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2012-2013 BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

CHILDREN'S SERVICES DIVISION

SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Grand Jury reviewed the Children's Services Division as part of an investigation of the Department of Employment and Social Services. The programs the Grand Jury reviewed were Child Protective Services (CPS), Foster Care, Family Maintenance/Family Reunification and Adoption Services.

GLOSSARY

- AB12 - Assembly Bill 12, "California Fostering Connections"
- CAM - Children Affected by Methamphetamine, a federal grant program
- Child - A person younger than 12 years of age
- CFSR - Child Family Services Review
- CPS - Child Protective Services
- CSD - Children's Services Division
- FM - Family Maintenance
- FR - Family Reunification
- FTC - Family Treatment Court
- Mandated Reporter - A person who, by law, is required to report suspected cases of child abuse and/or neglect
- Meth - Methamphetamine
- NVCSS - Northern Valley Catholic Social Service
- Youth - A person age 12 to 18

BACKGROUND

Child Protective Services (CPS) assesses and investigates allegations of child abuse or neglect. CPS offers services to families to ensure child safety and keep children safely in their own homes. If a child is at risk, CPS addresses the situation. The majority of referrals are mandated to be reviewed within 10 days, though some situations are

investigated within 24 hours. Services are provided to children and their families whenever allegations of abuse or neglect are substantiated.

The Foster Care program is available for children who have been removed from their homes through a legal process.

Family Maintenance provides services designed to promote a safe and stable environment, enabling children to remain in their own home.

Family Reunification services provide assistance to those families whose children are in out-of-home care. A plan is devised to assist a parent in meeting the court's requirements for the return of a child to the parent's custody. Over 60% of the children taken from their homes are reunified with family within one year. Ten percent of those are returned to foster care.

Responsibility for Adoption Services, previously administered by state agencies, was transferred to the county in January 2013. This program facilitates the adoption of children.

APPROACH

The 2012-13 Grand Jury performed the following activities:

- Interviewed personnel in both management and social worker positions
- Reviewed documents provided by the Department of Employment and Social Services
- Interviewed foster care providers

DISCUSSION

Child Protective Services

CPS is a statewide program that receives calls 24/7 regarding possible child abuse or neglect. The caller is not required to have first-hand information and can remain anonymous. The intake worker determines the caller's connection to the family being reported. Information is obtained on the child and everyone else in the child's household and the caller's concerns are documented. A formal process is used to assist in determining the level of abuse or neglect.

There are four categories of abuse: physical, sexual, emotional and general neglect. A situation may need an immediate, three-day or 10-day response, depending on the risk

level to the child. Seven hundred calls are typically received each month; however, some are requests for information.

If a referral is assigned, a social worker looks at the allegation and checks the prior history of the child. The social worker obtains as much background information as possible. The goal is to handle cases requiring an immediate response within 24 hours. If there is a 10-day window for investigation, the social worker tries to interview the child in a safe and non-threatening environment.

Removal is avoided unless the child is in danger. A social worker must write a report to the court and obtain a court order to remove a child from the home. A judge is available on a 24/7 basis, and law enforcement is available in a majority of detentions. There is currently no orientation program on CPS parameters for law enforcement officials. When a child is removed from the home, he or she is placed in foster care for up to 30 days. After 30 days, a longer-term solution is provided.

Each case has a primary social worker who carries 12-14 cases. Social workers interviewed felt this was a manageable caseload. Social workers meet and work with the parents to get the child back home. The social worker administers various assessments to determine the parents' competencies and abilities. Each parent is dealt with separately. Social workers provide the parents with positive, detailed information regarding what is expected in the process.

If applicable, a behavioral health professional recommends treatment/programs suitable to the parent's needs. All children in CPS receive screening and assessments for counseling services through the Behavioral Health Department. All parents attend a mandatory eight-week parent support group. The group facilitator recommends the next steps for the parent, and then the social worker makes a plan with the parents to get the children home.

The staff interviewed emphasized that going through the removal of children and working through programs to have them returned is not a "happy time" for families. However, it can prove to be a positive time, as it allows for families to improve their situations.

A local counselor is available to the CPS staff. Social workers in the program often deal with very difficult cases and those interviewed expressed gratitude for the ability to access counseling support when needed. Supervisors also monitor their staff members' stress levels and adjust workload as needed.

If a child can never return home, there is permanency planning with three options: adoption, guardianship or long-term foster care.

Foster Care

In January 2013, slightly fewer than 500 children were in foster homes in Butte County. This number is down from 1,000 in 2005 and 750 in 2011. According to an interviewed social worker, the reduction is due to a decline in meth use in the county and the efforts of the social workers working with families.

Relatives are the first to be considered to provide a foster home. All homes must be evaluated by social workers using a standardized state checklist. Under AB12, youth can stay in the foster system until they are 21.

In Butte County, there are currently 23 children placed in group homes, including 19 within the county. Children are assigned to group homes when their behaviors and needs cannot be met in traditional foster homes.

A monthly visit by a social worker is required for each child in foster care. Even when a child is returned to his/her parents, the child may remain under Children's Services' jurisdiction for up to a year.

Some concerns were expressed by foster parents interviewed. They felt that the county staff, at times, did not listen to them and also that the requirements to remain qualified as a foster parent were not always applied consistently.

Family Maintenance/Family Reunification

The FM/FR caseworkers take over cases that have been initiated by the investigating social workers, roughly five to six weeks after a child has been detained. There are 14-30 children assigned to each of the caseworkers. Seventy-five percent of the families under CPS are involved with drugs or alcohol. The parents must attend eight sessions of a parent support group within 10 weeks. Some also are required to attend parenting classes provided by NVCSS in Chico, Paradise and Oroville.

Parenting, communication and coping skills are enhanced by the programs in which families must participate. The interviewed staff expressed a desire for more staff and access to the depth of services that are available to families in urban settings.

If it is determined that the children have been exposed to meth, the parents are required to attend one FTC/CAM session before starting the FTC's Parents in Recovery classes, which must be completed within 20 weeks. There are currently 20 families in the CAM program. The parents are subject to the Family Treatment Court. Families that go through the FTC are required to appear before the judge monthly and are in touch with program workers daily. The parents, social workers and behavioral health counselors function as a group. The parents are permitted only two absences in the 20-week program.

If the child is under age 3, the family has up to six months to reunify; if the child is 3 or over, the family has up to a year. If reunification is not achieved in the allotted time, the child is adopted, ordered into legal guardianship or placed into long-term foster care.

There is special “wrap-around” assistance to families in which service providers, parents and social workers meet together to work as a team. Wrap-around services provide a family-led service model, including counseling, crisis intervention, ongoing family meetings and case management services. A shortage of funds has resulted in a long wait list for this service.

Adoption Services

On January 1, 2013, Butte County took over providing adoption services from the state. County staff feels assumption of this program will help expedite adoptions so that children will move through the system more quickly and be placed sooner. Generally, children do not thrive in foster care, so the goal is to place them in adoption as soon as possible. California has set a goal of having adoptions finalized within 24 months from the determination that a child should be put up for adoption. Butte County refers to this period of time as Child Family Services Review (CFSR). Older children frequently do better with relatives or other people with whom they’ve had a connection, such as a coach or a neighbor.

FINDINGS

- F1 The social workers and their supervisors in the Children’s Services programs are dedicated to providing the best possible services to their clients. They are to be commended for their work.
- F2 Law enforcement works closely with the Children’s Services Division. A training course in Children’s Services policies and regulations for law enforcement would enhance the working relationship and would result in a more efficient collaboration.
- F3 While being involved with CPS is not a pleasant experience, it provides an opportunity for families to improve their circumstances.
- F4 CPS staff recognize and appreciate the personal counseling support that is available to them if needed.
- F5 While several programs are available to families working with CPS, there is a desire to provide more programs if funding were available.
- F6 Assumption by the county of Adoption Services should expedite the adoption process.

F7 CSD has a wealth of information and checklists on foster care, child custody regulations, etc. However, it can only be obtained in hard copy from a CSD office.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1 Establish an orientation program on CPS parameters for law enforcement.
- R2 Seek additional funding to expand the programs for families working with CPS.
- R3 Monitor the newly acquired Adoption Services program to ensure that adoptions are taking place within 24 months.
- R4 Put as much information and checklists as possible on the Butte County government website, www.buttecounty.net.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSE

Pursuant to Penal Code Section 933 and 933.05, the Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

- Director, Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services:
 - A response to Findings F1 through F7 and Recommendations R1 through R4

The governing bodies indicated above should be aware that the comment or response of the governing body must be conducted subject to the notice, agenda and open meeting requirements of the Brown Act.

Reports issued by the Civil Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Penal Code Section 929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury do not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Civil Grand Jury.

2012-2013 BUTTE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES AND ELIGIBILITY SERVICES DIVISIONS

SUMMARY

The 2012-13 Grand Jury reviewed the operations of the Employment Services and Eligibility Services Divisions of the Butte County Department of Employment and Social Services. The two divisions administer the following programs:

- Employment Services
 - Welfare-to-Work
 - Child Care Program
 - Cal-Learn
 - Employer Services
- Eligibility Services
 - CalWORKs
 - Homeless Assistance
 - Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care
 - CalFresh
 - Medi-Cal
 - County Medical Services Program
 - General Assistance

GLOSSARY

- ACA - The Affordable Care Act, a federal law that establishes expanded medical coverage and institutes new regulations for U.S. healthcare
- CalWORKs - California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids is the California welfare implementation of the federal welfare-to-work Temporary

Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program that gives cash aid and services to eligible, needy California families

BACKGROUND

One of every four Butte County residents receives public assistance. The number of public assistance cases has increased over the past several years due to the recession and will increase with the introduction of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) in January 2014. The implementation of the ACA will take place over several years and continue to increase the workload, particularly in the Eligibility Services Division. The state and federal governments will provide more funds for the implementation of the ACA and for the overall increase in the number of cases. The county expects that more efficient operations will be needed, as the funding is unlikely to be sufficient to completely cover the anticipated increased workload.

APPROACH

The 2012-13 Grand Jury performed the following activities:

- Interviewed Department of Employment and Social Services managers and employees
- Reviewed applicable documents

DISCUSSION

Employment Services

The Employment Services Division has an annual budget of approximately \$17 million and a staff of 60-70 people.

Welfare-to-Work program, a program which promotes a “work first” philosophy, had 1,067 adult participants in June 2012 compared to 1,206 in June 2009.

The Child Care Program pays for licensed child care providers so families can participate in the Welfare-to-Work program. The Child Care Program paid approximately \$1.73 million in fiscal year 2011-12.

Approximately 84 student parents per month participate in the Cal-Learn program that requires minor parents to remain in school as a condition of receiving aid.