adapt and grow the Families Together program to serve families post-reunification. A key theme across focus groups was the need for families to have access to ongoing supports, connections, and resources following case closure to ensure continued recovery and stability.

Summary of Outcome Data Measures and Relevant Data Trends

There are two relevant areas of outcome data that emerged from the CSA process which are key to improving Santa Cruz child welfare performance over the next five years. These measures are P4: Re-entry into Foster Care and P3: Timely Permanency for Children in Care 24+ Months.

Since 2019, the percentage of children re-entering foster care within 12 months of their discharge date has mostly remained higher than the national standard of 5.6%, including a recent jump from 3.8% in Q1 2022 to 19.5% as of Q1 2024. This jump is partially due to the steady decline in the overall number of children entering care. The absolute number of children re-entering care remains relatively small (3 or 4 per reporting period), while the denominator is shrinking. Going forward, the aim is to reduce the number of re-entry incidents to better meet the national standard. In examining the reasons for re-entry, stakeholder input suggests that re-entry patterns match the original reason for entry into care which are parental substance use disorders, parental chronic mental health issues and domestic violence. Moreover, families can destabilize post-reunification due to economic stressors (e.g., housing insecurity, unemployment) that result in re-entry for reasons of neglect. These are all circumstances that

require intensive aftercare planning, concrete supports, an engaged support network and accountability structures to guard against relapse.

FCS has shown strong performance in achieving timely permanency (P1, P2, P3) over the past five years. This has been most consistent with P1 and P2. However, this positive trend has fallen off in the last two years for P3. In part the rapidly declining number of children who have remained in care for 24 months or more is a function of better alternatives FCS has made available to families (e.g., family engagement, intensive safety plans, early and regular CFT meetings, etc.) when they initially come into contact with child welfare. The denominator for the P3 measure has dropped from a high of 71 in Q1 2015 down to 23 by Q1 2024. With strengthened practices occurring at the front end, fewer children are entering care overall. Those who do tend to remain in care because these families often present with some of the most complex needs and may have limited support networks.

Effect of System Factors on Outcome Data Measures and Service Delivery

Several systemic factors have significant impact on outcomes and service delivery as described below.

Management Information Systems – While CWS/CMS can provide useful information to better understand the characteristics of families working toward permanency, knowing what factors influence re-entry rates is more difficult to track. Examples of this include:

- Linking the reasons for a family’s initial entry against those for subsequent entries
- Aftercare data about what community or natural connections were active post-reunification
- How geographic movement, housing insecurity, and other economic hardships of the family play into their stability and risk of later maltreatment.

However, stakeholders indicated the following contributing factors to re-entry:

- Re-entry patterns match reasons for referrals (e.g., a substance use, mental health issues, domestic violence); the most common reason for re-entry is substance use relapse
- Economic destabilization, housing insecurity, legal issues, and other stressors often occurring simultaneously for a family
- Rapid permanency timelines don’t allow enough time for families to fully stabilize, practice new behaviors and prepare for reunification; insufficient after care planning and connection to post-permanency resources compounds these issues.

Once staffing capacity is stabilized, FCS will be examining the primary reasons for re-entry through case reviews and other queries.

Workforce Capacity and Infrastructure Changes – An overarching challenge expressed by all internal stakeholders is the impact of a workforce adapting to significant vacancies, leadership transitions and infrastructure change. Every aspect of practice feels the effects: youth and families don’t feel attended to, teams are unable to collaborate effectively, caregivers miss important communications, clerical staff are unable to provide helpful supports, social workers don’t have the time or capacity to practice their skills or train for new ones, and more. These workforce issues can also result in frequent changes in a family’s assigned worker. All these patterns compromise the team’s ability to meet youth and family needs.

Teaming and Collaboration – While teaming in Santa Cruz is strong stakeholders reported the need to have an early and ongoing focus on building and engaging the family’s circle of support into the Child

and Family Teaming process. They felt this would better prepare these natural resources for supporting the family post-reunification, thus minimizing the possibility of re-entry.

Across focus groups and peer review, a theme emerged around inconsistent engagement of team members in the CFT process. Resource parents often felt underutilized and that their perspectives weren't heard. Because of workers' lack of availability, service providers were sometimes unaware of CFTs being held and were unable to connect with workers to prepare or follow up to meetings. This lack of coordination within the team leads to families being less prepared for the challenges of reunification.

Resource Parent Support and Retention – Resource parents are critical in providing a stable, consistent living situation for the children and youth in their care. In addition to contributing to the youth's own stabilization, resource parents can be significant role models for the parents who are working toward reunification. However, several system-wide issues compromise resource parents' ability to fully realize their potential. Resource parents seek more training, emotional support, respite, peer support and logistical support to help them better meet the needs of youth in their care. Some resource parents reported unclear expectations for their role and feel unprepared to care for children with complex needs (e.g., trans youth, substance use disorders, mental health conditions). Payments are often delayed, especially with relative caregivers, causing stress and frustration.

Without consistent support, resource parents are unable to bring their full skills, commitment and modeling to the families they are helping guide toward reunification. This diminishes the strength of a parent's circle of support to feel more competent and confident up to and following reunification. Re-entry can then become a consequence of this gap in the family's healing and support experience.

Progress, Challenges, and Overall, Lessons Learned from Previous SIP

The C-CFSR Annual SIP Progress Report for Santa Cruz County (2023-2024) outlines the progress and strategies implemented to improve timely permanency for children and families. Key strategies include improving father engagement, enhancing services to birth parents, strengthening the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM), increasing placement capacity, and expanding prevention services. The report highlights significant progress in areas such as family engagement, resource parent recruitment, and the implementation of the Comprehensive Prevention Program (CPP). Challenges faced include staffing shortages, natural disasters, and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also details promising practices like the Parent Partner Program and the use of Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs) to support family-centered decision-making. Despite some obstacles, the county has made strides in achieving timely permanency for children in foster care and addressing racial disparities in service delivery.

There are two overall lessons learned from the previous SIP cycle. First, that Santa Cruz FCS is incredibly resilient in overcoming significant obstacles to still achieve considerable progress toward important outcomes for children, youth and families. Second, the innovations explored on the prevention front have demonstrated enhanced partnership between FCS and community organizations with shared interest in child well-being. These strides can result in creative programmatic, financial and sustainable solutions. Both of these lessons will be important to continue into the next SIP cycle.

Implications for 2025 SIP

Re-entry of children into care (P4) and timely permanency for long stayers in care (P3) will be the outcome areas of improvement for Santa Cruz County FCS and are the focus of the 2025-2029 SIP. Two

potential areas of strategy development are a more robust aftercare planning effort and improved partnerships with behavioral health and substance use disorder providers.

Some strategy ideas for supporting permanency that arose from the Kick-Off, focus groups and peer review include: establish a Post-Adoption Services Hotline—division of traditional Hotline dedicated to responding to requests for support from post-adoption families to receive support, services, resources; utilize FURS (24/7 mobile crisis intervention response) for post-permanency families; build natural circles of support across the case life span; build capacity for community-based support services; create more opportunities to link families to post-permanency support groups; create infrastructure to support a referral pathway to post-permanency support service network with monitoring for access, connection and follow-through.

The CSA process has reminded Santa Cruz of the value of listening to the community. Not just every five years, but on an ongoing basis. FCS is poised to set the stage for a high degree of equity and inclusion in the Well-Being Cabinet and the SIP Oversight Committee. The aim is to engage stakeholders, those with lived experience, and key partners to ensure groups most impacted by the role of child welfare in the community are at the table to craft solutions, support implementation, and evaluate impact. Another focus for the future is to build capacity and infrastructure to be more anticipatory and responsive rather than reactive to the post-permanency needs of children and families.

The Well-Being Cabinet as well as a strategically composed SIP Oversight Committee are important forums in which to extend the pathway for families that reduce the likelihood of re-entry as well as promote permanency during the next SIP cycle.

PROBATION

Populations at Greatest Risk

Santa Cruz has made intentional efforts to avoid having youth become involved with the juvenile justice system and, by extension, entering care. The emphasis is on prevention and diversion. Programs such as Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiatives which has been very successful providing resources and preserving families to keep kids out of placement altogether. The court also emphasizes consideration of placement as a last resort for juvenile justice involved youth.

South county Latinx teen males are a population at great risk for involvement in juvenile justice. These youth face severe consequences in terms of frequency of arrests along with severity of charges and filings. These youth also present with more complex needs including unaddressed academic and behavioral issues in school. Several factors within the service context exacerbate these challenges. Local budget cuts limit social-emotional services in schools while the parents of these youth often lack the skills, language, or availability to advocate for their child. Existing service environments are not often designed to address the needs of this population, leading to them being pushed deeper into the system due to seriousness of their offenses.

This is not an uncommon trend across the state. Santa Cruz probation is interested in addressing this through a prevention approach. For instance, diversion programs are gaining momentum with state grants, but there are sustainability challenges ahead. Not only do current school district budget cuts challenge progress, but socio-educational programs in schools that help regulate behavioral challenges of this population are often first programs to be eliminated.

Several other characteristics of the population at risk contribute to their involvement in juvenile justice. Many youth have a family income level that meet the threshold for public defender assignment and have language barriers along with socioeconomic pressures that can pose challenges to participation in services. In addition, the most concerning population tends to be youth who don't attend school regularly. Contributing factors include attending to family responsibilities, lack of transportation, socio-economic stressors, lack of parental skill and/or capacity at responding to teen needs, and other pressures.

Currently, the average age of youth entering probation is 16.5 years. As of January 2025, there are 16 probation youth currently in placement. All but one youth are in extended foster care or transitioning out of STRTP placement to transitional housing. Of the 16 youth, only three are under 18. While the permanency outcome data in this report may not reflect it, many probation youth successfully return home after age 18 or live with a relative while receiving AB12 benefits.

County Strengths

Santa Cruz juvenile probation is committed to expanding its prevention and diversion efforts. Probation officers in schools (in plain clothes) reach out to vulnerable youth and engage family in helping youth avoid juvenile justice involvement. There's a consistent cultural shift of probation's work away from punitive, traditional roles for probation officers. Instead, the department is demonstrating more family engagement; increased upstream, early intervention; and preventive involvement of the probation expertise in community partnership efforts to support young people and their families. Stakeholder input corroborated this strength in observing that:

- Probation Officers go above and beyond with youth to engage youth and their families with consistent contact, effective communication strategies, meeting at convenient locations and other relational techniques.
- There is a strong partnership with the CASA program with expanded capacity, positive impacts and extended services to probation youth up to age 21.
- Building cultural responsiveness of probation staff is a central focus with many bilingual POs and adaptation of forms and processes to welcome families across a wide range of social identities.

Another strength is the department's consistent use of Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) principles, strong CFT facilitation practice, and utilization of Wraparound in their reentry work. Additionally, the department is working toward training as many POs as possible to become CFT facilitators. Motivational interviewing, counseling, engagement, family voice & choice and other skills come into play not only at the CFT meetings, but in other important encounters with youth and their families that may involve addressing conflict, barriers or other challenges. CFTs are used purposefully to meet unique needs for each case, rather than simply performed based on a timeline only.

All of this points to a shift in the role of PO to better address the needs of youth and promote their potential for the future. There's a focus on building PO skills to become a "coach" for youth, rather than a "referee", with a commitment to find youth doing something right, rather than doing something wrong.

Juvenile probation has a strong track record of working collaboratively with FCS. For Dually Involved Youth (DIY) cases there is good interagency communication, staff handling dual status youth attend joint training, collaboratively prepare 241.1 reports, use coordinated methods to manage conflict at case level, and follow protocols on determining lead agency status. In addition, there is regular leadership

communication between child welfare and juvenile probation and both agencies serve on many collaborative initiatives together.

Areas Needing Improvement

Many youth involved in probation have high behavioral health needs that are often coupled with substance use disorders—there is a need for more local specialized treatment resources for this population.

The re-entry (to home and community) program performed by Encompass and funded through the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) will be sunseting soon. This has been a strong connection to case management services when youth are transitioning home from out of home care. The grant may not be renewed, due to potential reduction of many federal funding streams. This may shift the responsibilities for transitional support activities to probation officers. In addition, the TAY program through Encompass will likely need to be strengthened to fill this gap.

Stakeholders reported additional areas needing improvement:

- While transitions for youth are strong, there lacks a parallel effort to engage and prepare parents which can create issues at re-entry to home and community.
- An array of gaps exists in the post-permanency support landscape including lack of peer support for probation parents, limited independent living resources to meet the needs of probation youth and service continuity disruption when youth return home.

Service Array Gaps and Needs

Overall, the greatest service gaps in Santa Cruz county exist within South County. For example, many of the Transition Age Youth (TAY) services for juvenile justice youth are located in North County. This greatly impacts the JPD population, since the majority of these youth and families reside in the Watsonville area.

Another countywide trend is the lack of communication and overall knowledge across family-serving organizations about what services are available and for whom. This makes it particularly hard to support probation youth and families to navigate the service system without confusion and frustration.

Staffing shortages with key service delivery partners such as the primary provider of wraparound services has been understaffed which significantly impacts continuity of care. This often results in POs limiting referrals to such short-staffed organizations to provide the level of intervention required.

Stakeholder input echoed similar themes regarding the service array:

- Lack of community based services for non-English speaking parents.
- Inconsistent services available for probation parents to help them manage their youth’s complex behaviors (e.g., parenting education, family therapy)
- Limited capacity for substance use or counseling services specifically designed for youth (Santa Cruz recently lost the only local inpatient youth-focused substance use treatment program).

Outcome Data Measures and Relevant Data Trends

In the last few years, youth on probation has dropped from 130 to 90. The department has been very successful at preventing youth from entering care. For the last two years, the department has not placed

any youth in RFA homes. Standard practice at JPD is to exhaust every alternative before considering STRTP placement.

In reviewing data since 2020, there is a high average age of youth entering Santa Cruz juvenile probation of 16.8 years old. This presents a very narrow window in which to return a youth home. Rather than aligning with permanency goals, these youth tend to be focused on gaining independence and launching into adulthood. Often if youth do return to family members or relatives, it is in preparation for transition into independence. Many probation youth are on Supervised Independent Living Program (SILP) with a relative, at home or with another known, committed adult.

Almost all youth are in extended foster care. Most are in 450 Non Minor Dependent [NMD] status without probation conditions, but have a PO assigned to provide case management services to the NMD case. Many are placed with family in this status. As of February 2025, the living situations for the NMD probation population is: 44% reside with family and slightly less than 56% are placed in some form of transitional housing arrangement with a small number placed in STRTPs. This trend will likely continue.

Permanency still happens for probation youth, but not in the traditional way that is more indicative of the child welfare system population. JPD has a much older population entering the probation system overall with the majority of juvenile probation population are 16-17 years old. Average age is 16-17 years old (16.8 years old average) (reflected in Peer Review population, too). Very difficult to get youth back home in a permanency status in the traditional way before they turn 18, but this outcome often is achieved through the above described channels after these youth turn 18. These can result in both legal and emotional permanency with family, yet the results are not reflected in the data reports available through CWS/CMS.

Effect of System Factors on Outcome Data Measures and Service Delivery

There is no STRTP option for male identified youth within the county. There is a facility for females in Santa Cruz, and many of those beds are occupied by youth from other counties. Santa Cruz youth then are typically placed 2-3 hours away (Fresno, Oakland, etc.) from their home communities. This distance complicates permanency efforts to reconnect youth to family. Especially considering the economic stressors and job obligations that prevent parents from travelling, etc., this distance compounds ability to rebuild bridges back to family in a timely way.

Once youth qualify for STRTP placement, with the recent removal of statewide presumptive transfer policy and protocol, now each county has to establish single agreements with a specific county or county-to-county agreements. These are time consuming administratively and negotiations can be complex often creating a barrier to timely placement in STRTPs and may ultimately delay permanency.

JPD benefits from a solid Placement Team with strong supervisory leadership. While the Placement Team origins began with limited capacity, this Team has built up with extensive training, supports and guidance to develop expertise in placement case management. The Placement Team Supervisor is becoming an expert in this role and is sought out by other counties for her knowledge.

Plans for organizational restructuring at Juvenile Probation are designed to leverage existing resources more effectively to support diversion efforts. The aim is to focus on earlier intervention that will reduce the length of time youth are on probation, thus preventing the need for placement in out of home care and minimizing deeper penetration of youth into the justice system. There are significant efforts to promote the culture change across the department as well as in collaboration with law enforcement to move toward this “upstream” approach to juvenile justice.

Progress, Challenges, and Overall Lessons Learned from Previous SIP

Family engagement and identifying natural supports for youth and family is a central focus that will continue. These practices are critical to shorter lengths of stay in placement, and is central to taking the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM) to heart in order to incorporate these principles into probation practice. This is demonstrated by attending to family voice and choice, building solid networks of support for youth & families, and engaging the family and their circle of support in helping support the youth's success. This requires a strong partnership between child welfare, juvenile probation, courts, public defenders, CASA and service providers to ensure are all working together toward this integrated approach via child and family teaming practice. When the system goes away, the family still has a strong supportive natural network to support their continued success.

JPD provided ICPM training to other partners to help shift the culture and build a teaming environment that recognizes the benefits of a youth and family-centered approach.

Development of the 2025 SIP

The juvenile justice intake program is the funnel that brings youth into the system. Currently, there's a large volume of youth who could be diverted, but staff constraints limit addressing all these cases. JPD is currently piloting a program focused on diverting youth through a community pathway of service access. This is intended to shorten or expedite the time it takes for a youth to receive services to address the needs that brought them to JPD attention in an effort to decrease formal involvement. : In addition, if youth can be connected to services while filing decision are being considered, then when the District Attorney sees this positive engagement of the youth in services, it may eliminate the need for a court filing and entry into probation. This would reduce entries into the formal system and therefore entries into placement.

The back-end practice of re-entry to home and community is another avenue for strategic change. Here there is a need to strengthen capacity and the role of re-entry Probation Officers to monitor the transition phase following a youth's exit from care. Rather than exclusively playing an enforcement role post re-entry, specialized Probation Officers would increase their coaching, guidance and family engagement roles.

SOCIAL WORKER FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW TOOL

1. Re-Entry

Over the past 5 years, children & youth reunified by FCS are nearly twice as likely to re-enter care within 12 months (after exiting to reunification or guardianship) than the national standard (11.3% vs. 5.6%).

- a. What aspects of current practice in Santa Cruz are contributing to this re-entry trend? [Prompts: aftercare, transition planning, parent engagement/readiness, workforce capacity]
- b. What strategies do you suggest for reducing the rate of re-entries into care?

2. Teaming

Santa Cruz County is using Child and Family Teaming to meaningfully engage families in identifying their needs and planning for services that help improve safety, permanency and well-being outcomes.

- a. What's working well with forming, engaging, and supporting teams?
- b. What suggestions do you have for strengthening teamwork at FCS?

3. Prioritizing Permanency

When a child needs to be placed in out-of-home care to ensure safety & well-being, the preferred option is to work toward safely reunifying the child as soon as possible. If that's not viable, an alternate permanency plan is activated.

- a. What aspects of current practice in Santa Cruz contribute to achieving successful reunification? [Prompts: assessment, service planning/delivery, permanency planning, concurrent planning, transitions, teaming, engagement, partnerships, workforce capacity]
- b. What are the main barriers or challenges that interfere with reaching safe, timely reunification for children & youth?
- c. In what ways are youth & families supported to contribute their perspectives on permanency decisions? How could this be better?
- d. For families who are unable to reunify, what practices are working well to find alternative plans for permanency (e.g., guardianship, adoption)? What improvements are needed? [Prompts: Family Finding, Concurrent Planning]

4. Placement in Out-of-Home Care

Let's talk about the placement experiences of children & youth. [Majority of children are placed with relatives in Santa Cruz].

- a. What's working well and what could be improved about the placement decision making process? [Prompts: assessment, matching, teaming, family engagement, communication]
- b. Consider the experience of youth while in care. What's working well and what needs improvement? [Prompts: training & support of resource parents, quality of care, teaming, transitions, communication]
- c. To what extent are youth able to maintain important connections while in out of home care? What improvements are needed?
- d. What strategies could be implemented in Santa Cruz to fill gaps in placement options available for children and youth? [Prompts: Youth with severe behavioral or developmental issues, Youth exiting from congregate care settings, LGBTQ youth, Transition Age Youth (15-18+ years), CSEC youth]

5. Equity & Inclusion / Cultural Responsiveness

Santa Cruz County is committed to being culturally responsive to the unique identities of the youth and families it serves, as well as its staff (e.g., cultural heritage, race, gender, sexual identity, language).

- a. What's working well?
- b. What could be improved?

6. Training, Preparation & Support

As frontline staff, you are constantly applying your professional judgment to conduct quality practice in a dynamic practice environment.

- a. How well prepared have you felt to carry out your role and responsibilities related to helping children and families achieve timely and successful permanency? What would help you feel better prepared?
- b. How would you characterize the quality of supervision you receive to support your role and function? Any suggestions for improvement?

7. Agency Collaboration

Collaborations are a core aspect of your work (with behavioral health, public assistance, providers, schools, treatment programs, courts, resource families).

- a. How well are these partnerships working to assist kids & their families get the help they need when they need it?
- b. How could these partnerships be improved?

8. Service Array

Consider the needs of families involved with child welfare in keeping their kids safe and maintaining a stable home environment.

- a. From your perspective, what services and supports available in Santa Cruz are working well to meet these challenges, especially the need for permanency?
- b. What recommendations do you have for addressing service gaps or barriers to service access?
- c. Are there prevention-focused services and resources you'd like to see more available to families across Santa Cruz County to help prevent kids entering care? [Prompts: child care, youth enrichment activities, family resource centers, etc.]

9. Final Question

Do you have any final comments? Is there anything else we should know that will help improve Santa Cruz's system toward better permanency outcomes?