

# California Child and Family Services Review 2008 County Self-Assessment



**San Luis Obispo County**

June 30, 2008

## California's Child and Family Services Review County Self-Assessment

<b>County</b>	San Luis Obispo
<b>Responsible County Child Welfare Agency</b>	San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services
<b>Period of Assessment</b>	6/30/2003-6/30/2007
<b>Period of Outcomes Data</b>	2007 quarter 2 data report
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### In Collaboration with:

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County Drug and Alcohol Services
County Mental Health
Children's Services Network

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# San Luis Obispo County Self-Assessment

## Introduction

San Luis Obispo County began its second three-year County Self-Assessment (CSA) process in January 2008, after finishing the Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) process. A CSA Advisory Group was formed, comprised of representatives from the Department of Social Services, Probation, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol Services, the Independent Living Program and the Children Services Network. The Advisory Group was tasked with overseeing both the planning of the public comment process and the writing of the CSA report.

It was decided that the public comment process would occur through a series of community forums. These forums were held regionally. Over 200 invitations were sent out to community partners, foster youth and parents and 82 people participated in the forums. The Advisory Group decided that the focus of these community forums would be on the three areas that the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department needed to work on the most:

- Timely response to child abuse and neglect referrals
- Re-entry of children into foster care
- Establishing permanent connections for youth before they age out of foster care

The Advisory Group developed a series of nine questions designed to garner feedback on these issues:

- #1 What has your experience been regarding the responsiveness and timeliness of the agency's action related to your report?
- #2 Are there areas that you see as a way for the Juvenile Probation Department and/or Child Welfare Services to be more timely?
- #3 How has the timeliness or responsiveness of the agency affected your relationship with the agency?
- #3a How has the timeliness or responsiveness of the agency affected the family you called about?
- #4 What do you believe are important elements or issues facing our families, after they leave Child Welfare Services and/or the Juvenile Probation Department?
- #4a What are the services they might need?
- #5 From your perspective how can the Juvenile Probation Department and/or Child Welfare Services contribute to increase the success rate of families who are involved in reunification services, thereby avoiding re-entry into care?
- #6 Do you think there are missing services that contribute to children going back into foster care?
- #6a If so, what are they?

Achieving successful launching means:

Preparing the youth with skills for managing adult life

Creating a meaningful permanent connection to provide support in the first decade of adult life.

- #7 What can Child Welfare Services and/or Juvenile Probation Department do to support these two important components of successful launching?
- #8 What can the community do to support these two important components of successful launching?
- #9 Understanding that the County's Self Improvement Plan process addresses children who are already involved with Juvenile Probation Department/Child Welfare

Services, do you have any additional thoughts in how we can improve our processes?

Peggy Cordero, from the Central California Training Academy, acted as facilitator for all three forums. During the forums, participants were provided with an overview of the Self-Assessment process, as well as an explanation of areas that the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department identified as strengths and areas needing improvement. Participants were then asked the nine questions and given two hours in which to brainstorm responses in small groups. In closing, each group reported their feedback back to the larger group.

Additionally, the same questions were posted in English and in Spanish as a survey on the Department of Social Services' website, and the community was encouraged to go on-line to provide feedback. 16 people responded to the survey. The responses gathered at the forums and from the on-line surveys have been incorporated into this report, and will be used when the County develops its System Improvement Plan.

### **Acknowledgements**

The County of San Luis Obispo Probation Department and Department of Social Services would like to thank the individuals listed below for their valuable contributions to the Community Forums and this report. The San Luis Obispo County Self-Assessment would not have been possible without their expertise and input.

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- Jannine Lambert, Department of Social Services, Staff Development
- Katie McCain, Independent Living Program, Permanency Case Manager
- Christopher Monza, Department of Social Services, CWS Program Manager
- Jill Powers, Department of Social Services, Staff Development
- Elise Roberts, Department of Social Services, Regional Manager
- Jim Salio, Probation Department, Assistant Chief
- Carol Wagner, Department of Social Services, Staff Development
- Liz Woods, Central California Training Academy
- Kim Wooten, Department of Social Services, CWS Program Manager

# I. Demographic Profile and Outcomes Data

## A. Demographic Profile

### 1. County Data Report

#### San Luis Obispo County Child Welfare Services Participation Rates

	Timeframe	SLO County		Statewide	
Number children <18 in population	2006	53,966		9,988,199	
Number of children with referrals	2006	3,566	66.1 per 1,000	482,706	48.3 per 1,000
Number of children with substantiated referrals	2006	793	14.7 per 1,000	108,290	10.8 per 1,000
Number of Foster Care entries	2006	224	4.2 per 1,000	40,321	4.0 per 1,000
Number of children in Foster Care	7/1/2007	368	6.8 per 1,000	73,245	7.3 per 1,000

Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

#### San Luis Obispo County Caseload by Service Component Type July 1, 2007

	Court Ordered	Voluntary	Missing/Under Investigation	Total
Emergency Response			41	41
Pre-Placement (FM)	30	93	1	124
Post-Placement (FM)	50	4		54
Family Reunification	183	1		184
Permanent Placement	222	27		249
Total	485	125	42	652

Source: CWS/CMS 2007 Quarter 3 Extract

## Federal and State Measures

<b>SAFETY</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
S1.1 No recurrence of maltreatment within 6 months	7/1/06-6/30/07	96.6%	92.5%	94.6%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
S2.1 Rate of child abuse and/or neglect in Foster Care (4 children out of 565)	7/1/06-6/30/07	99.29%	99.74%	99.68%	
2B Percentage of child abuse/neglect referrals with a timely response - Immediate	4/1/07-6/30/07	92.9%	96.5%		
2B Percentage of child abuse/neglect referrals with a timely response – 10-Day	4/1/07-6/30/07	63.3%	90.7%		
2C Timely Social Worker visits with child	4/07	85.4%	90.2%		
	5/07	82.4%	89.6%		
	6/07	81.9%	88.7%		

<b>REUNIFICATION</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
C1.1 Reunify within 12 months (exit cohort)	7/1/06-6/30/07	70.2%	63.6%	75.2%	
C1.2 Median time to reunify (in months)	7/1/06-6/30/07	6.4	7.9	5.4	
C1.3 Reunify within 12 months (6 mo entry cohort)	7/1/06-6/30/07	23.4%	41.1%	48.4%	
C1.4 Re-entry following reunification (exit cohort) (27 out of 108)	7/1/06-6/30/07	19.5%	12.0%	9.9%	

<b>ADOPTION</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
C2.1 Adoption within 24 months (exit cohort)	7/1/06-6/30/07	34.9%	32.6%	36.6%	
C2.2 Median time to adoption (in months)	7/1/06-6/30/07	29.3	29.5	27.3	
C2.3 Adoption Within 12 Months (17 months in care)	7/1/06-6/30/07	20.8%	14.6%	22.7%	
C2.4 Legally Free Within 6 Months (17 months in care)	7/1/05-6/30/06	10.8%	5.0%	10.9%	
C2.5 Adoptions Within 12 Months (Legally Free)	7/1/05-6/30/06	54.5%	54.9%	53.7%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>LONG TERM CARE</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
C3.1 Exits to Permanency (24 Months in Care)	7/1/06-6/30/07	27.0%	17.8%	29.1%	
C3.2 Exits to Permanency (Legally Free At Exit)	7/1/06-6/30/07	100.0%	97.2%	98.0%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
C3.3 In Care 3 Years or Longer (Emancipated/Age 18)	7/1/06-6/30/07	50.0%	61.4%	37.5%	

<b>PLACEMENT STABILITY</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
C4.1 No more than two placements within 12 months	7/1/06-6/30/07	86.5%	82.4%	86.0%	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
C4.2 No more than two placements (12-24 months in care)	7/1/06-6/30/07	59.6%	60.9%	65.4%	
C4.3 No more than two placements (24+ months in care)	7/1/06-6/30/07	35.5%	34.9%	41.8%	
<b>PLACEMENT WITH SIBLINGS</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
4A.1 Percent in Foster Care placed with ALL siblings	7/1/07	62.8%	48.3%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4A.2 Percent in Foster Care placed with SOME siblings	7/1/07	77.1%	69.7%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>PLACEMENT IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE CARE SETTING</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
<b><i>First Placement</i></b>					
4B-1.1 Kinship	7/1/06-6/30/07	51.2%	22.5%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-1.2 Foster Home	7/1/06-6/30/07	12.0%	19.6%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-1.3 FFA	7/1/06-6/30/07	36.4%	40.0%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-1.4 Group Home	7/1/06-6/30/07	0.5%	15.5%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-1.5 Other	7/1/06-6/30/07	0.0%	2.5%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b><i>Point in Time</i></b>					
4B-3.1 Kinship	7/1/07	57.1%	36.1%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-3.2 Foster Home	7/1/07	11.7%	9.5%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-3.3 FFA	7/1/07	15.5%	26.0%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

4B-3.4 Group Home	7/1/07	6.4%	8.2%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4B-3.5 Other	7/1/07	9.3%	20.2%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>ICWA PLACEMENT PREFERENCES</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>ICWA Eligible (10 children total in SLO Co)</b>					
4E (1) -1 Relative Home	4/1/07-6/30/07	20.0%	26.1%		
4E (1) -2 Non-Relative Indian Family	4/1/07-6/30/07	0.0%	7.0%		
4E (1) -3 Non-Relative Non-Indian Family	4/1/07-6/30/07	80.0%	57.8%		
4E (1) -4 Non-Relative Ethnicity Missing	4/1/07-6/30/07	0.0%	9.1%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<b>Multi-Ethnic (7 children total in SLO Co)</b>					
4E (2) -1 Relative Home	4/1/07-6/30/07	28.6%	23.6%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4E (2) -2 Non-Relative Indian Family	4/1/07-6/30/07	0.0%	5.4%		
4E (2) -3 Non-Relative Non-Indian Family	4/1/07-6/30/07	71.4%	62.0%		
4E (2) -4 Non-Relative Ethnicity Missing	4/1/07-6/30/07	0.0%	9.0%		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

<b>WELL-BEING</b>	<b>Cohort Period</b>	<b>SLO</b>	<b>State</b>	<b>Federal</b>	<b>*</b>
<b>Children transitioning into adulthood with:</b>					
8A-1 High school diploma or GED	10/1/05-9/30/06	75	5,152		
8A-2 Enrolled in college/higher education program	10/1/05-9/30/06	33	3,961		
8A-3 Received ILP services	10/1/05-9/30/06	201	30,992		
8A-4 Completed a vocational training program	10/1/05-9/30/06	30	1,281		
8A-5 Are employed or have other means of support	10/1/05-9/30/06	132	7,041		

\*  = San Luis Obispo County has met Federal Standard or State average (when no Federal Standard is available)  
Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

## 2. Demographics

	<b>San Luis Obispo County</b>	<b>California</b>
Population, 2006 estimate	257,005	36,457,549
Population, 2000	246,681	33,871,648
Population change, 4/1/2000 to 7/1/2006	4.2%	7.6%
Persons under 5 years old, 2006	5.0%	7.3%
Persons under 18 years old, 2006	19.3%	26.1%
Persons 65 years old and over, 2006	14.4%	10.8%
Female persons, 2006	48.7%	50.0%
White persons, 2006	91.1%	76.9%
Black persons, 2006	2.1%	6.7%
American Indian/Alaska Native persons, 2006	1.1%	1.2%
Asian persons, 2006	3.1%	12.4%
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, 2006	0.1%	0.4%
Persons reporting two or more races, 2006	2.4%	2.4%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, 2006	18.3%	35.9%
White persons not Hispanic, 2006	74.1%	43.1%
Language other than English spoken at home	14.7%	39.5%
<b>Households and Housing</b>		
Households, 2000	92,739	11,502,870
Households with children under 18 years old	41%	51%
Persons per household, 2000	2.49	2.87
Homeownership rate, 2000	61.5%	56.9%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2000	18.6%	31.4%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2000	\$230,000	\$211,500
Fair Market Rent (dollar amount)	\$955	\$905
Housing costs as a percentage of household income	30%	29%
<b>Employment, Income and Poverty</b>		
Per capita family income (dollar amount)	\$26,714	\$26,800
Median household income, 2004	\$46,225	\$49,894
Households with at least one working parent	92%	90%
Persons below poverty, 2004	10.4%	13.2%
Children living in poverty	17%	19%
Households receiving food stamps	9%	10%
Unemployment rate, March 2008	5.1%	6.4%
<b>Health</b>		
Mothers receiving early prenatal care	85%	86%
Low birth weight infants	7%	7%
Teen birth rate (per 1,000)	18	37
Children in good or excellent health	94%	92%
Children with regular access to a doctor	91%	89%

Children with dental insurance	72%	79%
Insured	97%	93%

Note: All figures for 2007 unless otherwise indicated.

Source: 2007 California County Data Book, [www.childrennow.org](http://www.childrennow.org); US Census Bureau, [www.quickfacts.census.gov](http://www.quickfacts.census.gov); EDD, [www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov](http://www.labormarketinfo.edd.ca.gov)

San Luis Obispo County is a semi-rural county located halfway between San Francisco and Los Angeles. The county has three distinct regions, each with its own unique characteristics and service areas. North County has historically been a rural, agrarian community, although it is currently the fastest growing region of the county, especially the city of Paso Robles. The Central Region contains the city of San Luis Obispo, the county's largest city and county seat, and location of many service providers and employers. South County is also growing at a faster rate than the Central Region, although it is not as populous as North County. Both the Probation Department and the Department of Social Services have offices in all regions. The Department of Social Services operates five different regions, each with their own offices and procedures. However, certain services and providers, such as Juvenile Court, remain centrally located, often creating service barriers and logistical problems for families and workers.

According to the Economic Opportunity Commission of San Luis Obispo County, the county's community action agency, the county has a high cost of living and some of the highest housing costs in the nation. There has been a slight increase in unemployment in the last four years, from around 4% to 5.1%. Entry-level jobs can be difficult to find, as there is a large college student population competing for jobs. Childcare and transportation are additional barriers families often have to overcome. These problems all combine to create stressors for families.

Health care is another stressor for many families. Although 97% of the county's population is insured, health care can be expensive and difficult to obtain. Many of the large HMOs have left the county, and many health care providers are reluctant to accept MediCal. MediCal dental providers are in especially short supply. Recently, the county's MediCal services have been contracted to CenCal, resulting in some additional barriers to service for families.

A recent Public Opinion Survey by Opinion Studies shows that county residents believe the quality of life in San Luis Obispo County is high. Thirty-nine percent of respondents rated their life a 9 or 10 (on a 10-point scale) and another 44% rated it a 7 or 8. However, this opinion has declined steadily in the last three years. In Opinion Studies' 2005 CountyTrak Survey, 50% of respondents rated their quality of life a 9 or 10. In 2006, the number of respondents who gave such a rating dropped to 45%. For 2007, only 39% felt that their quality of life rated a 9 or 10. This represents an 11% decline. When asked to prioritize specific issues in terms of resource expenditure, respondents identified providing quality education and ensuring an adequate water supply as the issues most worthy of the highest priority. Respondents in all parts of the county agreed on the rankings of these two issues. Other high priority issues are improving health care, protecting clean air and climate, and affordable housing.

Therefore, although San Luis Obispo County is considered a desirable place to live, it is not without its problems. Housing, well-paying jobs, and healthcare were identified as problems during our last County Self-Assessment and they continue to be issues for many residents. Additionally, methamphetamine is often named as an epidemic in the county, one affecting all socioeconomic classes. The Department of Social Services, the Probation Department and our community partners struggle with the challenges these issues present to families and service delivery.

### 3. Education System Profile

	County Totals	State Totals
Number of Schools	83	9,671
Enrollment	35,618	6,286,943
African American not Hispanic	699 (2.0%)	477,776 (7.6%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	237 (0.7%)	48,383 (0.8%)
Asian	603 (1.7%)	510,499 (8.1%)
Filipino	354 (1.0%)	165,480 (2.6%)
Hispanic or Latino	10,091 (28.3%)	3,026,956 (48.1%)
Pacific Islander	75 (0.2%)	38,733 (0.6%)
White not Hispanic	22,641 (63.6%)	1,849,078 (29.4%)
Multiple or No Response	918 (2.6%)	170,038 (2.7%)
Graduates (prior year)	2,629	349,180
Dropouts (prior year)	268	67,612
% Fully Credentialed Teachers	99.4	95
Pupil Teacher Ratio	20	20.97
Average Class Size	24.9	26.77
Free & Reduced Price Meals	12,209 (34.5%)	3,145,526 (50.7%)
Language Arts Percent Basic and Above (Total Tested)	78% # with Scores: (27,274) Total Tested:(27,404)	72% # with Scores: (4,802,038) Total Tested:(4,815,065)
Math Percent Basic and Above (Total Tested)	76% # with Scores: (26,075) Total Tested:(26,343)	66% # with Scores: (4,642,238) Total Tested:(4,675,993)
Science Percent Basic and Above (Total Tested)	80% # with Scores: (7,014) Total Tested:(7,140)	68% # with Scores: (1,116,085) Total Tested:(1,132,646)
History Social Science Percent Basic and Above (Total Tested)	70% # with Scores: (8,724) Total Tested:(8,827)	61% # with Scores: (1,398,086) Total Tested:(1,414,206)

Source: California Department of Education Data Quest, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>

San Luis Obispo County has students enrolled in ten school districts, the San Luis Obispo County Office of Education, and two charter schools. Reflecting our general population, our student population is less ethnically diverse than the state as a whole. Additionally, the number of students receiving free and reduced meals is lower than the state average. According to the San Luis Obispo County Schools Annual Education Report 2008, school enrollment in the county has been in decline since 2002. This is attributable to declining birth rates, high housing costs making it difficult for young families to live in the county, and a greater number of older populations in the county. However, San Luis Obispo does perform above average in student achievement.

## *B. CWS Outcomes and C-CFSR Data Indicators*

The following measures serve as the basis for the San Luis Obispo County's Self-Assessment and are used to track the County's performance over time. The data was extracted from the Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS). The Department of Social Services is responsible for inputting data in CWS/CMS as part of the caseload management process for children and families who receive child welfare services.

The Federal standards remain constant, while the State standards change quarterly, and are based on all California counties. Therefore, it is important to remember that the most accurate comparisons that can be made are by looking at a County's past and present performance. San Luis Obispo County is continuously analyzing data, seeking a better understanding of how accurately it reflects our practices, as well as modifying practices as needed. The Department's goal is to meet or exceed both the Federal and State standards.

### Outcome 1: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect

The Department of Social Services continues to use the Differential Response system, which proposes that child welfare act on referrals with a greater variety of responses and services. San Luis Obispo County uses Structured Decision Making (SDM) Hotline tools to assist in the identification of the appropriate response/path. Hotline screening is a three-step process that includes the following:

- A screening decision, which helps intake workers determine whether to evaluate in a referral for investigation or screen out the referral based on a set of criteria
- Response priority procedures, used for determining how quickly an emergency response worker should contact the family once a referral is accepted for investigation
- A path decision, which guides worker decisions regarding what services to offer to families under investigation and to those who are screened out

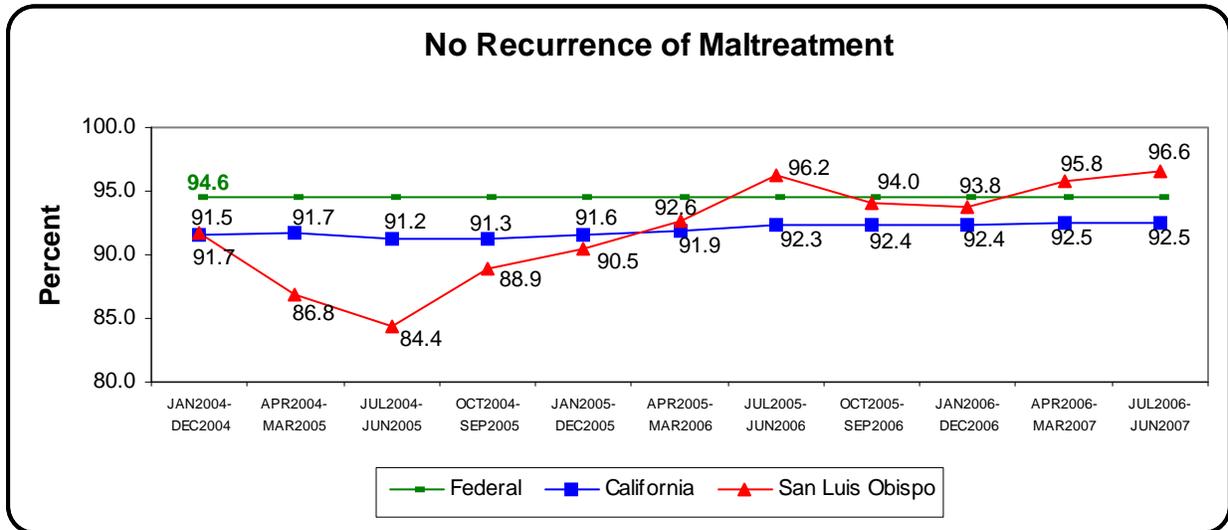
Path 1 is considered an appropriate referral for community services. These referrals are screened out for the purpose of CWS/CMS, and are referred to our community partner, Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC). EOC offers a countywide voluntary child abuse prevention program. EOC Educator/Advocates assist families with services to keep children safe and healthy. These services include in-home parenting, assistance with food, clothing, and resources for shelter and beds or cribs for children. They also provide assistance with referrals to community and county programs. EOC tracks and reports the response to services to the Department of Social Services. Currently, EOC receives approximately 16% of all child welfare referrals, for an average of 41 Path 1 referrals per month. Of these, approximately 33% accept voluntary services. Another 10% engage in a telephone conversation to discuss issues and ask for resources. The remainder decline services or do not respond.

Path 2 constitutes a CWS/Community Response within 10 days. Mandated reporters and community partners are given the opportunity to respond with Social Workers whenever appropriate on Path 2 referrals. Emergency Response Social Workers have responded with a variety of community partners, including Public Health Nurses, Drug and Alcohol, Mental Health and Participant Services. Path 3 is considered an Immediate Response, and is responded to within 24 hours. The most common partner for these responses is law enforcement.

### **Recurrence of maltreatment**

This measure reflects the percent of children who were victims of child abuse/neglect with a subsequent substantiated report of abuse/neglect within specific time periods.

As of June 2007, the Department's rate of no recurrence of maltreatment had risen to 96.6%. The Department has struggled with how to determine and assign duplicate referrals. Once again, duplicate reports are to be treated as one referral handled by the worker already working with the family, and the current statistics have decreased back below the state and federal standard.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

The following patterns were identified in the characteristics and circumstances of the children who experience repeat maltreatment in regards to age, allegations, reporter type, ethnic group, and gender:

- Children aged 11-15 had a higher percentage of referrals than other age groups, and the highest number of re-referrals
- The majority of the referrals were for general neglect
- The highest numbers of referrals were made by law enforcement/legal
- There was a higher representation of white and Hispanic children
- Of the 191 children with a substantiated allegation, 104 were female and 87 were male

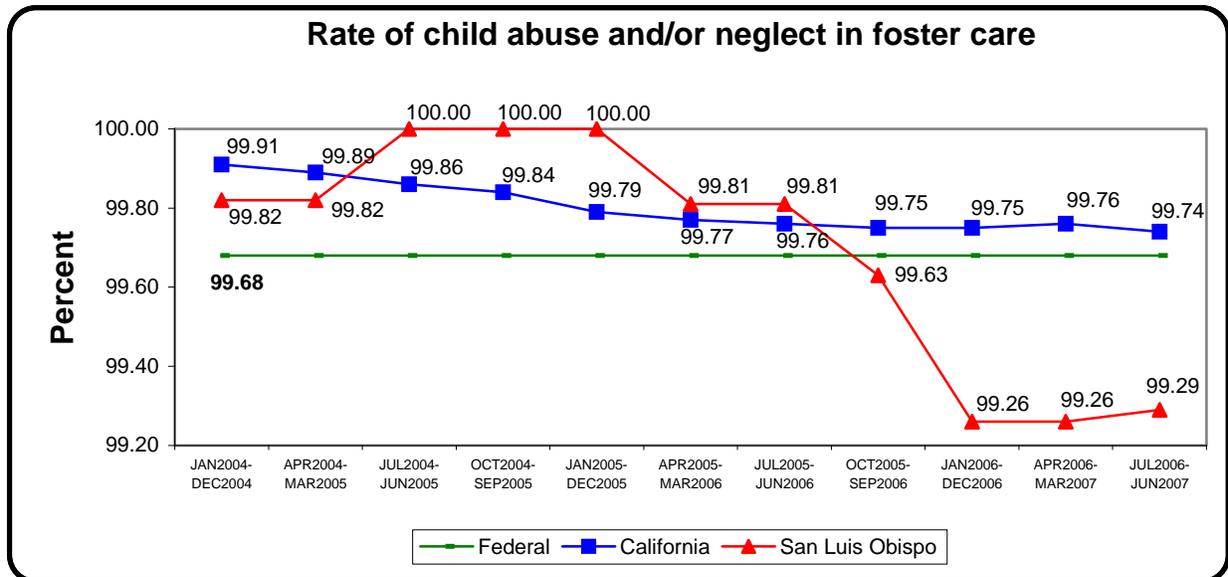
Substance abuse continues to be a prevalent issue in San Luis Obispo County and a major cause of referrals, both initial and subsequent. Although a parent may seek and successfully complete treatment, there always exists the possibility of relapse, and a subsequent referral to the Department of Social Services. Also, although substance abuse treatment options are available in the county, there is a need for a greater variety of treatment models and services, especially for monolingual individuals and fathers.

Out of 29 foster children, Probation's rate of no recurrence of maltreatment for their children in foster care is 100%. Children who remain in the home constitute the vast majority of children in Probation's population. Those children receiving child welfare services through Probation are already removed from the home; therefore, Probation does not monitor child welfare services in the home. Additionally, Probation does not receive or substantiate referrals on abuse. The safety of children allowed to remain in their homes falls under the breadth of observations made by Probation and they do a child abuse check on every minor placed. Probation Officers are trained to respond to situations where children may be at risk for abuse and they will ensure the provision of a variety of services where needed to assist a child remaining in a home.

### Rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care

This measure reflects the percent of children in foster care who are abused or neglected while in placement.

As of June 2007, the Department of Social Services' rate of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care was less than 1%. The Department's rate of no recurrence of maltreatment increased slightly in the most recent quarter. This rate reflects the abuse/neglect of 4 children out of a total of 566. Because San Luis Obispo is a small county, one incident of abuse in foster homes can significantly raise the percentage.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

The following patterns were identified in the characteristics and circumstances of the children who experience repeat maltreatment in regards to ethnic group and gender:

- There were a higher number of abuses in foster care for Hispanic children.
- Of the 566 children placed in foster care, 52% (294 children) were female and 48% (272 children) were male. Male children had a higher count of experiencing maltreatment in Foster Care.

The following services and resources are available to caregivers:

- Health Care Program for Children in Foster Care (HCPCFC). HCPCFC is a public health nursing program located in county child welfare service agencies and probation departments to provide public health nurse expertise in meeting the medical, dental, mental and developmental needs of children and youth in foster care.
- Parent's Resource for Information, Development and Education (PRIDE). PRIDE is designed to strengthen the quality of family foster parenting and adoption services by providing a standardized structured framework for recruiting, preparing, and selecting foster parents and adoptive parents.
- Foster and Kinship Care Education Program – free workshops for Foster or Adoptive Parents and Kinship caregivers.
- Foster Parent Empowerment Newsletter
- Foster Parent Training Academy

Most of the Department of Social Services' reporting and tracking procedures for occurrence of abuse and neglect in relative, non-related extended family member and county-licensed home foster care settings are handled by the Licensing Unit. Licensing staff conducts screenings and licensing of foster parents and other individuals living in the foster home prior to placement of a child. Staff also track and report on occurrences of abuse and neglect in relative, non-related extended family member and county-licensed home foster care settings. Allegations of abuse in county-licensed foster care are responded to as Path 3 Immediate referrals, and both an Emergency Response Social Worker and a Licensing Social Worker respond to the referral. All Social Workers are trained to assess for appropriateness of placement. Community Care Licensing, the state regulatory division, has jurisdiction to investigate allegations of child abuse in Foster Family Agency's or group homes. They are immediately notified if an allegation is received.

There are no known instances of abuse or neglect against a minor placed in a foster care program by Probation. The group and foster homes used by Probation are licensed by the State or other states where applicable, or an independent FFA. In those few cases where a minor on probation is placed with a relative, that relative and any other adult in the home is screened for appropriateness. Probation contacts each minor in placement, regardless of placement type, at least once a month and will address any safety concerns during the contact. Probation Officers use a standardized safety checklist during these visits and this checklist is filed in the case as part of the permanent record. The ability of the minor to contact family members and Probation is reinforced with each placement. The Probation Department is in the process of developing Memorandums of Understanding with every placement agency to ensure that the Foster Care Bill of Rights was followed for each minor.

The following patterns were identified in the characteristics and circumstances of the children who were placed in foster care by Probation in regards to ethnic group and gender:

- A higher representation of white (73% or 26 children) and Hispanic (19% or 7 children) than other ethnic groups
- Of the 36 children placed in foster care, 72% (26 children) were male and 28% (10 children) were female

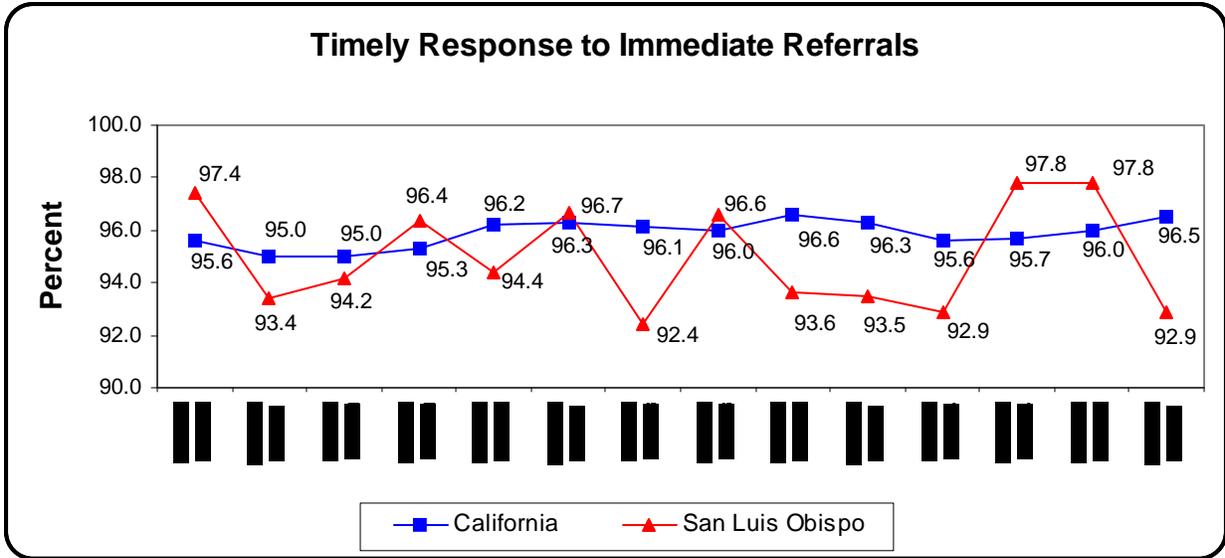
#### Outcome 2: Children are maintained safely in their homes whenever possible and appropriate

##### **Timely response for immediate referrals**

This process measure is designed to determine the percent of cases in which face to face contact with a child occurs, or is attempted, within the regulatory time frames in those situations in which a determination is made that the abuse or neglect allegations indicate significant danger to the child.

For the Department of Social Services, as of June 2007, the rate of timely response for immediate referrals is 92.9%. The Department saw a drop from 97.8% to 92.9% from March 2007 to June 2007. Immediate response rates have improved since then, however the Department has still set a standard in which all immediate referrals are to be completed timely.

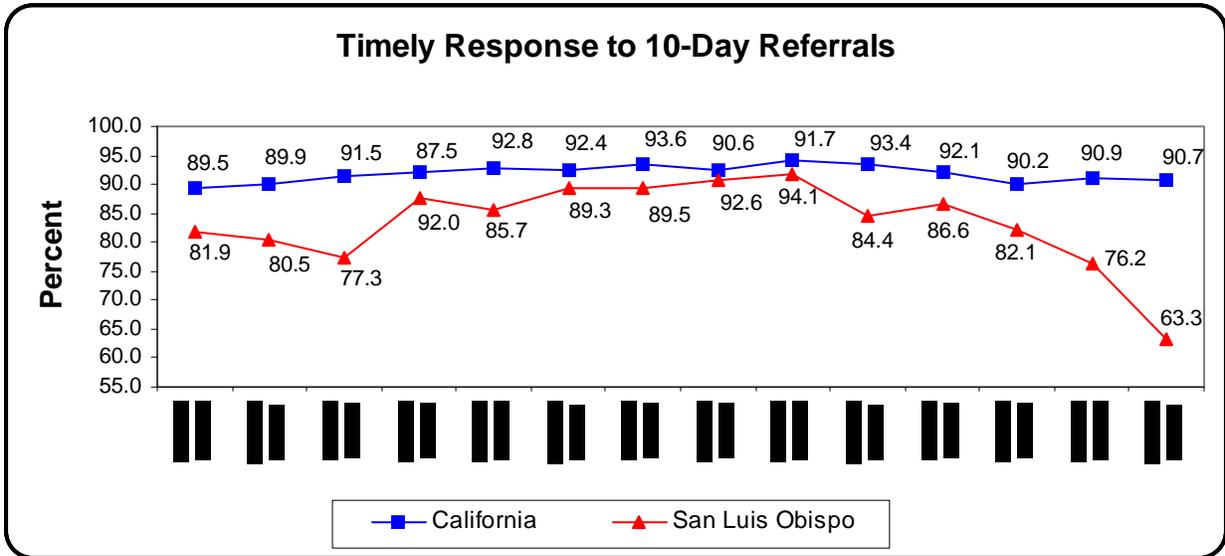
The Department has had several shifts in the rate of response for both immediate and 10-day referrals over the past 3 years. This can partially be explained by vacancies and staff transitions, as well as an increased workload for Emergency Response Workers, as they are adding duties such as Probate Guardianship assessments to an already busy caseload. The Department meets monthly with Emergency Response Social Workers to discuss concerns and consistency of practice, and is currently re-evaluating processes and developing new strategies to support Emergency Response Social Workers in meeting responses timely.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

### Timely response for 10-day referrals

This process measure is designed to determine the percent of cases in which face to face contact with a child occurs, or is attempted, within the regulatory time frames in those situations in which a determination is made that the abuse or neglect allegations indicate significant danger to the child. As of June 2007, the Department of Social Services' rate of timely response for 10-day referrals is 63.3%.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

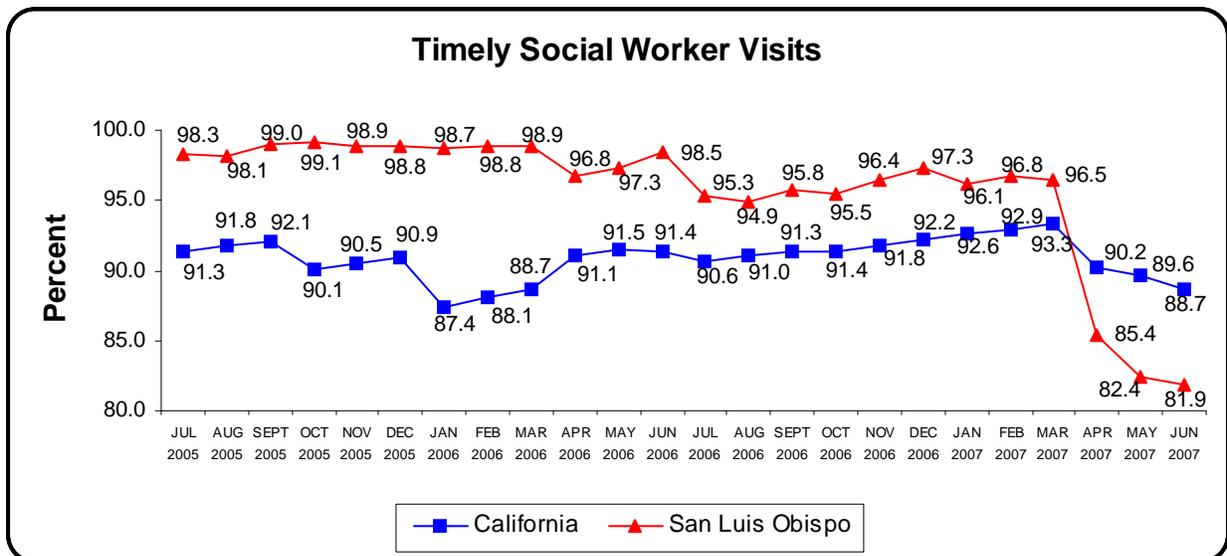
As mentioned for immediate referrals, the Department has had several shifts in the rate of response for both immediate and 10-day referrals over the past 3 years. Again, this can partially be explained by vacancies and staff transitions, as well as an increased workload for Emergency Response Workers. The Department is currently re-evaluating processes and developing new strategies to support Emergency Response Social Workers in meeting all responses timely.

### Timely Social Worker visits with child

This process measure determines if Social Workers are seeing children with an approved case plan on a monthly basis, when required. When monthly visits are not required, for such reasons as “Out of State,” it is not included in this measure.

Effective April 2007, the methodology for determining the rate of timely Social Worker visits was changed from a method that looked at only those children requiring monthly visits, to a method looking at all children with an approved case plan. Using this new method, the Department’s rate of timely Social Worker visits dropped below the state average. Additionally, new methodology was adopted by the State that counted cases with expired case plans as non-compliant contacts even if monthly contacts were made, until such time as the case plan was renewed. Thus there may be instances where this outcome is under-represented.

As of June 2007, the Department of Social Services’ rate for timely Social Worker visits was 81.9%. The Department of Social Services is currently working with supervisors and Social Workers on how to use Safe Measures to monitor caseloads and compliance.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

Timely response and timely Social Worker visits were identified during the Peer Quality Case Review, the County Self-Assessment Community Forums, the on-line community questionnaire, and the Emergency Response Social Workers Survey as areas of concern. This will be a focus of the next System Improvement Plan as the Department of Social Services continues to work on strategies to support Emergency Response and Family Maintenance/Family Reunification Social Workers in their jobs and to improve timely response and visitation rates.

Probation does not receive or investigate abuse/neglect referrals. Probation has consistently met the mandated requirements to visit children placed in foster care.

### Outcome 3: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry to foster care

#### Percentage reunified with 12 months – exit cohort

This measure computes the percentage of children reunified within 12 months of removal. The denominator is the total number of children who exited foster care to reunification during the

specified year; the numerator is the count of exiting children who were reunified in less than 12 months.

Of all children leaving foster care to reunification during the year that had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, as of June 2007, 70.9% of 103 children were reunified in less than 12 months from the date of the latest removal from home.

For the Department of Social Services, the following patterns were identified for the 103 children who were reunified within 12 months in regards to placement:

- 88% (64) of the children were removed for general neglect
- Placement with kin - 71% (44 children) reunified within 12 months and 29% (18 children) reunified in 12 months or more
- Placement with Foster Family Agency - 69% (20 children) reunified within 12 months and 31% (9 children) reunified in 12 months or more
- Placement in county-licensed foster home - 100% reunified within 12 months
- Court -specified home - 100% reunified within 12 months or more
- Group home - 100% reunified within 12 months or more

For the Department of Social Services, the number of children in placements in county-licensed foster homes, court-specified homes and group homes were much smaller than placement with kin and Foster Family Agency homes. The Department of Social Services continues to work on decreasing placement moves through Family-to-Family and improve performance toward permanency and stability.

For Probation, the following patterns were identified in the characteristics and circumstances percentage of 14 children who were reunified with 12 months in regards to placement:

- Group home - 33% (3 children) reunified within 12 months and 67% (6 children) reunified in 12 months or more
- Foster Family Agency - 67% (2 children) reunified within 12 months and 33% (1 child) reunified in 12 months or more
- Placement with kin - 100% reunified in 12 months or more
- Court -specified home - 100% reunified in 12 months or more
- Placement in county-licensed foster home - no foster placements

For Probation, the number of children in placement in kin, court specified, and Foster Family Agency homes were much smaller than court specified and group homes.

### **Median time to reunification - exit cohort**

This measure computes the median length of stay in months for children reunified. Length of stay is calculated as the date leaving foster care minus the latest date of removal from the home. Children in foster care for less than 8 days were excluded from the median calculation. Children with a current placement of "trial home visit" were included if that visit lasted more than 30 days, its start date fell within 11 months of the latest removal date, and it was the final placement before the child left foster care for reunification.

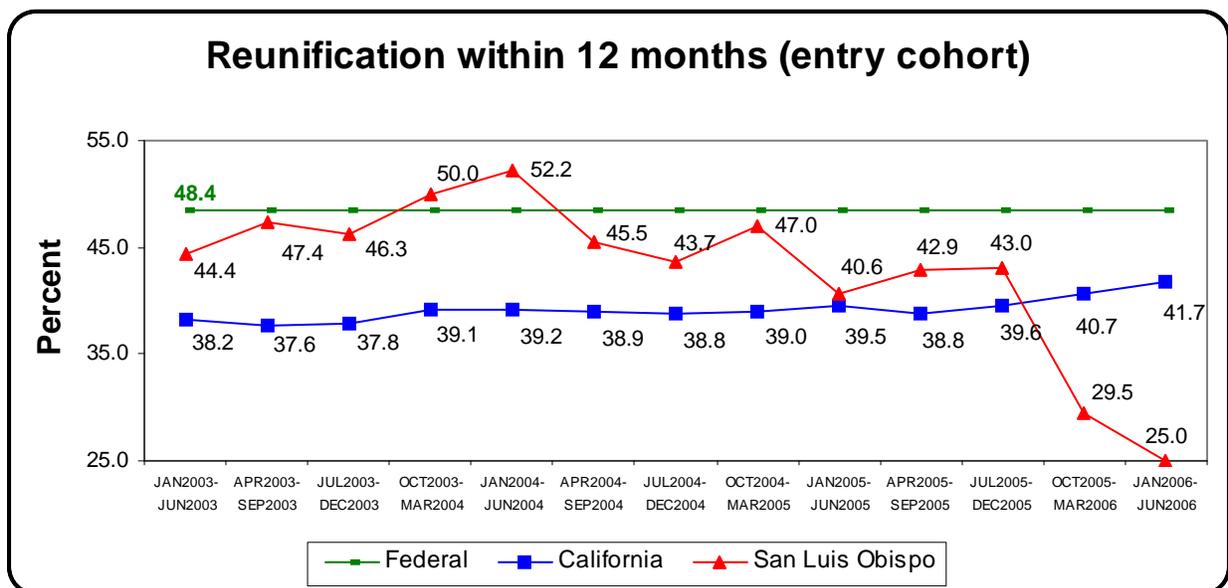
Of all Department of Social Services children leaving foster care to reunification during the year who had been in foster care for 8 days or longer, as of June 2007, the median length of stay from the date of latest removal from home until the date of discharge to reunification in was 6.8 months. For Probation children leaving foster care to reunification as of June 2007, the median length of stay was 14.5 months.

San Luis Obispo County Child Welfare Services reunifies at a rate higher than the state average, though below the current Federal standard. The predominant contributing factors that lead to a child’s removal from the home are mental illness, substance abuse and family violence. Although parents may be fully engaged in reuniting with their children, research in these areas indicates that relapses are the norm, rather than the exception. Given the restricted mental health and substance abuse resources in San Luis Obispo County, many children re-enter care due to on-going family challenges, perhaps compounded by the scarcity of resources.

**Reunification within 12 months – entry cohort**

This measure computes the percentage of children reunified within 12 months of removal for a cohort of children first entering foster care. The entry cohort is comprised of children entering foster care for the first time during a 6-month period. This measure contributes to the first permanency composite. The 12-month cutoff to reunification is based on the latest date of removal from the home with children in care for less than 8 days excluded. Children with a current placement of “trial home visit” are included in the count of children reunified in less than 12 months if that visit lasted at least 30 days, its start-date fell within 11 months of the latest removal date, and it was the final placement before the child left foster care to reunification.

As of June 2006, for the 64 children entering foster care for the first time in the 6-month period who remained in foster care for 8 days or longer, San Luis Obispo County had 25% (16 children) reunified in less than 12 months.



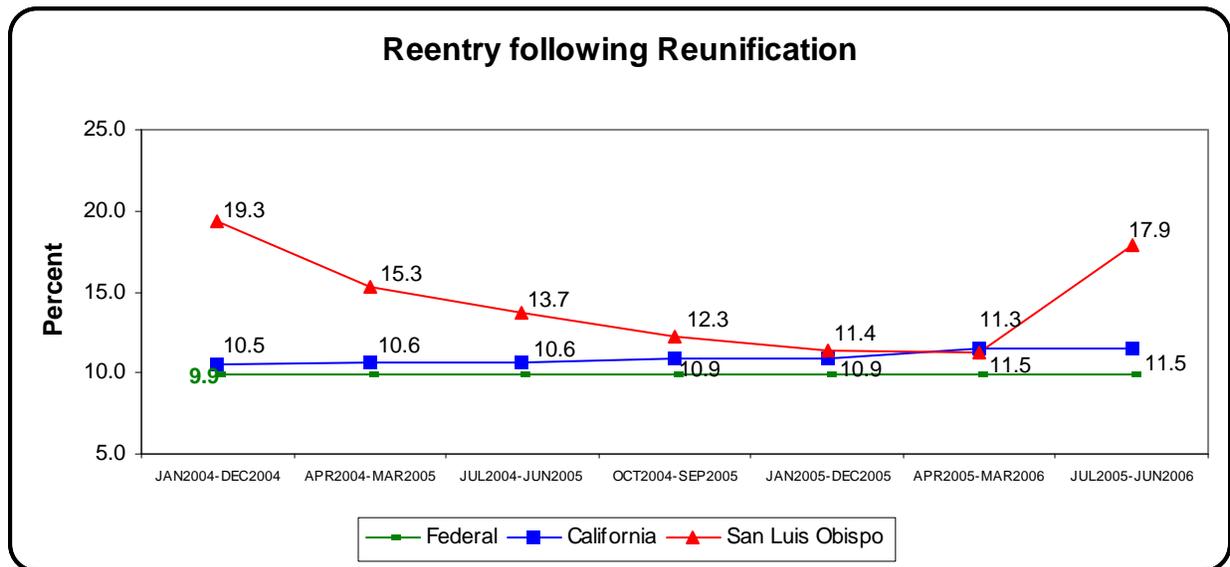
Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

Probation had 4 out of 10 (40%) of children leaving foster care to reunification in less than 12 months.

**Re-entry following reunification - exit cohort**

This measure computes the percentage of children reentering foster care within 12 months of reunification. The denominator is the total number of children who exited foster care to reunification in a 12-month period; the numerator is the count of these reunified children who then reentered care within 365 days of the reunification discharge date.

For the Department of Social Services, of 117 children reunified from July 2005 to June 2006, 17.9% (21 children) reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of reunification.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

Probation had 12 children reunify during the year. Of these 12 children, 0 reentered foster care in less than 12 months from the date of reunification.

Re-entry was chosen as the focus for San Luis Obispo County's joint 2007 Peer Quality Case Review. Both the Probation Department and the Department of Social Services interviewed Social Workers, Social Worker Supervisors, Participant Services Supervisors, Public Health Nurses, and foster parents about this issue. During the County Self-Assessment Community Forums, re-entry was also a focus. The following factors were frequently noted as barriers to reunification:

- Lack of affordable housing
- Lack of access to youth therapeutic psychiatric services
- Lack of Mental Health services
- Lack of Drug & Alcohol services
- Lack of resources/further development of support services
- Lack of after-care services

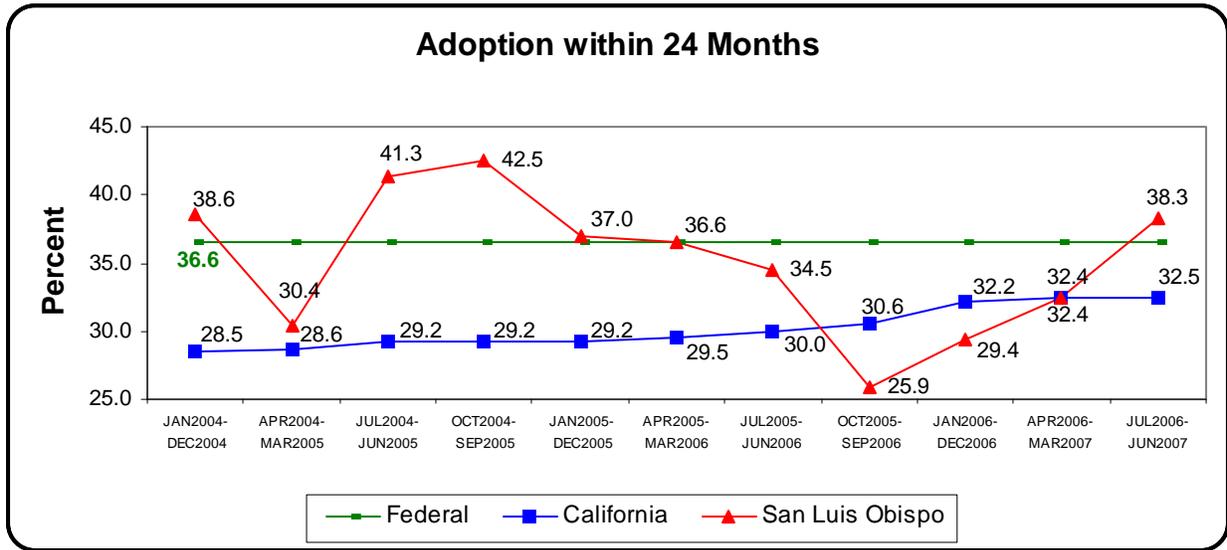
Outcome 4: The family relationships and connections of the children served by Child Welfare Services will be preserved, as appropriate

#### **Adoption within 24 months – exit cohort and Median time to adoption in months – exit cohort**

These measures compute the percentage of children adopted within 24 months of removal and the median length of stay in months for children discharged to adoption. Only placement episodes ending in adoption are included.

As of June 2007, of 47 children leaving foster care to a finalized adoption during the year, 38.3% (18 children) were adopted within 24 months. Of those adopted within 24 months, ages ranged from 1 year old to 15 years old. Of the 47 children that left foster care, 64% (11 children) were white, and 30% (7 children) were Hispanic. The majority of children were male. Both genders had a large number of children still in care after 24 months.

Of all children leaving foster care to a finalized adoption during the year, 29.3 months was the median length of stay.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

#### Adoptions within 12 months (17 months in care)

This measure computes the percentage of children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year, which were then adopted within 12 months. The denominator consists of all children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year; the numerator includes those children in the denominator who left foster care to adoption by the last day of the year (i.e., a placement episode termination reason of adoption).

Of the 130 children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year, in San Luis Obispo County as of June 2007, 21.5% (28 children) left foster care to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year.

For the Department of Social Services, the following patterns were identified for the 130 children who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year, which were then adopted within 12 months:

- Age group 6-10 has the highest number of adoptions
- Age group 11-15 has the highest number of foster children not adopted by the end of the year
- Age group 3-5 had the best results – 61.5% (8 children) in this age group were adopted by the end of the year
- 21.7% (18 children) of white foster children and 19.4% (7 children) of Hispanic were adopted by the end of the year
- Females had a slightly higher percentage of adoption by the end of the year – out of 69 females, 17 (24.6%) were adopted. Out of 61 males, 11 (18%) were adopted.
- The highest number of adoptions took place with relative placements. 17 of the 28 children adopted had been in placement with relatives or a non-related extended family member home.

Probation had 6 children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year; none were discharged to a finalized adoption by the last day of the year.

### **Legally free within 6 months (17 months in care)**

This measure computes the percentage of children who were in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer and not legally free for adoption on the first day of the period, who then became legally free for adoption within the next 6 months. The denominator consists of all children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer who, on the first day of the period, were not yet legally free; the numerator includes those children who were then declared legally free within the next 6 months (including the first and last days of the 6 month interval). This measure contributes to the second permanency composite.

For the Department of Social Services, of the 83 children in foster care for 17 continuous months or longer and not legally free for adoption on the first day of the year, 10.8% (9 children) became legally free within the next 6 months as of December 2006.

- 53 of the 83 children were white and 1 of the 53 children were legally free for adoption within 6 months
- 25 of the 83 children were Hispanic and 5 of these 25 children were legally free for adoption within 6 months
- 43 children were female and 40 were male
- 6 of the foster children had been in placement with relatives or a non-related extended family member home

As of December 2006, Probation had 6 foster youth who had been in care for more than 17 months. None of these foster youth were legally free for adoption within 6 months.

### **Adoptions within 12 months (legally free)**

This measure computes the percentage of children leaving foster care to adoption within 12 months of becoming legally free. The denominator consists of all children declared legally free for adoption during the year; the numerator includes those children who were then discharged to a finalized adoption within the next 12 months. This measure contributes to the second permanency composite. A child is considered to be legally free for adoption if there is a parental rights termination date recorded for all parents with legal standing. If a parent is deceased, the date of death is reported as the parental rights termination date.

As of June 2006, San Luis Obispo County had 24 out of 46 foster youth become legally free during the year and adopted in less than 12 months.

- 52.2% (24 children) were adopted in less than 12 months
- Age group 6-10 had the highest number of adoptions
- 16 (67%) were white children and 6 (33%) were Hispanic
- 21 (46%) were female and 25 (54%) were male
- The highest number of adoptions took place with relative and non-related extended family member placements

### **Exits to permanency (24 months in care)**

This measure computes the percentage of children discharged to a permanent home by the last day of the year and prior to turning 18, who had been in foster care for 24 months or longer. The denominator consists of all children in foster care for 24 continuous months or longer on the first day of the year; the numerator includes those children with a placement episode termination date that occurred by the last day of the year and before the child's 18th birthday, and a placement episode termination reason coded as reunification with parents or primary caretakers, discharge to guardianship, or discharge to adoption.

As of June 2007, Department of Social Services foster children exited to permanency after 24 months of care at a rate of 27%. This was higher than the state rate of 17.8%, although still

lower than the Federal average of 29.1%. Out of the 110 children in foster care, 6 were reunified with their parents or primary caretakers and 24 were adopted by the last day of the year and prior to turning 18. Of these 30 children that were reunified or adopted the majority were white. The second highest number was Hispanic. Based on gender demographics, females had a slightly higher number of exits – 16 of the 54 females (15%) and 14 of the 56 (13%) males were reunified or adopted. Foster youth placed with relatives or non-related extended family members had the highest number of reunifications and adoptions.

Sometimes the Department recommends the denial or termination of family reunification services to the court. If this occurs, the court sets a 366.26 hearing date to determine the permanent plan for the child. Adoption and Legal Processing staff is responsible to pursue 366.26 hearings and their timeliness. Every effort is made to identify an adoptive home prior to termination of parental rights (TPR), however the permanent plan may also be guardianship or a planned permanent living arrangement. At the hearing, the Department must present an adoptability assessment and recommend adoption, except in some situations. When the recommendation is adoption, TPR is recommended at the 366.26 hearing. If for some reason the child is not in an adoptive home, the court can put off TPR for 180 days. It is the goal of the Department for a child to make the fewest moves; therefore, it is the hope that by the 366.26 hearing the child is in the home that will keep them permanently. In order to prevent the creation of legal orphans, the Department follows the Welfare and Institutions codes regarding these hearings, ensures accountability of the codes, and utilizes and stresses the importance of concurrent planning.

Additionally, the Department and the Independent Living Program recognize the importance of long term and meaningful adult connections in the lives of the youth they serve. It is the Department's belief that every foster youth deserves a permanent and lifelong attachment to a caring and trusted adult. The Department has begun to implement many new programs to help achieve foster youth permanency, which include advocating for fewer placement changes and more guardianships and adoptions.

The Probation Department did not have foster children exit to permanency after 24 months of care. Due to the low number of children details are not provided in order to protect their confidentiality.

#### **Exits to permanency (legally free at exit)**

This measure computes the percentage of legally free children who were discharged to a permanent home prior to turning 18. The denominator consists of all children leaving foster care during the year who were legally free for adoption at the time of discharge; the numerator includes those children who have a discharge date that is prior to their 18th birthday and a discharge reason coded as reunification with parents or primary caretakers, discharge to guardianship, or discharge to adoption. A child is considered to be legally free for adoption if there is a parental rights termination date recorded for all parents with legal standing. If a parent is deceased, the date of death is reported as the parental rights termination date.

As of June 2007, the Department of Social Services percentage of children legally free who were discharged to a permanent home prior to turning 18 was 100% (47 children), higher than the state standard of 97.2% and the Federal standards of 98%.

Probation had all of their children who had been in care for less than 3 years, discharged legally free from foster care and adopted prior to turning 18. Due to the low number of children details are not provided in order to protect their confidentiality.

**In care 3 years or longer (emancipated/age 18)**

This measure computes the percentage of children in foster care for 3 years or longer who then either emancipated or turned 18 while still in foster care. The denominator consists of all children emancipated or who turned 18 while still in foster care during the year; the numerator includes those children for whom the time from the date of the latest removal from home to the date of emancipation, or the date the child turned 18, was equal to or greater than 3 years.

As of June 2007, 16 of the 32 foster children (50%) in care 3 years or longer emancipated or turned 18 while still in foster care. This was lower than the state standard of 61.4%, but higher than the Federal standard of 37.5%.

All the 11 children placed in foster care by Probation during the year who either emancipated or turned 18 while still in care, had been in foster care for 3 years or longer.

**Placement stability (8 Days to 12 Months in Care)**

This measure computes the percentage of children with two or fewer placements in foster care for 8 days or more, but less than 12 months. Time in care is based on the latest date of removal from the home. The denominator is the total number of children who have been in care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months; the numerator is the count of these children with two or fewer placements.

Of the Department of Social Services' 230 children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, 86.5 % (199 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

Of Probations' 18 children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, 94.4% (17 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

**No more than two placements within 12 months**

This measure computes the percentage of children with two or fewer placements in foster care for at least 12 months, but less than 24 months. Time in care is based on the latest date of removal from the home. The denominator is the total number of children who have been in care for at least 12 months and less than 24 months; the numerator is the count of these children with two or fewer placements.

Of the Department of Social Services' 140 children served in foster care during a year who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, 59.3% (83 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

Of the 23 Probation children served in foster care during a year who were in foster care for at least 12 months but less than 24 months, 60.9% (14 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

**No more than two placements within 24 months**

This measure computes the percentage of children with two or fewer placements who have been in foster care for 24 months or more. Time in care is based on the latest date of removal from the home. The denominator is the total number of children who have been in care for 24 months or more; the numerator is the count of these children with two or fewer placements.

Of the Department of Social Services' 172 children served in foster care during the year that were in foster care for at least 24 months, 35.5% (61 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

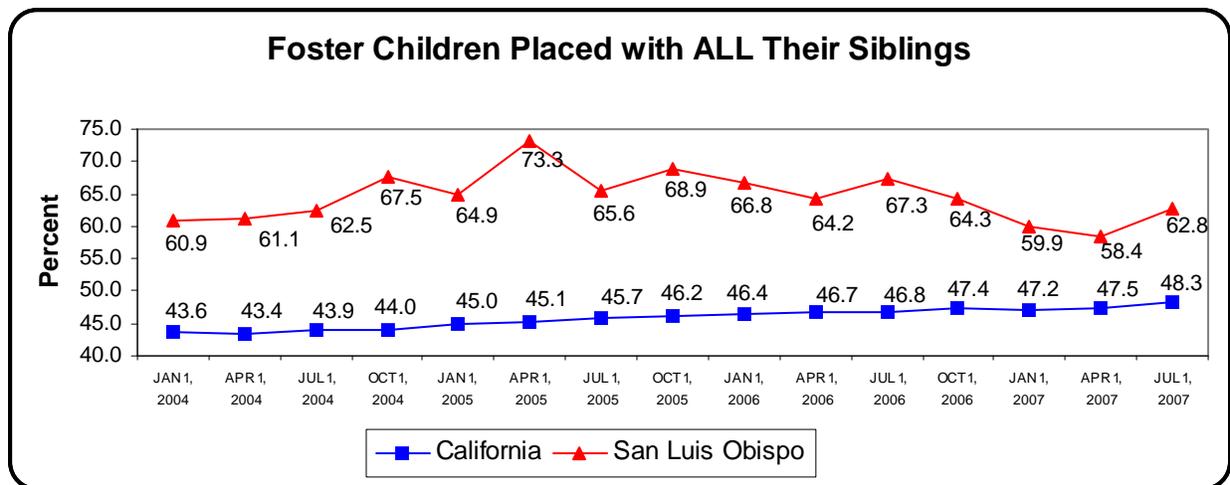
Of the 9 Probation children served in foster care during the year who were in foster care for at least 24 months, 22.2% (2 children) had two or fewer placement settings.

San Luis Obispo County has a policy in place requiring a Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting be held before a child will be moved from the home or a placement without. Structured Decision Making is also utilized to determine safety factors when moves are considered. Both of these policies, combined with Family-to-Family goals, have been instrumental keeping San Luis Obispo County's placement moves low.

**Foster children placed with all of their siblings**

Sibling groups are identified at the county level, not the state level. A sibling group size of 'one' is used to signify a single child with no known siblings in the supervising county. Sibling groups are constructed from an unduplicated point in time count of all children who have an open placement episode in the CWS/CMS system. A set of sibling identifier variables (derived from the CWS/CMS Client Relationship table) and placement address variables (derived from the facility address information from the Placement Home table) are used to locate all whole, half, and stepsiblings, as well as maternal siblings.

San Luis Obispo County's percentage of siblings that were placed with all siblings was 62.8%, well above the state average and the County's baseline measurement.



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

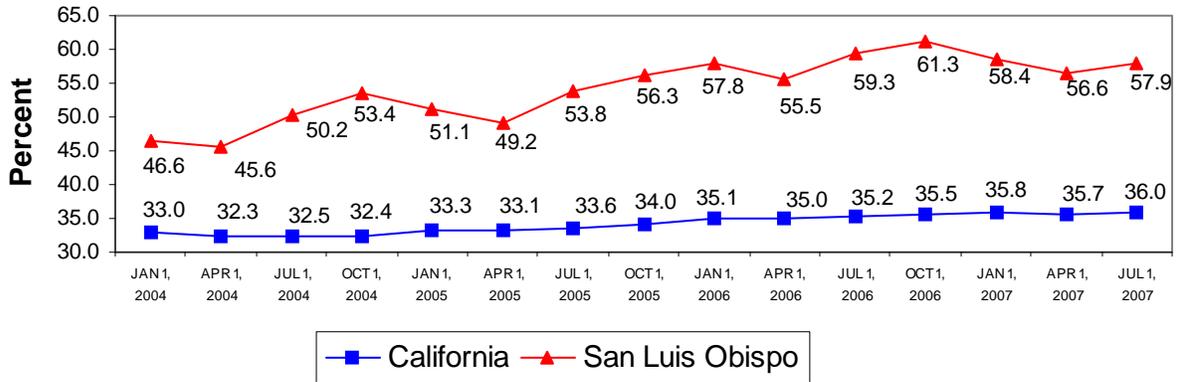
**Foster children placed with some of their siblings**

San Luis Obispo County's percentage of siblings that were placed with some or all siblings also consistently measures above the state average and the baseline measurement. For the period ending 7/1/07, San Luis Obispo County's rate was 77.1%, above the state average of 69.7%.

**Placement in the least restrictive care setting - point in time/in-care**

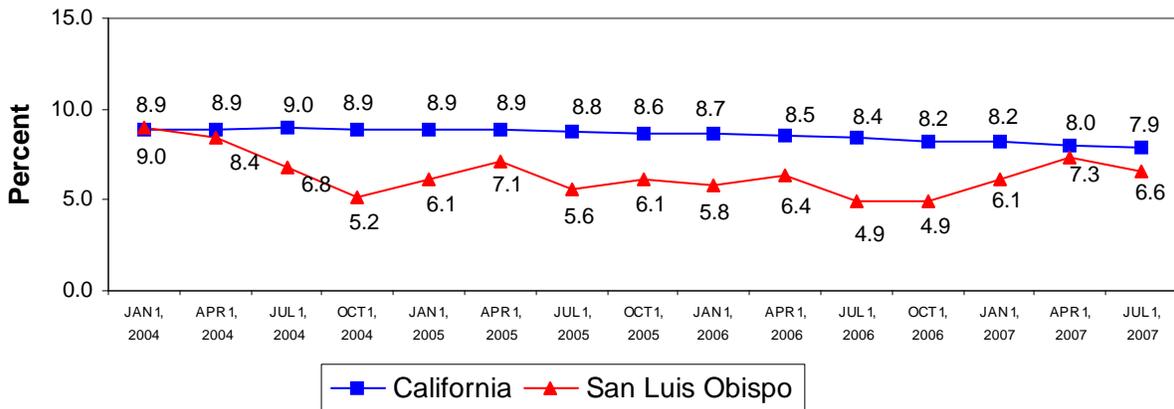
These reports provide information on all entries to out-of-home care during the time period specified - Point in Time/In-Care. Children are assigned to the county in which there is an open case or referral (child welfare) or an open case, referral, or state id county code (Probation) on the count day. As of July 1, 2007, of the 361 children placed in foster care, 57.9% (209 children) were in relative placement, 11.9 % (43 children) were in county-licensed foster homes, 16.1 % (58 children) were in Foster Family Agency placements, 6.6 % (24 children) were in group homes/shelters, and 7.5 % (27 children) were in other placements or not listed.

### Placements with Relatives or Non-Related Extended Family Members



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

### Placements in Group Homes



Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

As of June 30, 2007, the Department of Social Services had 188 children placed in out-of-home care. 50.5% (95 children) were placed with relatives, 13.3% (25 children) were placed in county-licensed foster homes and 36.2% (68 children) were placed in Foster Family Agency (FFA) homes. The Department utilizes kinship care in the majority of cases, an improvement on both the County’s baseline measurement and the state average. FFA placements look higher than they are because the County uses an FFA for shelter bed placements, as well as foster care. The FFA rate as a primary placement decreases as children are moved to relative homes.

San Luis Obispo County has a higher than average rate of placements into relative homes. The County has further increased the rate of primary placements with relatives, and achieved below average rates for all other types of primary placements. The practice of asking for family input regarding placement at the family’s entrance into the system, involving CalWORKs staff when appropriate, the use of Team Decision Making and relative placements all support the opportunity for siblings to be placed together. Team Decision Making and Family Group

Conferencing also provide opportunities for parents, youth and foster parents to participate in case planning.

As of July 1, 2007, Probation had 44 children placed in foster care. Of the 44 children placed in foster care, 6.8% (3 children) were being taken care of by relatives, 36.4 % (16 children) were in group homes, 6.8 % (3 children) were Foster Family Agency placements, 4.5 % (2 children) were in trial home visits, 25% (11 children) were runaways and 20.5 % (9 children) were served in other placements or not listed.

As of June 30, 2007, the Probation Department had 10 children placed in out-of-home care. Of these 10 children, 80% (8 children) were placed in a group home, 10% (1 child) were placed with relatives and 10% (1 child) were placed in court specified homes.

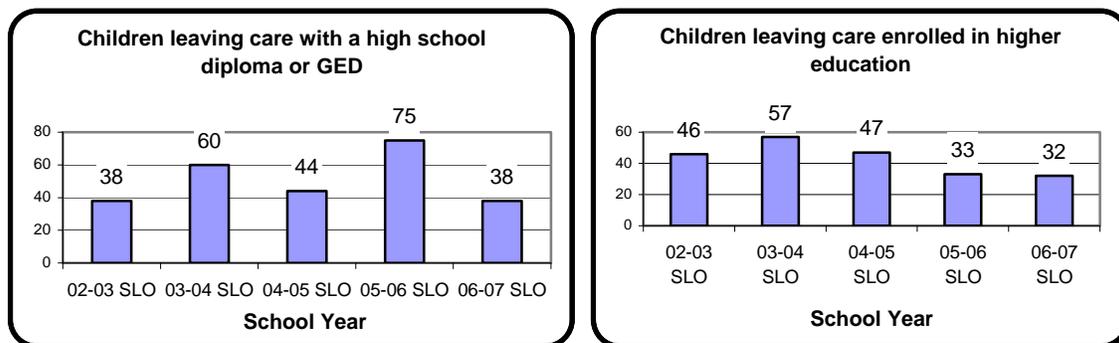
Because of our County’s success in this outcome, we chose not to focus on this area during either the County Self-Assessment or the PQCR. Both the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department are committed to placing children in kinship care whenever it is appropriate and available. We will continue to work to educate the community and staff on the importance of kinship care, and Team Decision Making, in an effort to continuously improve this outcome.

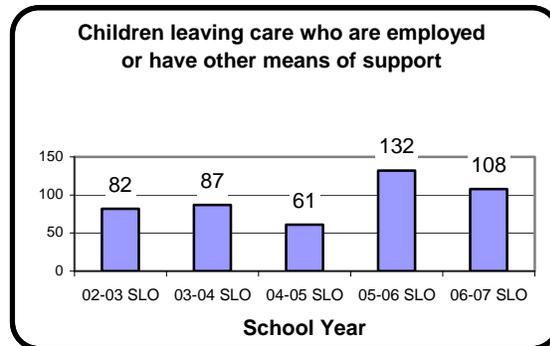
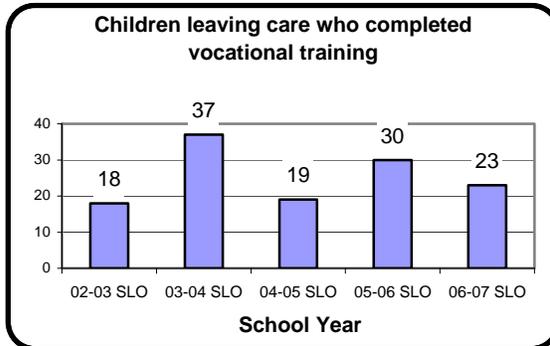
**Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA)**

San Luis Obispo County’s ICWA rates are currently based on a very small number of ICWA children placed in our county; therefore making it difficult to track any trends. As of June 30, 2007, San Luis Obispo County identified 14 foster children who met the ICWA criteria. 11 (78.6%) Native American foster children were placed with non-relative, non-Indian substitute care providers and 3 (21.4%) were placed with a relative.

All child welfare services families are given a choice of ethnic affiliation. By ICWA regulations, if any participant identifies, either verbally or in writing, as Native American, the Department is required to explore the identification process to determine if the client is from a federally recognized tribe. However, there are many families who self-identify as Native American who do not meet ICWA requirements. Those who do not meet ICWA requirements are still considered by the State to be Native American and are acknowledged as American Indian, meaning they have blood line ties to the American Indian culture. The data for this population may vary widely based on the situation of one child.

Outcome 8: Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood





Source: CDSS, prepared by the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services Information Reporting Team

San Luis Obispo County offers the following services and programs to assist our foster youth in transitioning into adulthood:

- The San Luis Obispo Independent Living Program empowers youth through life skills education, supportive services, advocacy, and community collaboration. It is their mission to provide services for young adults to develop community and lifelong connections.
- The Independent Living Program Employment Program strives to improve the quality of life for foster youth by giving them the resources and skills to gain employment that matches their talents, desires, and needs. The following services are offered:
  - One-on-one assistance
  - Resume development
  - Interviewing skills
  - On-the-Job Training
- The California Chafee Grant Program gives up to \$5,000 annually of free money to foster youth and former foster youth to use for college courses or vocational school training. The Foster Youth must be enrolled in a:
  - College or vocational school that is eligible
  - Course of study at least half-time
  - Course of study that is at least one year long and is eligible (accredited),
  - And must maintain a C average or better
- California Youth Coalition (CYC) is a statewide youth run organization for former/current foster youth ages 14 to 24. CYC advocates for change in the foster care system, encourages the foster youth to use their voice to make positive change, builds leadership skills and talks to legislators about foster youth needs and policy development.

Cuesta College took over administration of the Independent Living Program (ILP) for San Luis Obispo County in July 2007; the ILP contract includes permanency services and activities.

Cuesta College is committed the mission of permanency, and employs two full time case managers dedicated to ensuring that every youth in foster care will have at least one significant, supportive adult in his/her life. In the past year, there has been an increase in the responsibilities for the case managers and an emphasis on permanency specific casework within the program. Thus far, we have primarily relied on a permanency practice model – the Five-Step Model – provided by Mary Stone Smith, an expert in the field from Catholic Community Services in Western Washington State and a substantive working dialog with the County regarding permanency best practices.

The quality of sibling relationships is generally assessed on a case-by-case basis. Case managers meet with foster youth and siblings to get a sense of any existing relationship, and then work to facilitate deeper sibling relationships where appropriate.

Initiatives include: a commitment to allow the permanency case managers increased responsibility and influence within their cases, better dialog between the College (as the permanency contract agency) and the County of San Luis Obispo regarding permanency, the development of a strategy to promote permanency (both internally and externally), and implementation of best practices described in “pilot cases.”

The San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services and the Independent Living Program recognize the importance of long term and meaningful adult connections in the lives of the youth they serve. It is the Department's belief that every foster youth deserves a permanent and lifelong attachment to a caring and trusted adult. Child Welfare Services has begun to implement many new programs to help achieve foster youth permanency, which include advocating for fewer placement changes and more guardianships and adoptions. The Independent Living Program has also added two Permanency Case Managers to its staff, part of whose focus is to seek out significant adult relationships and "forever families" for the youth on their caseload.

## II. Public Agency Characteristics

The Department of Social Services and the Probation Department are the two county agencies with primary responsibility for child welfare. However, both Departments work in close collaboration with partner agencies to serve the children and families of San Luis Obispo County.

### *A. Size and Structure of Agencies*

#### 1. County-Operated Shelter(s)

San Luis Obispo County contracts with Family Care Network, a private non-profit within the community, to provide nine shelter beds for ambulatory children ages 0-18. The nine beds are situated in four certified foster homes licensed by the Family Care Network. The shelter is used when less restrictive resources, such as relatives and non-related extended family members, cannot be used. A listing of available shelter beds is maintained on DSS Net, the Department's intranet. Protocol is for Social Workers to call a 24-hour/7-day a week on-duty placement worker from Family Care Network prior to using the shelter bed. Ideally, children remain in shelter for three days or less until a less restrictive placement is found. Depending upon available resources, children may remain in the shelter for up to thirty days. Weekly meetings are held at the Department of Social Services to staff the cases of children who initially enter shelter care. These cases are discussed in an effort to find a less restrictive placement resource.

## 2. County Licensing

San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services has a Memorandum of Understanding with CDSS that allows the Department to license foster family homes. The licensing unit, with 2.5 Social Workers and one Administrative Assistant, handles the licensing of all foster family homes. Social Workers are responsible for ensuring that all regulations are met prior to the issuance of a license, including but not limited to, criminal records checks and inspection of the grounds for space and safety issues. Foster parents are required to complete PRIDE, CPR and First Aid training prior to receiving a placement. Renewals are completed on all resource families by the licensing Social Workers. The Department also has a process to investigate all complaints on foster families. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, corrective action may be implemented or the case may be referred to the State for revocation. The Department of Social Services continues to be proactive in recruiting homes that reflect the diversity of the community, and placing children within their ethnic group. For example, the Model Standards project worked to increase awareness of the needs of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) youth in foster care.

## 3. County Adoptions

The Department of Social Services is licensed to provide adoption services. The Department currently provides adoption services to 144 children. Most adoptions through the Department are for at-risk children who are dependents and whose parents are unable to reunify with them. There are perhaps one to two adoptions per year where a parent voluntarily relinquishes their non-dependent child to the Department of Social Services via a Child Welfare Services Adoption Social Worker. That child is almost always a newborn. It is likely that more of these voluntary adoptions occur within the county, but that birth parents use private agencies to facilitate the adoptions.

Adoption Social Workers work closely with families to identify possible adoptive homes/resources within the circle of family and friends. They use concurrent planning strategies to reduce the number of placement moves children are subjected to. Designated relinquishments may be offered to parents to make adoption placement decisions. Permanency planning mediation can provide post-adoption contact agreements with a birth family. Currently, almost 64% of current adoption plans are with relative adopters.

The Department currently employs six full time Social Workers to provide adoption assessments of children and families. In addition, there is one .5 FTE providing Specialized Training to Adoptive Parents (STAP). All Adoption Social Workers must have related master's level degrees. The current adoption caseload of each worker ranges from 21-28 children. After a period of regionalization, the Adoption program was restructured this year and is currently located solely in the Central region under one supervisor.

### *B. County Governance Structure*

Both the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department are part of the government of San Luis Obispo County. The agencies are two separate entities, but work together to provide services to children and families. The Probation Department provides a wide array of services to both the juvenile and adult population of law offenders. The Child Welfare Services division of the Department of Social Services provides services that ensure safety and stability for children at risk of abuse and neglect and, when possible, keep them in their own homes. Additionally, the Department of Social Services provides aid to children placed in Foster Care, whether this is through CWS, Probation, or local Foster Family Agencies. The Department of Social Services also administers the CalWORKs, MediCal, Food Stamps, General Assistance and Adult Protective Services programs.

## *C. Number/Composition of Employees*

### 1. Staffing Characteristics/Issues

As of May 2008, the Department of Social Services has 403.25 filled positions. This includes staff in Child Welfare Services, Participant Services, and Adult Services, as well as Management and the Information Technology, Fiscal, Administrative Support, Staff Development and Human Resources divisions. Management includes the Director, Assistant Director, five Regional Managers, as well as Division Managers and Program Managers. The Regional Managers directly supervise staff in both Child Welfare Services and Participant Services. Positions distinct to Child Welfare Services include:

- 55 Social Workers
- 10 Social Worker Supervisors
- 9 Community Service Aides (who help both Participant Services and Child Welfare Services staff and families)
- 16 Administrative Assistants
- 2 Supervising Legal Clerks
- 5 Legal Clerks
- 3 Program Managers (Prevention, CWS Case Management and Foster Care/Adoption)
- 6 Program Review Specialists

The Department currently has 46.5 vacancies. For Child Welfare Services, there are currently 9 full-time Social Worker, 2 part-time Social Worker, 6 Community Service Aide and 2 Administrative Assistant vacancies. Because of the current budget issues, the Department must petition the County Administrator whenever we seek to fill a vacancy. The request must include an explanation of what position we would like to fill and why, as well as information on what duties the position performs and where the funding comes from for the position. The County Administrator then determines whether or not the position can be filled. The Department has cut 15 positions and will hold approximately 35 vacant for the year.

Social Worker positions include assignments to Intake, Emergency Response, Dependency Investigation, Family Maintenance/Family Reunification, Licensing, Placement, Adoptions, Team Decision Making facilitators and Options for Recovery. The Department contracts with the Economic Opportunity Commission to provide response for Path 1 referrals. Cuesta College currently holds the contract for the Independent Living Program (ILP), and 8 ILP staff work at the Department of Social Services to provide ILP and permanency services to youth and staff.

In Child Welfare Services, there are 33 employees with Bachelor of Science degrees, 3 with Bachelor of Arts degrees, 2 with Master of Arts and 33 with Master of Science degrees. There are also employees currently pursuing undergraduate degrees, as well as two Social Workers currently enrolled in MSW programs. Child Welfare Services currently has 12 Spanish-speaking personnel. There are no personnel fluent in any other languages.

Of the 55 Social Workers, 15 have been hired since January 2007. The relative inexperience of Social Worker staff has had particular impact on Emergency Response. Of the 11 Social Workers assigned to Emergency Response, 5 have been hired since January 2007. The Department is currently struggling with compliance with timely response. Although lack of program experience is certainly not the only problem, it is seen as a contributing factor.

In the past few years, the Department of Social Services has struggled with hiring and retaining new Social Workers. The last recruitments have been particularly difficult. An uncertain budget

delayed the hiring, resulting in some candidates dropping out to accept other employment. Other candidates have declined due to low salary and high cost of living.

## 2. Bargaining Unit Issues

The San Luis Obispo County Employee's Association (SLOCEA) represents the interests of county employees. The union does not have a say in either worker unit assignment or case assignment, although they have hired a lobbyist who works in the state political arena to advocate for lower caseloads. Christine Scanlon, the SLOCEA representative for Social Services, did not identify any current collective bargaining issues. The last issue that arose was in 2004, regarding Social Workers working after-hours. SLOCEA, the Department of Social Services and the County successfully reached an agreement for the staffing of after-hours, and the agreement was formalized with a Memorandum of Understanding. Mike Dutra, who represents the Probation Officer's Association, stated that the Probation Officers currently have no issues.

## 3. Financial/Material Resources

The Department of Social Services is allocated \$11,191,441 for Child Welfare Services, plus an additional \$1,352,019 for Adoptions. The Department also uses the Planning and CWSOIP Augmentations. Because San Luis Obispo County is a Cohort 1 County, the Department receives \$1,367,224 in Redesign funds. Beginning in fiscal year 2007-2008, the Department will receive \$100,000 per year for three years from the Stuart Foundation for being a Family-to-Family Anchor Site. Other small grants are also received, such as the CAPIT grant for prevention. The Department provides \$175,000 to Drug and Alcohol for Child Welfare Services substance abuse services. \$30,000 is allocated to Public Health for a Public Health Nurse to work with 0-5 year olds in the child welfare system.

The fiscal division participates in the State Fiscal Training Academy. Identified fiscal challenges include limitations with local county funding and the recent budget cuts, which only exacerbates the problems the Department has with the hiring and retention of Social Workers.

## 4. Political Jurisdictions

### School Districts

San Luis Obispo County District Office of Education  
Atascadero Unified School District  
Cayucos Elementary School District  
Coast Unified School District  
Lucia Mar Unified School District  
Paso Robles Unified School District  
Pleasant Valley Joint Union School District  
San Luis Coastal Unified School District  
San Miguel Joint Union School District  
Shandon Unified School District  
Templeton Unified School District  
San Luis Obispo Community College (Cuesta)

Law Enforcement	Arroyo Grande Police Department Atascadero Police Department Cal Poly Police Department Cuesta College Public Safety Grover Beach Police Department Morro Bay Police Department Paso Robles Police Department Pismo Beach Police Department San Luis Obispo Police Department San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Department Narcotics Task Force
Tribes	Chumash, Salinan & Yokuts (Per Native American Heritage Commission)
Cities and Unincorporated Areas	Arroyo Grande, Atascadero, Avila Beach, Baywood Park, California Valley, Cambria, Cayucos, Cholame, Creston, Grover Beach, Halcyon, Harmony, Los Osos, Morro Bay, Nipomo, Oceano, Paso Robles, Pismo Beach, San Luis Obispo, San Miguel, San Simeon, Santa Margarita, Shandon, Shell Beach, Templeton, Whitley Gardens

The mission of the Department of Social Services reflects our commitment to working with the community: We partner with the community to enhance self-sufficiency while ensuring that safety and basic human needs are met for the people of San Luis Obispo County. Many of our committees include community partners, each of the regions participate in outreach activities and participate in community agencies, such as the Atascadero Link, and the Department also participates in many training and community awareness programs, such as CASA training and mandated reporter training. Representatives from every school, as well as the County Office of Education, local law enforcement, tribes and cities were invited to the County Self-Assessment Community Forums. Although not everyone attended, we did receive participation from some schools, law enforcement and city government.

The Department of Social Services is involved with the County Office of Education and the school districts on a number of levels. Social Workers work with the schools to determine appropriate school placement for foster youth in order to comply with AB490, which ensures educational rights and stability for foster youth. The schools have foster care liaisons, who will be working closely with the Department of Social Services to implement the school based recruitment project, an effort that will potentially reduce the costs associated with AB490. Additionally, the Department, in conjunction with the San Luis Obispo Child Abuse Prevention Council (SLO-CAP) provides mandated reporter to school personnel. The schools were very responsive during the recent County Self-Assessment Community Forums, particularly in the North Region. A recurrent concern for the schools is response to allegations of abuse. On the other hand, Social Workers often struggle with school staff over access to children. Future trainings with the Department of Social Services and school personnel will be held to address these issues.

Social Workers work closely with local law enforcement agencies, particularly in Emergency Response. Law enforcement is available to accompany Social Workers when they remove children. One Emergency Response Social Worker is assigned to the Narcotics Task Force, and responds with Law Enforcement on countywide coordinated drug manufacturing responses. Law enforcement also provides periodic trainings for Child Welfare Services staff, such as

changes to cell phone use and car seat training. These trainings increase the contact between staff and forge closer working relationships.

San Luis Obispo County has no federally recognized Native American tribes. However, there are three tribes considered local by the Native American Heritage Commission: Salinan, Chumash and Yokuts. There is no formal relationship between the County and these three tribes, although representatives were invited to the County Self-Assessment Community Forums.

San Luis Obispo County is comprised of seven cities and nineteen unincorporated areas, each with its own unique population, characteristics, and politics. Ethnic and cultural issues differ depending upon the individual community. Nipomo and Paso Robles, in particular, require more bi-lingual staff to serve the needs of their Hispanic population. In an effort to better serve the different regions of San Luis Obispo, the Department of Social Services completed its process of regionalization. We now have five regional offices including the San Luis Obispo Central location, North County Offices at Paso Robles and Atascadero, and the South County Offices at Arroyo Grande and Nipomo. However, due to the recent budget issues the Morro Bay office was closed in April 2008. Although no Child Welfare Services staff was located in the Morro Bay office, this did have a large impact on the Adult Services population.

The Department of Social Services also implemented Linkages in all regions over the past five years. All offices have both Participant Services and Child Welfare Services staff working together to better serve the families in their regions. The County also has two SAFE offices, one in Arroyo Grande and another in Paso Robles, as well as a community-based team (the Atascadero Link) in Atascadero. These all contribute to the maintenance of a mutually supportive relationship between the Department of Social Services, the Probation Department and other community agencies.

## 5. Technology Level

The Department of Social Services has an Information Technology Division devoted to information reporting, technical development and maintenance and staffing a help desk. The Information Reporting Team utilizes Business Objects to create reports and other tools used for tracking the Department of Social Services' progress on outcomes and measures. This information is provided to staff via email, and is posted on the Department's intranet, DSS Net. Additionally, they create tools for the Social Workers and Supervisors to use in case management. Safe Measures is another tool used mainly by Staff Development and Social Worker Supervisors to track compliance and identify training needs. In March 2008 Children's Resource Center provided further Safe Measures training for staff to increase proficiency in the system.

The Department of Social Services currently has about 50 Quick Pads assigned to staff. However, due to issues surrounding personally identifiable information (pii), it is anticipated that the Quick Pads will be rendered obsolete in the next few years. Due to current budgetary constraints it is difficult to state what planned improvements the Department has. The Department continues to replace Child Welfare Services' desktop computers, but would eventually like to order laptops with wireless capability to replace the Quick Pads and support the move to server based computing.

As new staff is hired, the Department of Social Services finds them to be more familiar with computers and more able to integrate technology into case management. CWS/CMS, Safe Measures, Web SDM, Lotus Notes and DSS Net are all available to all CWS staff, however many struggle with some or all of these programs. The Information Technology Division and

Staff Development continuously work with staff by providing assistance or trainings for staff to increase their comfort level.

#### D. Current Systemic Reform Efforts

Systemic Reform Effort	San Luis Obispo County Involvement
CWS Redesign Early Implementing County	X
Family to Family (with Annie E. Casey or Stuart Foundation)	X
Family to Family (without Annie E. Casey or Stuart Foundation)	
Integrated Services/AB 1741	
Structured Decision Making	X
Wraparound Services	X
Linkages	X
Differential Response	X

### III. Systemic Factors

#### A. Relevant Management Information Systems

The following information systems are relevant to the Department of Social Services' child welfare staff, supervisors and management:

##### State Systems:

- Child Welfare Services Case Management System (CWS/CMS)
- UC Berkeley Child Welfare Dynamic Report System
- CWS/CMS Business Objects
- MediCal Eligibility Data System (MEDS)
- California Law Enforcement Telecommunications Check (CLETS)
- LIVE SCAN

##### Consortium Systems:

- CalWIN
- SMART

##### Web-based Systems:

- Safe Measures
- Structure Decision Making
- Training Management System

##### In House Web-based Systems:

- DSS Net – Department of Social Services Intranet
- Linkages database
- SDM database
- Foster Care Child Location
- Permanency (Youth Permanent Connections)
- Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC)
- Foster Parent Inquiry
- In House Web-based Systems under assessment/development:
- Independent Living Program

The Department of Social Services continuously works to ensure that data is correctly entered into CWS/CMS. While some issues are a result of data entry, others involve training and case practice. However, the Department constantly monitors its progress on the outcomes, by reviewing data from the Berkeley website, Business Objects, and Safe Measures, and

discussing practice. The following data issues and insights were identified through an analysis of outcome data results:

- Attempted contacts are not always being entered into CWS/CMS. This negatively affected our timely response rate.
- Some staff did not understand that day one of the ten days allowed for a 10-day response was the date the referral was received by the county. Therefore when the Social Worker saw the family on the 11<sup>th</sup> day, they thought they were compliant. This negatively affected our timely 10-day response rate.
- Due to CWS/CMS data only being refreshed weekly in the CAD/Business Objects database, it is impossible to create up to date reports on referral response status. With the new 36-hour data refresh starting in June 2008, more comprehensive and timely reporting will be possible.
- San Luis Obispo County's strong stance on reunifying children as soon as is safely possible logically increases the probability that we will have a higher rate of children re-entering foster care than a county with a low reunification rate. In San Luis Obispo County, reunification was the reason for 57% of the placements episodes that ended between January 1, 2004 and May 8, 2008.
- Identifying and reporting on the status of establishing permanent connections for youth is problematic. CWS/CMS Special Project codes have been set up in CWS/CMS to help with this task, but ensuring the coding is kept current, and that all Social Workers are using the coding in the same way, are issues. A new in-house application is being implemented mid-May 2008, and it is hoped that this will address much of the permanency case management tracking needs.
- Tracking youth ages 16–18 and their Independent Living Program activities is problematic. A new in-house application is being developed to address this issue.

Since the last County Self-Assessment, the use of Safe Measures, county-specific Business Objects reports, and data from the UC Berkeley website to monitor compliance has increased dramatically. A variety of reports are used by all levels of staff, from clerical staff to the Director. Some reports assist with the day-to-day referral/case management, while others monitor data compliance and outcome progress. Staff reports of inconsistencies between the different data sources still occur occasionally, but are no longer a major issue. Data quality is high and data accessibility is also good. In-house reports are most often posted to the Department's intranet, and/or sent via email to the appropriate staff. Individuals have appropriate access to the systems needed to obtain pertinent data based on their particular job. Through a joint effort between Child Welfare Services' supervisors, managers, Staff Development and the Information Technology Team, continuous work is being done to ensure data compliance and outcome improvement. CWS/CMS data is also used department-wide to support activities and procedures related to Family to Family, Linkages, CWS Redesign, AB 636, and the management of general CWS programs.

The Probation Department's current case management system does not have the ability to track outcome data for Probation Cases. Probation is in the process of bringing forward a more comprehensive case management system that will be user-friendly for Probation Officers and will help streamline the paper work.

### *B. Case Review System*

The Department of Social Services monitors child welfare cases throughout the life of a case, from the initial intake telephone call through reunification, adoption or other permanency plan. When children are detained, or siblings are separated, or children are placed outside of their neighborhoods, efforts are made to review the safety issues and resources that would enable

children to be reunified or placed in the least restrictive/most family-like setting, ideally in their own neighborhood or close proximity.

Cases are essentially reviewed and assessed by Social Workers and their supervisors in part through the use of Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools. These tools are generally linked to the various service components as follows:

- Intake: Hotline Tools (Screening Criteria, Response Priority, Path Decision)
- Emergency Response: Safety Assessment Tool, Risk Assessment Tool
- Dependency Investigation, Family Maintenance/Family Reunification: Initial Family Strengths and Needs Assessment
- Family Maintenance: Reassessment Tools (Family Risk Reassessment, Family Strengths and Needs Reassessment, Safety Assessment)
- Family Reunification: Reunification Reassessment Tools (Family Reunification Reassessment, Family Strengths and Needs Reassessment)

Through supervision, training and desk guide references, it is communicated that the decision to open and close a case is based on a Social Worker's assessment informed by SDM risk levels. It is also communicated that the decision to detain and reunify children is based on a Social Worker's assessment informed by SDM safety factors being unresolved or resolved. To facilitate the focus on resolving safety issues as immediately as possible, the after-hours duty bag is stocked with blank safety plans with protocol established that when an after-hours Social Worker detains a child they are to contact the on-duty after-hours supervisor to collaborate on possible safety interventions while in the field.

The assigned Social Worker reviews the case, interviews the family, and produces the appropriate SDM tool in the online website per SDM protocol. Once completed, the particular SDM tool is reviewed by the supervisor, at which time it is either approved or sent back for "requires modification" with reasons communicated to the Social Worker.

San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services is working on a means to test for quality assurance and continuous quality improvement to ensure that the Social Workers and their supervisors are correctly using the Structured Decision Making tools and correctly applying the definitions within the tools. At this stage the Department is focusing on how other counties accomplish SDM Quality Assurance, such as having a Program Manager run monthly audits or having supervisors run semi-annual audits on their assigned Social Workers.

It is a Department standard that each month the Social Worker will review the progress the family has made with their case plan and consider any and all family strengths and needs and safety and risk elements that pertain to the family's current circumstance. The Department is working to formalize these monthly contacts as Family Team Meetings and involve persons that the family and/or the Social Worker views as valuable members of the team. Additionally, at a minimum of every six months the case plan should be updated in collaboration with the Social Worker, the defined team and the family, based on the Family Strengths and Needs Reassessment.

In 2007 the Department created the Child Locator Database. The Social Worker detaining a child is responsible for filling out the Child Locator Record within 24 hours of the next working day. This record feeds a database that the supervisor reviews and approves. Instances where a child is placed outside of their neighborhood and/or siblings are separated are noted on the child locator form. Also noted is type of placement (shelter, relative, non-related extended family member, foster parent, foster family agency, etc.). This gives the supervisor an opportunity to review the facts of the placement and can lead to conversations and action plans

to work toward the least-restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to the child's need and in proximity to the parent's home.

Effective 2008, the Child Locator Database also enables the supervisor to monitor if and when the Team Decision Making (TDM) meeting was held, is being scheduled, or has a valid exception. The reconciliation of these TDM factors can be made in real time at the end of the day, week or month. This review ensures timely compliance to TDM protocol, with the anticipated outcome of children placed in less restrictive placements at earlier opportunities through team informed involvement.

The Child Locator Database has also been useful in generating school transportation lists for school administrators to review to ensure foster children are being bussed to their schools even if they are placed outside of their neighborhood or school district. This continuity of care and schooling is important to all members of the team and the use of this database and review of that report has ensured timely response to emergency and planned moves.

Cases are also reviewed both individually (i.e. a particular client) as well as collectively (i.e. how the Social Worker is doing compared to their peers for their whole caseload) by the supervisor. Individual cases are reviewed by the Social Worker with their supervisor as frequently as needed (daily, weekly, monthly, etc.) through formal and informal means. Supervisors have access to read and review case information on line through the CWS/CMS database, the Structured Decision Making website and Safe Measures. Beginning this year, Monthly Measures supervision templates are posted monthly to DSS Net for supervisors to aid in their review of Safe Measures and to present to their manager, who in turn presents it to the Assistant Director. Other reports used for review of cases include a monthly Court Report Review for timely submission, sent by the Legal Processing unit.

The minimum standard for supervisor formal review of Social Worker cases is weekly for newly hired Social Workers, and monthly for experienced Social Workers. As newer Social Workers gain experience and competence, the standard for formal supervision is once every two weeks. The formal supervision is a set period of time (one hour minimum) reserved in advance with minimal interruption. Key elements in this supervision meeting include ensuring that the Social Worker is having monthly contacts (at a minimum) with children on their caseload. Adoption Social Workers will present steps taken to make and finalize an adoption or permanent plan, and document those steps in the CMS/CWS case and on court reports. Adoption workers will also present and discuss the termination of parental rights (TPR) for children who have been in care for 15 of the last 22 months, and offer a compelling reason indicating why TPR is not in the child's best interest and document that in the CMS/CWS case and on court reports.

As of 2007, the Department also has a full time employee serving as a field mentor. This position is funded through the Central California Training Academy and works to support Social Workers and their supervisors by providing one-on-one and group training as needed. This position also allows for a review and standardization of Social Worker and supervisor practice.

In addition to the review of cases, there are also other opportunities for case presentation and review within the Department of Social Services. These departmental staffings do not include families. Some of the more common staffings are weekly shelter care staffing, monthly unit meetings, regional case staffings, and centralized case staffings. If a child is in shelter care, the purpose of the shelter care staffing is to develop a plan to move the child to a less restrictive setting. Typically if a Social Worker experiences challenges in their casework the monthly unit meeting provides a resource to staff cases among peers and a supervisor to remove barriers and consider alternative ideas. If the issues are not resolved at the unit meeting level, then the case may be reviewed at regional case staffing where linked Participant Services staff and their

supervisors and Regional Manager joins the team. If the case issues are not resolved at the regional case staffing, then the use of centralized case staffing is considered where the team is further expanded to include other Regional Managers and a placement Social Worker.

If the potential resource includes entry into or return from a group home or out of county placement, another option for case review is the Interagency Placement Committee Meeting (IAPC). The IAPC is a multi-agency management team that consists of managers from Probation, Mental Health, the Department of Social Services, Education and the two community based organizations that provide Wrap-Around Services, crisis stabilization services and level 12 group home service. Social Workers are required to attend this meeting in order to place children in high-level placements in or out of the county. It is standard procedure at these meetings to ensure that least-restrictive, most family-like setting appropriate to the child's need and in proximity to the parent's home is being considered. This includes SB969 placement or Wrap-Around home-based services. These Wrap-Around services can be used in foster homes and are increasingly being held in the family's home.

There are other formal opportunities for review of cases in a team-based model with families and community partner members present. These include but are not limited to SAFE initial and follow-up meetings, SAFE Intensive Based Team, Differential Response Path 2, Linkages Joint Case Staffing, Family FIRST Staffing, Family Group Decision Making, Wrap-Around Services (initial and follow-up), Team Decision Making Meetings, Family Team Meetings, Permanency Team Meetings, Life Team Meetings, Concurrent Planning meetings, and Treatment Team meetings with Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Services. During these collaborative meetings case plans are reviewed, assessed and updated.

Cases involving dependent minors are also reviewed in our court system as they move through the legal process. Generally after the Disposition hearing the 6, 12 and 18-month review hearings are scheduled in advance. Special 3-Month Review hearings are requested for all children who are three years old or younger at the time of detention to assess parent case plan progress made toward reunification. A special 3-month review hearing is also held in cases where a 366.26 hearing has been held to establish a permanent plan prior to the first 6-month review hearing to assess Social Worker concurrent plan progress made toward permanency. After a permanent plan is established, regular 6-month review hearings are scheduled.

## 1. Court Structure/Relationship

The Department of Social Services enjoys a positive working relationship with the Juvenile Court, the attorneys, and Probation. The Juvenile Presiding Judge sits on the bench for this Court. The Juvenile Court Judge also presides over delinquency court, the dependency court and dependency drug court. Having one court and one judge provides for greater information sharing and consistency. The Judge meets with Probation and the Department of Social Services on a regular basis to discuss issues involving the court process.

A supervisor from both the Department of Social Services and Probation serves as the court officer and liaison for their respective departments. They are responsible for calling the cases and managing the calendars on the days of their hearings. The court officer for the Department of Social Services takes notes in collaboration with the assigned county counsel and shares information (such as dates and times of contested hearings and important information verbally communicated in court) as needed with the Social Workers and supervisors who have written the reports. San Luis Obispo County also has a Dependency Drug Court with its own hearing dates once a week. The liaison and court officer is the Dependency Drug Court Social Worker.

The Department of Social Services' Dependency Investigation unit and the Probation Department work closely together. The supervisor who serves as court officer is an assigned

liaison that communicates with his/her counterpart on a regular basis. The Department of Social Services and the Probation Department have signed a protocol pursuant to WIC 241.1 that states whenever a child appears to come within the provisions of section 300 and either section 601 or section 602 of the Welfare and Institutions Code, the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department must conduct a joint assessment to determine which status will serve the best interest of the child and the protection of society. In addition, the protocol provides structure for an agreed-upon recommendation to be presented to the Juvenile Court, a framework for resolving disagreements between the Probation Department and the Department of Social Services, and a means to determine if circumstances exist warranting the filing of a petition to change the minor's status. When differences of perspective occur, either department liaison can request management involvement. Increasingly, Child Welfare Services has experienced consensus on which department will pursue jurisdiction of a child.

Child Welfare Services is involved in a court improvement project that includes all parties involved in the court process. The group includes attorneys, the Judge or commissioner, Department of Social Services staff (including the supervisor and Regional Manager of the Dependency Investigation unit), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), court administration and county counsel. The group meets periodically to share information, announcements, training opportunities and addresses issues raised by all parties to develop agreed upon procedures and practices in an effort to improve working relationships. Additionally, Regional Managers from the Department of Social Services meet with the CASA Director regularly to problem-solve process issues between the two agencies. Individual matters between CASA and the Department are handled at the lowest level possible to resolve the issue.

The Department of Social Services also created its own internal court improvement process in an effort to become more accountable and responsive to the laws and regulations that govern CWS. This group convened regularly until 2007. After 2007 the committee became an ongoing work-group that meets regularly for specific projects and purposes. The work group is attended by the Regional Manager for the Dependency Investigation unit and Legal Processing unit, the supervisor of the Dependency Investigation unit, the supervisor of the Legal Processing unit, the assigned County Counsel (if and as needed), the lead worker for the Legal Processing unit, and the Program Manager and Program Review Specialist supporting the represented programs. Some of their recent accomplishments include writing instructions and training staff on Protective Custody Warrants, new Findings and Orders, and Probation Guardianship assessments.

The supervisor of the Dependency Investigation unit who serves as the court officer provides consultation for Social Workers and their supervisors on court-related issues. An effort is being made to improve the consistency and continuity between units of court-related work. Ongoing discussions occur between Emergency Response Social Workers and supervisors and the Dependency Investigation unit staff to determine whether families are willing and able to work on a voluntary basis prior to filing a petition and whether protective custody warrants are required. Attempts are made to engage the family prior to removing children, based on safety assessments and safety plans. The Dependency Investigation unit is a centralized unit based in one office with one supervisor, but its Social Workers are connected to regions and as often as possible tend to be assigned cases within those regions. The Social Workers for these regions/program serve as liaisons to staff and families in those regions, and provide information, consultation, and outreach.

The Judge and attorneys have received material about Redesign in an effort to educate them on the potential harm to children and the prognosis for successful reunification that can occur as a

result of the court process and out-of-home placement. Desk guides have been created and are continually updated to address protocols and procedures pertaining to all aspects of Child Welfare Services including juvenile court. Child Welfare Services routinely sends the managers and staff to the annual Beyond the Bench convening. This further builds the knowledge, skills and competency of Child Welfare Services staff.

The Department of Social Services' Legal Processing unit tracks the timeliness of reports to the court. As of 2007, continuance requests that are submitted in lieu of the court report are now presented in writing, with a legitimate reason for the continuance request, rather than continuing the past practice of requesting them verbally on the day of the hearing. Late reports are tracked by a supervisor tool and incorporated into supervisor/manager staffing. The court officer and County Counsel are proactive to objecting to requests for hearings or continuances for the purposes of addressing issues that don't specifically pertain to detention, jurisdiction, and disposition, such as psychological evaluations, placement, visitation, etc. Every attempt is made to move a case forward in accordance with legal timelines, and to develop and use alternative dispute resolution opportunities, including facilitated mediation, dependency mediation, and other family-based meetings

When services are either ended or not offered to the parents, and a hearing date is ordered to terminate parental rights and to determine the permanent plan, a service review date is set to ensure that the Department of Social Services is in compliance with statutes. Therefore, generally by the hearing to terminate parental rights, the Department is in compliance with notification requirements, and hearings do not need to be continued for legal notice to parents.

The County maintains a waiting room with childcare at the main courthouse in San Luis Obispo. Effective 2007, Child Welfare Services' cases are being held at the downtown courthouse in closer proximity to this waiting room. The courtroom also has a waiting area at the end of a hallway with couches reserved for families.

Child Welfare Services uses many forms of Alternative Dispute Resolution, including Team Decision Making for placement/reunification, Family Group Decision-making for case planning, Juvenile Dependency Mediation for contested hearings, and Post Permanency Mediation for ongoing birth family/sibling contact after adoption. The Department works hard to resolve all issues at the lowest level with facilitation and collaboration by family members, so that all parties are invested in mutually beneficial outcomes when possible. The focus of issues are narrowed and reduced to safety, well-being and permanency. Additionally the Department supports and welcomes probate guardianship assessments, and has recently sought to streamline and document the process for Social Workers.

## 2. Process for Timely Notification of Hearings

The 3, 6, 12, and 18-month hearings are initially set within the statutory timelines at the disposition hearing. Contested hearings and/or continuances can extend the time it takes to complete a prior hearing. The Department of Social Services and County Counsel have been proactive throughout the years in objecting to continuances whenever possible. Juvenile Dependency Mediation has also decreased the numbers of contested hearings or the length of contested hearings. Some hearings are delayed or continued because of late court reports from Social Workers, although the Social Worker deadline report has reduced the instances of late court reports. A supervision-tracking tool has assisted supervisors in tracking numbers of late court reports for trends or patterns within the unit and by Social Worker.

For all post-Disposition hearings, timely notices of hearings and the Social Worker recommendation are sent to all resource families who have dependent children in their home in

advance of the upcoming court hearing. Following the notice is the Social Worker's written Recommendation Report. The Department strongly encourages foster parents, pre-adoptive parents and relative caregivers of children in foster care as well as the children themselves to exercise an opportunity to be heard at any review hearing. Notices include the date, time and location of hearing. The minor's attorney often visits with the child in advance of the hearing and the Department and resource family coordinate transportation of the child to the hearing. The Judge is receptive to the idea of interviewing the minor in chambers, as well as having conversation in the courtroom.

Many caregivers apply for and are granted de facto parent status of a child by the court so that they may have an enhanced presence in the courtroom and be able to participate in proceedings and provide evidence. Social Workers routinely seek the input and feedback of caregivers, who may or may not be in attendance at court. The JV290 Caregiver Information Form is given to caregivers to fill out and return and is included in Social Workers' court reports. It details in the caregiver's own words an account of how the foster child is doing in care. If families and caregivers are at court, the court officer attempts to prioritize their cases based on their needs to ensure that there are not excessive delays in waiting for their case to be called.

### 3. Process for Parent-Child-Youth Participation in Case Planning

The Department of Social Services believes that case plans should be family centered, strength based, needs driven, solution oriented and community based. The Department realizes that collaboration between the family and community partners assists the Department in increasing their knowledge about a family to develop an appropriate case plan.

Case planning occurs ideally in Family Group Decision Making meetings for initial plans of court cases and in Family Team Meetings for ongoing case plans. The case plan is written with the concept of the family as a partner and the community partners as the team. Anyone that is involved with the family should be included either by being present at the meeting or by telephone, individual face-to-face meetings or emails. The Department maintains several different forms to elicit feedback from partners who cannot attend meetings.

The emphasis for case plans is on safety and risk factors, because mitigating those results for children and families assists in the timely ability to reunify and end cases at the soonest and safest time. The safety and risk language used in the SDM tools is shared with parents throughout the case plan activity.

The Department recognizes that youth emancipating from foster care or youth who were unable to reunify with their parents requires increased focus. As of 2008, the Department has established Life Team Meetings and Permanency Team Meetings and protocol to ensure positive outcomes.

Tools used to engage families and explain their rights and responsibilities include DOJ/CACI Grievance Procedure Instructions and Request for Grievance Hearing, the Parent's Guide to Dependency ("Pink Book"), the Department of Social Services' Complaint Protocol, the Client Satisfaction Survey, and Civil Rights Brochures. In addition, parents and caregivers are included in team meetings where needs/concerns are considered. This process includes needs around planning for safety, reducing risk, and visitation.

### 4. General Case Planning and Review

Case plans are written utilizing a solution-focused, strength-based process using:

- SMART format (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time Limited)

- SDM tools to identify the focus of the plan to address risk factors and to focus family's work on areas that will improve safety and stability for themselves and their children
- Family Engagement to develop a positive relationship in the development of the plan.

The Department also uses Linkages practice. With regard to case plans, if a family is receiving assistance from both Child Welfare Services and Participant Services, the case is considered a linked case. The Social Worker, the Employment Resource/Specialist, and any service provider working with the family teams with the family at a monthly family team meeting and creates a Coordinated Family Plan.

Once written, agreed upon and signed by the family, a case plan is entered in CMS. In dependency cases, the court orders the case plan. Social Workers receive training in collaborating on case plans and a desk guide is available for reference. The desk guide includes various samples of different types of case plans.

Social Workers track case plan status by means of a Case Deadlines Report, issued twice a month. The report is color-coded and has been seen as an essential and useful tool for Social Worker case management. The case plan fields are Case Plan Due Date, Days Until Case Plan Due, Case Plan Goal Date and Days Until Case Plan Goal Date. Social Workers have access to their Safe Measures data and could locate the instances where the plan is in place, missing or expired. However, few Social Workers are accessing this tool. A future training will be held to engage the Social Workers with the practice of reviewing their own work in Safe Measures and reacquaint them with the newest releases' user-friendly features.

Supervisors may track case plan status by means of the same Case Deadlines Report. Supervisors also have access to the Monthly Timeliness Reports that monitor timely case plans and timely case visits by Social Worker. These reports are posted on a monthly basis to the Department's intranet website and include an archive of the past 11 months. Supervisors also track case plan status by means of Safe Measures and are alerted of all instances where the plan is in place or the plan is missing or expired. The Safe Measures data is updated twice a week, and stored with archived monthly data for the prior 13 months. This enables the supervisor to spot patterns or trends. A recent training was held this year for supervisors and managers to engage them in the practice of reviewing their staff's work in Safe Measures. Additionally, a Monthly Measures template was created to enable supervisors and managers to see the data of individual workers, units, and the entire agency in context and serve as an aid to supervision.

In 2004, the Department of Social Services and the Juvenile Judge established a 3-month review hearing between the 366.26 and 366.3 (Post Permanency Hearing Review), specifically for the court to assess the progress of the permanent plan. The Department has realized continued improvement in this area, which has contributed to a positive outcome for children. From April 2007 to April 2008 there have been twice as many adoptions finalized.

The court initially sets permanency hearings within the required time frame, however, contested hearings and late court reports sometimes delay permanency. Submitting court reports late has been a problem for several years and the Department has created policies and procedures to address this.

The Department has explored ways to improve the timeliness of court reports to the court. In May 2007 a standard was introduced that Social Workers were to submit court reports to their supervisors for approval 30 days in advance of the court hearing. Approved court reports are due to Legal Processing unit 18 days prior to a court hearing. Court reports are due to court

(and sent to parties) 10 days before the court hearing date. Jurisdiction and disposition reports have a different timeline: they are due to Legal Processing 4 days before court and due to court and parties 2 days before court. A monthly Court Reports Due Statistics report is also sent to supervisors and managers accounting for the reports sent to court each month.

The County engages in permanency planning for youth in many ways, including the use of permanency case managers, Permanency Team Meetings and Life Team Meetings, and Transitional Independent Learning Plan. The Department of Social Services is working to strengthen its partnership with Tri-Counties Regional Center (TCRC) by developing a Memorandum of Understanding for our common cases of youth in transition to adulthood who may need TCRC support after leaving the dependency system. The Department has a contract with Cuesta College to engage two Permanency Case Managers who are responsible for assisting foster youth in a permanency planning status with permanency identification and goals. This procedure incorporates all best practices principles (family centered, strengths based, needs driven, solution oriented and community based) by providing essential connections focused on permanency for foster youth. In addition, all decisions regarding youth should be made with their participation in planning and in the consensus-based process of decision-making. Permanency decisions should focus on the future of the youth and not be bound or limited by past behaviors or circumstances. This practice helps meet the outcome of achieving stable and nurturing legal relationships with adult caregivers/siblings that creates a shared sense of belonging and emotional security.

The Permanency Case Managers research every avenue available to determine any potential family/friends that might be appropriate and/or available to the foster youth for permanent living. A Permanency Case Manager is assigned to youth who are currently in a Planned Permanent Living Arrangement/Permanency Placement status and are 10 years and older and do not have an identified adoption plan. Permanency Case Managers identify cases by reviewing a monthly report provided by the Information Reporting Team. They identify all youth in a Permanency Placement status, prioritizing youth by number of years in placement with an additional focus on youth age (nearing emancipation), youth not having significant connections, youth experiencing a high number of placement changes, and youth with prior dependencies. The primary duties of the Permanency Case Manager are to:

- Interview and complete assessments with youth to identify significant individuals
- Mine case files and CMS history to identify significant individuals
- Complete a family tree for each youth
- Contact the identified individuals to assess their level of commitment to the youth
- Facilitate bi-monthly Permanency Case Staffing with the Social Worker, Social Worker Supervisor, and other relevant staff
- Complete picture and profile to be included in the Adoptions Binder to be shown at foster parent trainings
- Refer youth for other adoption outreach, such as the Heart Gallery
- Complete a Guaranteed Preparation Packet for youth upon emancipation

Upon completion of work on a case, a comprehensive package including all information gathered by the Permanency Case Manager is created and provided to the Social Worker's supervisor. The supervisor reviews the packet to ensure that all permanent adult connections are explored and assists the Social Worker with any potential barriers. The supervisor meets with the Social Worker to review the permanency services packet and discusses services and steps to be taken to explore permanent adult connections. The supervisor also ensures that the youth remains involved in decisions and in the consensus-based process of decision-making. The Social Worker then ensures that all of the above factors are addressed and assists the identified significant adults with needed services to help establish connections to youth. In the

event that no identified significant adult is available the Social Worker will return the packet to their supervisor to explore future connections with permanency placement staff.

It is the policy of the San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services that every child/youth in permanent placement will achieve permanency, safety, and well being as a result of ongoing child/youth family team meetings. For children/youth ages 10-15 years old who are in Permanency status, the initial and subsequent Permanency Team Meetings are the vehicles for helping to ensure these outcomes. For youth ages 16 years and older who are in Permanency status, the initial and subsequent Life Team Meetings (LTM) are the vehicle for helping ensure these outcomes.

The goal of the LTM is to continue to identify and establish permanent connections through either adoption or guardianship of the youth. The LTM also helps set the stage for a successful transition to adulthood, while building permanent connections i.e. healthy, sustainable adult relationships. At each and every LTM, all reasonable efforts will be made to finalize a permanent plan for the youth. Services are not withheld if a youth does not attend or wish to participate, as not all circumstances are appropriate. The Social Worker consults with their supervisor and regional manager prior to the decision not to hold a Life Team or Permanency Team Meeting.

Additionally, it is the policy of San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services and the Probation Department that every youth in placement shall have a signed Transitional Independent Living Plan (TILP) prior to the youth's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday per Division 31-236. The Social Worker enters the TILP information into CWS/CMS prior to the youth's 16<sup>th</sup> birthday. If the youth enters the Child Welfare system after the date of their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, a TILP will be signed and entered into CWS/CMS within 30 days of the start of services.

A permanency alternative is identified prior to the Disposition Hearing: In the Disposition Report, the Social Worker includes a statement regarding the concurrent plan and also discusses characteristics of the various individuals who are willing to make a permanent commitment to the child. The Department conducts early identification and search and assessment of relatives and non-custodial parents as possible placement resources. This includes resolution of paternity issues and identification of Indian Child Welfare Act issues.

The placement Social Worker contacts each resource family a day or two after receiving their first placement, to answer any questions and offer support. She may arrange for a mentoring resource family to help with the first placement. She also informs resource parents who the new Social Worker will be for the child, and she facilitates receipt of AFDC-FC when applicable.

Past attempts at concurrent planning case staffing were essentially held one month before a court date so that efforts could be reported to the court. Attendees included the reunification Social Worker and their supervisor, the Regional Manager, and a representative from CASA. This structure did not lend itself well to concurrent planning and a new model is currently being explored. This new model states that prior to disposition, the Legal Processing unit will provide the Adoption Social Worker Supervisor a copy of each detained petition. The supervisor will then have an initial discussion via a "concurrent planning meeting" or at the Central Regional case staffing with the Dependency Investigation Social Worker Supervisor, Regional Manager and Program Manager to discuss concurrent planning.

After disposition, the Adoption supervisor will assign the case to an Adoption Social Worker as the secondary worker. The regional administrative assistant will calendar to have the case discussed at the Regional Case staffing and will invite attendees, including the assigned family

reunification Social Worker, secondary Adoption Social Worker, their supervisors, their Regional Managers, a licensing Social Worker and their supervisor, and permanency case managers.

This group will meet for the regional case staffing and the following will be discussed:

- Where child is currently placed and what the plan is
- Status of family placement options for the child
- Family members vs. foster or adoptive placements
- Requested holds (by family or by Department of Social Services staff)
- Binders
- Next steps

A follow up meeting will be scheduled 3 months later to revisit the plan.

The Department also includes an Adoption Social Worker as a secondary assignment or consultant when the Dependency Investigation Social Worker first becomes involved. If reunification is not realized, the initial Adoption Social Worker (who has served as a secondary/ services support role in the case) will become the primary assignment and have information and knowledge about the child and their concurrent plan.

The Department believes in full inclusion of family on teams to the extent that this is possible in a given circumstance or case. When a child is put into protective custody efforts are made to obtain the name of a relative or not-related extended family member as a resource. This resource is explored in the field and placement approval is made when possible. Families and prospective foster parents are encouraged to attend Team Decision Making meetings and consider being a foster care placement and consider adoption as a concurrent plan.

The Judge, at the detention hearing, asks parents to disclose names of relatives and other possible resources for the children as well as paternity, absent parent, or ICWA information. The Judge will advise parents, at the disposition hearing, of the 6-month limit for children under three years old and/or sibling groups with one or more children under age 3 years old. All disposition reports contain the same advisement in bold type. Disposition reports document the permanency alternative and describe the characteristics of potential adopters and/or guardians.

Enhanced opportunities for communication among staff exist and are practiced throughout the Department. Some examples include:

- Linkages, co-locating Participant Services and Child Welfare Services staff
- Team Decision Making meetings
- Family Group Conferencing
- Treatment Team Meetings
- Assigning an Adoption Social Worker to court cases as secondary Social Worker
- Services Affirming Family Empowerment (SAFE) model
- Agency partners co-located at Services Affirming Family Empowerment (SAFE) sites and the Higuera office
- Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health Services, Public Health Department, and Juvenile Probation staff available at regional offices
- Agency partners included in decision-making meetings

The Department provides and identifies intensive support services to birth parents early and throughout reunification and family maintenance. Examples of support services include:

- Team Decision Making meetings
- Family Group Conferences
- Treatment Team meetings
- Options for Recovery placement/mentoring
- Dependency Drug Court

- Referrals to other services and community partners, such as Public Health and Tri Counties Regional Center
- Strong staff commitment to reunification
- Wrap-Around and Intensive Services
- Wrap-Around Foster Care

The Department is committed to developing and maintaining interagency partnership support during concurrent planning. Current efforts include training, Family Team Meetings, Life Team Meetings, Permanency Team Meetings, and SAFE. Additionally, both the Department and CASA have partnered on various trainings for new staff and seek to improve collaboration and understanding of each agency's values, beliefs and attitudes.

Adoption staff and Legal Processing staff are responsible to pursue WIC 366.26 hearings and their timeliness. The 366.26 hearings are set at the 366.21 or 366.22 hearing. There is a service hearing held mid-way between the 366.21/366.22 hearing and the 366.26 hearing to address any issues needing attention regarding personal service of notice of hearing to the parents. For example, it may be necessary to publish notice to a parent whose whereabouts are unknown. These areas have been improving since the last report.

Every effort is made to identify an adoptive home prior to termination of parental rights. The Social Worker is clear when working with parents to identify potential placements, both initial and subsequent. Staff informs parents that it is in the best interests of children to have as few placement moves as possible and serves children well when the first placement is the final placement if reunification cannot be achieved. This information is generally communicated to the team at the initial Team Decision Making Meeting where efforts are made to invite relatives and non-related extended family members for consideration of placement. Eligibility Resource/Specialists are also in attendance to help explain the funding for foster care eligibility, payment and other services.

Often times there are relatives or friends of the family who are interested in pursuing adoption if the birth parents are unable to reunify. Those relatives and non-related extended family members are considered for early placement initially and their comments are recorded and reported in the disposition court report and subsequent reports to the court.

Relatives, non-related extended family members, and foster parents are all asked whether they are interested in exploring adoption generally and with the specific child that may be placed in their home. This question and its answer are revisited throughout the time a child is in their home or being considered for placement in their home. Any perceived barriers for adoption are explored, reported to the court and addressed.

The Department teams with the Kinship Center and Aspira Foster Family Agency to provide adoptive home studies. Both agencies consider referrals that meet the following criteria: homes where the potential adopter is identified and the child is already or can be placed in that home. For that reason, the movement of a child to potential adopters is considered early in the life of a case.

Social Workers and their supervisors work closely with county counsel to ensure that the compelling reasons are valid and justified. Fewer discrepancies currently exist in this area.

### *C. Foster/Adoptive Parent Licensing, Recruitment and Retention*

The Department of Social Services maintains consistent standards for foster family homes, including relatives. The Department's Staff Development division maintains these standards by

tracking compliance and developing close relationships with state licensing liaisons for assistance with questions. Staff Development attends the Foster Parent Association's monthly meetings, provides trainings for foster parents and tracks attendance for mandatory foster parent trainings. Additionally, Staff Development ensures that staff receives training on new regulations and procedures, such as the Adam Walsh Act. The county also maintains compliance of criminal record clearances through the help of the Criminal Records Coordinator.

San Luis Obispo County's largest minority group is the Hispanic population. The county attempts to meet the needs of the Hispanic population by recruiting foster parents in both English and Spanish. The Department of Social Services' website, [www.slocounty.ca.gov/dss.htm](http://www.slocounty.ca.gov/dss.htm), which includes information on becoming a foster parent, has been translated into Spanish. PRIDE trainings are also available with bilingual trainers.

## 1. General Licensing, Recruitment and Retention

The Department of Social Services continues to work on the recruitment of foster families. Recruitment strategies include the implementation of a recruitment calling system to ensure immediate live contact with a recruitment staff member to give specific information to all calls and inquiries and the development of a data system to document these inquiries and to assess the strengths and needs of the callers. Extensive use of self evaluation reports have been used to identify specific target areas of recruitment and to identify the in what area of the county they are placed. The Department has also used public service announcements, newspaper articles, and the Heart Gallery to publicize the need for more foster families.

One strategy the Department of Social Services will be implementing in the fall of 2008 is a school-based recruitment. Due to a lack of resources, children coming into foster care are frequently placed out of their local communities and experience multiple forms of loss due to their relocation. When children can maintain placement within their local community the types and number of losses a child experiences can be significantly reduced. The school-based recruitment will strive to increase children staying in the same school, maintain existing relationships with family and friends, and keep the same routines with after-school activities.

The Department of Social Services also attempts to support and retain existing foster/resource parents in a variety of ways. The Department continues to develop private funding to provide the yearly Foster Parent Retreat. Respite services are provided on an emergency basis and respite services for Options for Recovery Homes are provided through the year. The Department provides office space and equipment services and supplies to the Foster Parent Association to promote retention services. For the Options for Recovery program initial Ice Breaker meetings are being implemented to provide support and retention to children newly placed in foster care. The Department also distributes a Foster Parent Newsletter to support current caregivers. Additionally, the Department is developing a County Collaborative Master Calendar of classes, workshops, activities and other available resources to caregivers to support their efforts.

## 2. Placement Resources

San Luis Obispo County places the majority of foster children with relatives. In order to facilitate timely placements for waiting children, the county researches all kin in an effort to meet the youth's needs. The Department of Social Services takes into consideration everything about a child and strives to meet the needs of the child, whether it is a drug-exposed child, a youth with mental health needs or a youth with diabetes.

For youth with special needs, the Department works closely with a Public Health nurse or hospital to make the best possible placement. For example, the Department takes into account

the discharge plan from the psychiatric or regular hospital, ensures that the foster family receives training from the hospital, or opts to use the Family Care Network, who can bring in an in-home counselor for an assessment. In cases of scarce resources, the Department of Social Services Management Team will become involved to develop a plan with Family Care Network or Probation, such as utilizing a Therapeutic Behavioral Service

The Department of Social Services continues to work towards integrating fairness and equity into case planning decisions. Staff Development schedules annual cultural diversity/sensitivity training for all Department staff. The 2007-2008 training was a UC Davis full-day class on Human Diversity and Cultural Competence in Service Provision taught by Matthew Mock. Another means of ensuring fairness and equity is the use of team decision-making, which offers opportunities for checks and balances against any possible Social Worker bias. Continual training and supervisory oversight also helps with integrating fairness and equity into case planning decisions.

#### *D. Quality Assurance System*

##### 1. Existing Quality Assurance System

Many of the quality assurance systems used by the Department of Social Services were discussed above in the Relevant Management Information Systems and Case Review sections. The recent County Self-Assessment Community Forums provided both the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department with community and partner agency feedback. The Departments plan to continue these forums on a regular basis to provide an opportunity for continuous feedback.

#### *E. Service Array*

##### 1. Availability of Resources

San Luis Obispo County has a variety of services available to families and children. Besides Mental Health and Drug and Alcohol Services, some of the more commonly utilized include:

- SAFE, where families and agencies meet together to discuss issues and find possible solutions
- Wrap-Around, to maintain children in the least restrictive placement consistent with safety and protection from abuse and neglect
- Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC), our community action agency who respond to Path 1 referrals and provide other services to empower individuals and families to achieve economic self-sufficiency and self-determination
- Outreach, to increase awareness in the community of services and programs available through the Department of Social Services
- Dependency Drug Court, a program to expedite treatment and monitoring of drug and alcohol issues in order to enhance the possibility of reunification
- Options for Recovery, working to provide nurturing and safe care for medically fragile infants
- Child Development Center, providing services for traumatized and abused youth
- Creative Mediation, offering mediation services, including Juvenile Dependency Mediation
- Family Resource Centers and their family advocates
- Martha's Place, providing assessments to all children entering dependency in foster care, ages 0-5, for developmental and/or emotional delays
- California Youth Connection, giving youth a voice to advocate for improvements in the care and treatment of youth and a chance to shift the stereotype of foster youth to a more positive image of strength, potential, and resilience

- Father Involvement Study, offering couples a chance to improve parenting and communication skills
- Women’s Shelter programs in both North County and San Luis Obispo, providing shelter and services to victims of domestic violence

Additionally, the Department of Social Services is involved in initiatives designed to increase the efficiency and availability of services, such as Linkages, Wraparound, Differential Response, and Family to Family.

While programs are almost always available for all families and children involved with child welfare services, there is a need for increased monolingual Spanish services, treatment programs for fathers, and aftercare services. The need for more aftercare services was a recurrent theme during the PQCR with both Social Workers and Probation Officers.

## 2. Assessment of Needs and Provision of Services

The Department of Social Services uses Structured Decision Making (SDM) tools to assess the strengths and needs of families, and to ensure the safety of children. Additionally, multi-disciplinary teams meet in a variety of settings to further address the needs of families and children. Agencies frequently meet together with families to discuss available and appropriate services. Additionally, the Department of Social Services has co-located partner agencies in some offices, including Probation, EOC Child Care Resource Connection, Drug and Alcohol Services, Mental Health and Public Health Nurses. This co-location provides families with easier access to services, and increases the teaming between agencies.

## 3. Services to Indian Children

San Luis Obispo County has a very small Native American population and no federally recognized tribes. Therefore, no specific services are identified for the Native American population. The County strives to comply with the Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA), as outlined in Division 31-515 and 31-525, and during the Detention Hearing the Native American Ethnic relationship status is asked for. If an Indian child is identified, the proper notification is sent to all tribes.

### *F. Staff/Provider Training*

The Department of Social Services has a Staff Development Division whose goal is to develop trainings on services and skills encompassing Best Practices (family-centered, strength-based, needs-driven, solution-oriented and community-based), to better equip staff to facilitate safety, permanency and well-being for the county’s children and families. For the past two years, Staff Development has focused on strengthening Induction Training for newly hired Social Workers. New Social Workers receive eight weeks of training on Department, child welfare and community practices and procedures.

The Department also contracts with the Central Coast Training Academy (CCTA) to provide new Social Workers with the state mandated Core Module trainings. Additionally, in 2007 the Department contracted with CCTA to provide a field-based trainer. This program provides a mentor who works with Social Workers and Supervisors to provide services needed to acquire core child and family engagement welfare skills and knowledge needed for professional child welfare practices. Services provided by the mentor include transfer of learning activities, field-based training, small group discussion sessions and skill development.

The Department also provides on-going trainings on Car Seat Safety, CWS/CMS, Cultural Awareness, Domestic Violence, multi-disciplinary teams, Structured Decision Making, First

Aid/CPR, Complaint Resolution and Civil Rights. Additional trainings are frequently available through UC Davis, as well as through the County's Employee University. Guest trainers are also brought in to train on such topics as Self-Care and Supervisory Training (Peter Dahlin). Short informational trainings are frequently provided at the monthly CWS staff meeting on such topics as gangs, cell phone laws, public health nurses, and the local Child Abuse Interview Team (CAIT).

The Department is currently developing a database to track training hours in order to comply with the new state mandates for Social Workers.

The local community college offers PRIDE training for prospective foster parents and relative caregivers. All county foster parents are required to complete the PRIDE training, which addresses concurrent planning and permanency planning throughout the modules. All relatives and non-related extended family members are invited to attend PRIDE, or the portions of PRIDE that may address their needs. PRIDE training is held several times a year at regional locations. In addition PRIDE is held at various times of the week and various times of day to be useful to resource families and their schedules. The Department has quality assurance standards in place with PRIDE instructors and curriculum. For the past four years, in conjunction with CCTA, the Department has offered a Foster Parent Academy. The trainings are available to both foster parents and Social Workers. Topics include Interacting with Birth Parents, Adoptions, Methamphetamine, Options for Recovery, and a parent panel.

The local Foster Parent Association meets monthly and provides support for foster parents. The Department of Social Services also distributes the quarterly Parent Empowerment Newsletter, the PEN, to educate, support and connect foster, adoptive, resource and kinship parents. For adoptive parents, STAP (Specialized Training for Adoptive Parents) offers a mentor program, respite care, therapeutic consultations, training stipends, trainings for parents, and an experiential preparatory home study class.

## *G. Agency Collaborations*

### **1. Collaboration with Public and Private Agencies**

As discussed throughout this report, the Department of Social Services is involved with the community at a number of different levels. The Department collaborates with community partners at all stages of a child welfare case, from Differential Response through Permanency Planning. Outreach occurs regionally, as the Department strives to educate the community on services and policies. And both Departments attend meetings throughout the community in an effort to partner and increase visibility and understanding.

However, at the County Self-Assessment Community Forums, the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department clearly heard that the community would like a venue to provide feedback on a more frequent basis. The Department of Social Services is considering utilizing quarterly Children's Services Network standing meetings as a chance to continue the community forums and discuss current issues with the community.

The Department has developed many contracts and Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) with other agencies in an effort to coordinate services. Some examples include:

- Contract with Housing Authority to administer Eviction Prevention and Security Deposit Loans
- Contract with Kinship Center regarding relative caregiver programs
- Contract with Father Involvement for P.O.P.S., a program educating fathers on their roles and importance in the lives of children

- Contract with Family Care Network to provide shelter care
- MOUs with both Aspira and the Kinship Center to conduct adoption home studies
- MOU with the Health Agency regarding co-located staff and Mental Health Services for CalWORKs, Child Welfare, and Adult Services recipients
- MOU with Family Care Network to establish roles and responsibilities for providing transitional housing for emancipated foster and probation youth
- Multi-disciplinary Team membership with the Department of Social Services, Probation, all school districts, District Attorney, Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol, the Sexual Abuse Response Team, Family Court Services, all law enforcement agencies, Health Department, Rape Crisis Center, Superior Court Investigator and the Department of Juvenile Justice, allowing for the exchange of confidential information for law enforcement purposes and to coordinate the provision of services

Additionally, both the Department of Social Services and the Probation Department work closely with each other and other agencies on such collaborations as the Child Death Review Team and Vulnerable Families.

## 2. Interaction with Local Tribes

As previously mentioned, San Luis Obispo County has no federally recognized Native American tribes and there is no formal relationship between the County and three tribes considered local by the Native American Heritage Commission. Although representatives were invited to the County Self-Assessment Community Forums, none of the tribes attended. Current interaction is limited to CWS Court cases, through the Detention Hearing for identification of potential ICWA tribal connection.

## IV. County Wide Prevention Activities and Strategies

### A. County-wide Primary Prevention Efforts

The Department of Social Services is forging a closer partnership with the San Luis Obispo Child Abuse Prevention Council (SLO-CAP) to work towards the prevention of child abuse. Educating the community is currently a key strategy. Another close partner of the Department, the Children's Service Network, is currently restructuring and reassessing their focus, although they do plan to focus their efforts on intervention and prevention for youth.

Some of the strongest and most effective prevention comes from and through the local youth task forces working with school districts, the Prevention Alliance and the Asset Development Network. The Prevention Alliance is focused primarily on substance abuse prevention and provides seed money for the task forces. Asset Development is used throughout the school system, Services Affirming Family Empowerment (SAFE), recreation and childcare, Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) and County programs and is becoming popular with kids themselves. Other prevention is done through community diversion programs for first time offenders, Friday Night Live, EOC programs and the SAFE Community-Based Teams in North County and South County. The Domestic Violence Resource Center also sponsors and facilitates a domestic violence prevention program focused on middle school children.

### B. Prevention Partnerships

Linkages remains the Department of Social Services' primary prevention program, providing early services to families and coordinating CalWORKs, Medi-Cal and Food Stamp resources to help relieve stressors that can lead parents to child abuse. Participant Services staff is piloting a SDM tool to screen families for safety, and Participant Services and Child Welfare staff frequently work together on linked cases. The Department has a Linkages database to identify and track these common cases.

### *C. Strategies for the Future*

The Department of Social Services is actively working to expand the network of agencies working towards the prevention of child abuse. Instead of separate agencies working towards separate purposes, the Department would like to see the various agencies work together to pool resources and prevent duplication of effort in order to better educate and serve the community and work to ensure the safety of the children of our community.

## V. Summary Assessment

### *A. System Strengths and Areas Needing Improvement*

San Luis Obispo County's Department of Social Services and Probation Department continue to perform well on most of the C-CSFR outcomes; however a few outcomes have been identified as needing improvement. The County Self-Assessment Advisory Group identified three outcomes in which the county will focus on to improve upon; timely response, re-entry and youth emancipating from foster care. As this is San Luis Obispo County's second tri-annual review, the Advisory Group decided to focus on fewer outcomes, in the hope that the County System Improvement Plan will be more realistic, with goals that can be accomplished in a shorter period of time.

#### **Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect**

San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services and Probation Department continues to strive to:

- Increase the safety and stability of children within their own families
- Keep children in their homes whenever possible, or in the homes of family or friends
- Keep children in their own community
- Use a collaborative team approach to assist the family
- Limit the amount of placement moves, and
- Reunify children as quickly as possible, often with in-home follow-up services

At this time, this is not an area that has been targeted for improvement. The Department of Social Services and the Probation Department has decided to focus their attention on other areas in greater need of improvement.

#### **Children are maintained safely in their homes whenever possible and appropriate**

For the months of April 2007 to June 2007, San Luis Obispo County had a total of 518 referrals. Of those 518 referrals, 91 Immediate Response referrals were completed timely which resulted in a 92.9% immediate compliance rate; 266 10-day response referrals were completed timely which resulted in a 63.3% 10 day compliance rate.

The Advisory Group has identified timely response as one of the three outcomes to be addressed in San Luis Obispo County's next System Improvement Plan. Timely response was discussed in the community forums, on-line questionnaire, and the Emergency Response/Intake Social Worker survey. The three recurring items that were mentioned by all of the responses received were:

- The need for improved communication
- The need for increased training, especially mandated reporter training
- Lack of resources (for example, staff, support and equipment)

The Department of Social Services has already started discussions with Emergency Response and Intake Social Workers, Social Worker Supervisors, and Management on how to improve our compliance rates for immediate, 10-day, and timely monthly Social Worker visits.

### **Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry to foster care**

As of June 2007, of all the children reunified during the year, 25 % reentered foster care in less than 12 months. Increased emphasis continues with PRIDE training for resource families, Family-to-Family, and greater Social Worker engagement. The Advisory Group identified re-entry of children back into foster care as one of the three outcomes that will be addressed in the next System Improvement Plan for San Luis Obispo County.

Re-entry was addressed in the County Self-Assessment Community Forums, on-line questionnaire, and the Emergency Response/Intake Social Worker survey. The following recurring items were mentioned in the community forums and on-line questionnaire, in regards to issues facing families after they leave Child Welfare Services and/or Probation:

- Sustainability of services, follow-up, and after-care plans
- The need for additional Wrap-Around services
- Lack of Mental Health services
- Increase in Drug and Alcohol abuse, especially methamphetamine use
- Housing and high cost of living
- The need for more parenting support groups

### **The family relationships and connections of the children served by Child Welfare Services will be preserved, as appropriate**

San Luis Obispo County continues to have a higher than average rate of initial placements in relative homes. For the month of June 2007, out of 443 children placed in out of home care placed by the Department of Social Services and Probation:

- 235 of the children were placed with a relative
- 81 of the children were placed in a Foster Family Agencies
- 53 of the children were placed in a Foster Family Home
- 55 of the children were placed in a Group Home
- 12 of the children were placed in unspecified homes, and
- 7 of the children were placed with a guardian

San Luis Obispo County strives to place all of the children who are removed from their homes with relatives or non-related extended family members (NREFMs) – close family friends and/or someone already connected to the child, such as the child's best friend's family.

In the period from July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2007, data from the UC Berkeley Center for Social Services (CSSR) shows that 50.5% of children in foster care in San Luis Obispo County were placed with family and friends.

### **Youth emancipating from foster care are prepared to transition to adulthood.**

The Department of Social Services contracts with Cuesta College for the Independent Living Program and additional Permanency Planning Social Workers. San Luis Obispo continues to try new innovative methods to assist the youth in their transition to adulthood. Social Workers are currently being trained on using the 3-5-7 Model of Engagement. Assisting youth to emancipate from foster care was addressed in the community forums and on-line questionnaire. The following recurring items were mentioned in the community forums and on-line questionnaire, in regards to issues facing youth as they prepare to manage adult life:

- Lack of transitional services, after-care plans, and support groups
- The need for additional training in life skills
- Lack of Mental Health Services
- Helping youth identify their strengths and passions and develop them
- Increase in Drug and Alcohol abuse, especially methamphetamine use
- Housing and high cost of living
- Lack of collaboration, communication and coordination of services amongst agencies

- Vocational classes have been cut from high schools

## *B. PQCR*

The 2007 San Luis Obispo County Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) process involved collaboration between the Probation Department and the Department of Social Services and focused on the theme of re-entry into foster care. In addition to the interviewing of Social Worker Workers and Deputy Probation Officers, focus groups were held involving supervisors, community partners and stakeholders. This expanded PQCR process provided richer information from a wider variety of partners and participants. The results indicate that the participants, no matter their origin, were engaged successfully in the PQCR process. Social Workers, Deputy Probation Officers and Supervisors are all passionate about the need to improve and strengthen Child Welfare Services and Juvenile Probation processes, especially around the topic of re-entry into Foster Care.

San Luis Obispo County Child Welfare services reunifies at a rate higher than the State average, though below the current Federal standard. The predominant contributing factors that lead to a child's removal from the home are mental illness, substance abuse and family violence. Although parents may be fully engaged in reuniting with their children, research in these areas indicates that relapses are the norm, rather than the exception. Given the restricted mental health and substance abuse resources in San Luis Obispo County, many children re-enter care due to on-going family challenges.

The PQCR identified the need for additional funding and support for after-care programs as essential. The creation of family resource centers, recovery programs, and parent leadership programs is needed to develop each community's capacity to provide effective primary prevention and after-care services. Social Workers and Deputy Probation Officers identified the need for more individualized services, particularly in the areas of substance abuse and mental health services. Populations identified as in need of more services include monolingual Spanish-speaking fathers or other male partners in families.

Teaming efforts, such as Wrap-Around Services and Team Decision Meetings, or other case planning and review processes, are effective in helping families reunify successfully. A need to streamline service provision and access was a common theme identified. Multiple Social Workers and Deputy Probation Officers identified Wrap-Around as a promising practice, but also expressed a need for an increase in Wrap-Around slots.

San Luis Obispo County's PQCR revealed valuable ideas regarding the Departments' processes, case practice and services provided to families. This information, together with the feedback received through the County Self-Assessment, will provide direction as San Luis Obispo County Department of Social Services and Probation Department develop their next System Improvement Plan.