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## DCFS To Utilize More Community-Based Services

### A. More Community-Based Services Are Needed

The Grand Jury has learned of a program called Point-of-Engagement (POE), which emphasizes community-based services. If the community becomes more involved in helping out its member families with the troubles that occur in families, it follows that the community will be stronger and DCFS should have fewer abuse calls to deal with.

If the Hotline is ever able to get the number of calls and referrals under control, it will probably be because of more involvement by community-based services. Those services include those offered by churches, clergy, other faith-aligned organizations, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Alcoholics Anonymous and/or drug abuse organizations

It is believed by the Grand Jury and those interviewed that these organizations have the ability and the wherewithal to promote healthy families and to cause a decline in incidents of child abuse and neglect. They can aid families so that they can solve their own problems with perhaps just a bit of help. If that process is a success, there may be no need for “the call” to the Hotline.

DCFS should catalog what relevant resources are available and be willing to ask to use the facilities that exist. “Can we use your hall for a meeting?” Such a venue will certainly be more user-friendly and less intimidating than a government office, especially for an organization that wants to show a friendly face to the community.

DCFS needs to tell the community who it is and make the point very clear that DCFS is not in any hurry to take your child or anyone’s child away from the rightful parent unless it is truly warranted. Like everyone in the community, it wants a safe, secure situation for every child and realizes that the much-preferred option is for the child to be in its own home. The County is not coming to take your child and the community needs to hear that simple phrase.

Negative myths and stereotypes do exist in the community and those DCFS employees interviewed recognize this. The myths and stereotypes have to be faced. Too many people fear the DCFS and see it as an organization that is not friendly to the community. DCFS must overcome these myths and stereotypes. One idea is to place CSWs from DCFS in “volunteer” situations, so that the community sees them and recognizes them. DCFS can place them in schools or at police stations. In order to interact with the community, it needs to get them out of the Field Office. It can schedule visits and meetings at neutral sites, so that there is less institutionalism involved. Showing DCFS in its best light must be a goal. As stated to the Grand Jury by one employee, it simply needs to do some public relations or do some marketing.

## B. DCFS Must Promote More Community Partnerships

In order to reduce the number of calls to the Hotline, DFS can have “community partnership” meetings. The Grand Jury believes DCFS can find such partners. Services do exist and DCFS must get them on the side of DCFS. It has to be ready to say, “We need your help.”

Observers recognize that DCFS has a stake in getting such organizations on its side. Importantly, it can and must find out exactly what is out there in the community. It simply needs to go around and look. It needs to be visible. It needs to recognize that it must, on occasion, ask for help. DCFS has to “beat the bushes” in order to locate resources that can be used to reduce incidents of abuse or neglect. It can ask for volunteers from the community to be mentors. It need spend no money; just offer the satisfaction of being of aid. DCFS will not know how this works until it is tried.

DCFS needs to determine whether schools can be used. They would appear to be an obvious resource and can be used to solicit potential foster parents. DCFS can make presentations at schools and get involved with the school personnel to make its message known.

Thus the County needs more “front-end programs,” the kind that makes the call to the Hotline unnecessary. If DCFS cannot provide all the programs needed, it can encourage community based-services to do so. The Grand Jury realizes that the DCFS has initiated some of these activities but they need to be greatly expanded.

## REQUIRED RESPONSES

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Responding Agency</b>
4.1-4.10	Department of Children and Family Services
4.1	Board of Supervisors

## ACRONYMS

DCFS	Department of Children and Family Services
CSW	Children’s Social Worker
CWS/CMS	Child Welfare Services/Case Management System
SDM	Structured Decision Making
SCAR	Suspected Child Abuse Report
ESCAR	Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Report
AWOL	Absent Without Leave
CSA	Children’s Services Administrator
ASFA	American Safe Family Act



**FOSTER CARE  
QUALITY ASSURANCE:  
TRAINING FOSTER PARENTS**



**COMMITTEE MEMBERS**

**Joseph P. Des Barres – Chair  
Marie Louise Gutierrez  
Caroline Kelly  
Elena L. Velarde**

## 5. FOSTER CARE

### QUALITY ASSURANCE: TRAINING FOSTER PARENTS

#### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Grand Jury declares foster parents as the backbone of the foster care system. Foster parents provide care 24/7, contending with the myriad problematic experiences of removed children. Foster parent training must be significantly enhanced to deal with the tremendous challenges foster children present. The Grand Jury understands successful foster parenting is a complex undertaking requiring a high level of knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and skills.

The Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) is the county agency responsible for the safety, well-being and permanence of foster children. Its charge is to place the child into a safe home. Often it does so with *contracting agencies*<sup>1</sup> that recruit, select and train foster families meeting requirements set by state law and DCFS.

DCFS must upgrade and standardize its current training curriculum with parent and instructor participation. DCFS must train a cadre of master teachers to devise, model and impart training modules and methodologies. Master teachers providing instruction must receive current evidence-based<sup>2</sup> training and techniques in adult learning theory. These master teachers should then instruct foster parent trainers county-wide, differentiating instruction according to learning styles and modalities. With a DCFS-certified and modeled curriculum, DCFS can assure consistency and high standards to all stakeholders. Expert master teachers and expertly trained foster parents are central to the DCFS vision.

DCFS articulates its responsibility as:

*...working towards its vision that ‘Children thrive in safe families and supportive communities’ with three overarching Goals: (1) Emphasize Child-Centered Practices; (2) Pursue Workforce Excellence; and (3) Strengthen Organizational Operations.*<sup>3</sup>

Accomplishing the goals above will occur when caregivers are rigorously trained; share and articulate the DCFS vision; and work collaboratively. The Grand Jury commends DCFS for undertaking the 2012 Strategic Planning Process—transforming the way the Department functions—to make its vision a reality.

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<sup>1</sup> Relative/Non-Relative Extended Family Member Homes; Foster Family Homes and, Foster Family Agency Certified Homes. CWS/CMS Datamart History Table, December 31, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Evidence-based practice is a combination of best research evidence, best clinical expertise and consistent with patient values and preferences: Dr. David Sackett, 1996; [www.hsl.unc.edu/services](http://www.hsl.unc.edu/services)

<sup>3</sup> Letter to Stakeholders, Philip L. Browning, Director DCFS, September 28, 2012

## COMMENDATIONS

5.1 DCFS is commended for implementing the Strategic Plan<sup>4</sup> to transform itself.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 DCFS must assess, upgrade and standardize the scope and sequence of the foster parent training curriculum emphasizing evidence-based practices.<sup>5</sup>

5.2 DCFS must train foster parents and a cadre of master teachers within the proposed DCFS Inter-University Consortium Training Academy.<sup>6</sup>

5.3 DCFS must quickly implement the Strategic Plan training objectives for foster parents.

5.4 DCFS must assign greater value to foster parent input within its multidisciplinary teams.<sup>7</sup>

5.5 DCFS must restructure its electronic data network to transmit client information on demand to all involved caregivers.<sup>8</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury met with the following: Edmund D. Edelman Children’s Court, Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, Child Welfare Initiative of Los Angeles, Alliance for Children’s Rights, California State University Northridge (CSUN) School of Social Work, Foster Family Associations (FFA) and an array of foster care providers. The Grand Jury reviewed studies and reports, including the Children’s Special Investigation Unit Report (2012) to the L.A. County Board of Supervisors. This report detailed systemic child-endangering deficits and offered remedies. The Grand Jury interviewed foster care parents and foster children both currently in care and those who have exited care. The Grand Jury attended training sessions for prospective foster parents and researched the topics and content of the preparation and selection program for foster parents and adoptive parents. Sources of information included phone interviews, printed literature, database searches, county and agency websites, e-mails, newspaper articles, and reports of previous L.A. County Civil Grand Juries. The Grand Jury also researched information from the Casey Family Foundation, California Evidence-Based Clearinghouse for Child Welfare, Child Welfare League of America, National Foster Parents Association, the John Burton Foundation, and the Edmund D. Edelman Children’s Court.

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<sup>4</sup> DCFS 2012 Strategic Plan: Living document of 48 objectives guiding DCFS efforts over the next 3 to 5 years

<sup>5</sup>PS-MAPP: Partnering for Safety and Permanence—Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting, DCFS packet

<sup>6</sup> DCFS Strategic Plan (Obj.: II.3.1 [curriculum], II.3.2 [new hires’ education], II.3.3 [caregiver/staff development])

<sup>7</sup> Multidisciplinary Team Approach: All identifiable caretakers having a stake in influencing a child’s success

<sup>8</sup> DCFS Strategic Plan (Obj.: III.1.1 [data report consolidation]; III.1.2 [streamline existing data reports])

## BACKGROUND

### What is the Depth and Breadth of Foster Parenting?

*...Each foster parent has an obligation to maintain and improve the practice of fostering, constantly to examine, use and increase the knowledge upon which fostering is based, and to perform the service of fostering with dignity, integrity and competence.<sup>9</sup>*

The National Foster Parent Association calls for three indispensable Parent Competencies requiring foster parent training:

Principle 7: Promoting educational attainment and success.

Principle 10: Growing as a foster parent—skill development and role clarification; participation in training, professional or skill development, and foster parent support organizations and associations.

Principle 12: Preparing children and youth for self-sufficient and responsible adult lives.

Foster parents are essential to positive outcomes; thus, they must receive rigorous, ongoing and professional training to optimally raise their foster children.

### Current Minimum Requirements for Foster Parenting—the Core Abilities

DCFS adopted the “Partnering for Safety-Model Approach to Partnerships in Parenting” (PS-MAPP) to prepare and select prospective foster parents. Relevant Core Abilities<sup>10</sup> equip them to:

- Meet the developmental and well-being needs of children coming into foster care, or being adopted through foster care.
- Meet the safety needs of children coming into foster care, or being adopted through foster care.

Skills training consists of ten meetings that cover the following required topics: Core Abilities; Developing the child’s physical, mental, emotional, social, spiritual and moral compass; Dealing with Loss; Dealing with Attachment; Behavior Management; Birth Family Connections; Foster Care Exit; Fostering and Adopting; Foster Parent and Agency Worker Roles; Shared Parenting; and, Fostering and Adopting Challenges.

During training, each foster parent is supposed to learn specific skills and practice them. In the home, social workers should observe whether or not skills have been mastered. More importantly the social workers should provide feedback to further develop competencies or determine inability or unwillingness to master the required skills.

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<sup>9</sup> Excerpted from National Foster Parent Association, Code of Ethics; [nfpaonline.org/](http://nfpaonline.org/)

<sup>10</sup> PS-MAPP, Excerpted from The Five Core Abilities; DCFS packet provided to Grand Jury

## FINDINGS

### Extent of the Problem

According to DCFS data, more than half of court hearings end with the removal of children from their parents or guardians.<sup>11</sup> These out-of-home placements accounted for the living arrangements of approximately 16,000 children as of December 31, 2012.<sup>12</sup> This is the juncture where foster parents enter and take charge.

### Foster Parents: Integral Team Members

Foster parents are expected to care for children. They must always be included in any information loop.<sup>13</sup> Foster parents' day-to-day contact makes their inclusion imperative. Parents should always be informed of all available historical data regarding their foster child. All foster children have issues—over 50% have significant mental health issues.<sup>14</sup> Foster parents require information and skill-training to address those issues.

The multidisciplinary team<sup>15</sup> supports a child throughout the foster care system. This represents “Child-Centered Practice”—one of DCFS’s three overarching goals. Shared information guarantees each team member is “in the know.” Standard operating procedure should enable each to send and receive accurate case information as required.

### Complex Conditions Demand Rigorous Curriculum

Emotional, mental health and behavioral conditions compromise foster youth’s ability to personally develop and exit foster care as fully functioning citizens. Years in foster care may include numerous additional placements resulting in separation trauma each time. For these children, such life disruptions end only when they are released from foster care.

*Sending 18-year old foster children with a history of abuse and no family ties into adulthood without the support and training they need to live productive, healthy and stable lives, is government-sanctioned child abuse.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Data Sharing: 2011 Final LA County Interagency Report from 2010 data

<sup>12</sup> Child Welfare/Case Management System [CWS/CMS] Datamart History Table/BIS Information Technology Services Division—Statistics, Department of Children and Family Services, 2012 data.

<sup>13</sup> Interviews with current foster parents

<sup>14</sup> Interview with Department of Mental Health staff members

<sup>15</sup> Multidisciplinary Team Approach: All identifiable caretakers having a stake in influencing a child’s success

<sup>16</sup> Quote per Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich (e-mailed to the Grand Jury on 3/14/12 by his deputy, Helen Berberian—with permission to use) as contained in 2011-2012 Los Angeles County Civil Grand Jury Final Report