



**S.A.F.E.**  
**Services Affirming**  
**Family Empowerment**

**BACKGROUND**

## **SAFE SYSTEM OF CARE**

The County Board of Supervisors authorized the Children's Services Network (CSN) to explore the creation of a Children's System of Care in July 1997. Many system of care models focus primarily on the high-end expensive services that attempt to keep already-troubled youth from entering high level out-of-county placements. While that effort must be a critical component of any system, the CSN wanted to build on the very positive results from the Healthy Starts, Youth Task Forces and other community based projects that were helping children and youth avoid reaching a critical stage where they are at risk of losing their home and school placement.

The SAFE System of Care builds upon the concept of multi-disciplinary, community-based, integrated, school-linked service delivery models that have been developed in the majority of counties throughout California and around the world. Three levels of service are incorporated: intensive treatment services, intervention services and referral, and community prevention activities. Services are family- and child-centered and the family is incorporated into planning and service delivery.

The CSN's Integrated Services Committee developed a detailed philosophy and an implementation plan that the Board approved September 1, 1998 and the first SAFE site opened on the Bauer-Speck Elementary School campus in Paso Robles later that year. At the time many local agencies were intensifying efforts to regionalize services and out-station services providers to local communities. The SAFE System of Care provided a natural locus for the coordination of these efforts.

In 2000 the Board of Supervisors reviewed the findings from the initial implementation and approved expansion into the South County in Oceano, Nipomo, Arroyo Grande and Arroyo Grande High School. The Atascadero Community Link added a SAFE community-based team to its operations in 2003 and the San Luis Coastal Unified School District began developing the first of two planned teams in 2005. Now, in 2006, there are nine SAFE sites and/or teams operating around the county.

## PARTNERS AND SHARED VALUES

It is important to realize that SAFE is not a program or a project, but rather a strength-based way of integrating and delivering services. Partnerships are key, both between service providers and between providers and the family. Eight years after the advent of SAFE this philosophy and practice has been adopted (and indeed mandated) by funders, organizations and entities around the world and at most levels of American service delivery.

The SAFE System of Care is a partnership between school districts, County Departments (Social Services, Mental Health, Drug & Alcohol Services, Probation, Public Health), Economic Opportunity Commission (EOC) programs (Homeless Services, Head Start) and many local community-based organizations such as Big Brothers/Big Sisters, the Women's Shelter or Hospice. The SAFE partners have identified the following values to guide practice:

- *Multi-agency case planning* to include the parent and child in the development of the plan
- *Collaboration and coordination* of service delivery to eliminate narrow interventions, fragmentation and duplication of efforts
- *Co-location* of multi-agency staff to improve communication, promote cross training and improve understanding of each agency's resources and strengths
- *Continuum of service* Creating levels of service within an enhanced system of care allows client needs to be met in the least restrictive manner possible
- *Cultural competence* via bilingual/bicultural staff and focus on improving access to culturally diverse groups
- *Community-based interventions* provide services in the neighborhoods, schools and homes of the families involved
- *Child and family centered services* directly involve families in the planning process, supporting and developing natural family resources and strengths
- *Interagency case planning* for families involved with multiple agencies to determine the most efficient case plan
- *Evaluation* of collaborative outcomes by using a unique data collection system created and maintained by the CSN.

## PLANNING AND FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

- *Oversight* provided by a multi-agency mid-management committee from the CSN to monitor effectiveness, resolve problematic issues, develop policy, provide direction and assist with outcome reports (SAFE MST, or Management Support Team).

The planning for SAFE System of Care continues to be based on several critical principles:

*1. The need to move away from grant status and make this system a part of the every day working responsibilities of the partner agencies.*

*2. The desire to build on family strengths.* A growing body of research shows that interventions with families are better received and have better long-term effect when families become partners in planning to meet their own needs. Combining [Asset Development](#) with [Best Practices](#) and Wrap-around services, San Luis Obispo County is among the strongest proponents of family strength philosophy in the State. SAFE family conferencing uses the best of these systems to empower families to solve their problems as independently as possible and to become self-sufficient and self-reliant.

*3. The desire to develop a true continuum of services from grassroots prevention through community-based intervention and referral to intensive multi-agency treatment.* This range of options allows SAFE System of Care staff to provide services based on the participant's presenting need, not the agencies' available programs. As the participant's needs change so can the level of service; likewise, different members of a family can receive appropriate services at different levels at one service delivery location.

## SAFE SERVICES STAFF

The SAFE staff developed core beliefs and goals as part of their team building.

### **Beliefs:**

- *Children and families are resilient and there is always hope for change and success.*
- *Healthy families ensure safe and secure communities.*

- *All individuals including every child deserve the right to be heard.*
- *Families have the individual strength and abilities to create safe and healthy environments*
- *Families have opportunities through participation in community resources and services*

**Goals:**

- *To develop a single case management system, including a universal intake process and common confidentiality statement.*
- *To allow families the opportunity to be part of on-going planning of services, focusing on their individual strengths.*
- *To communicate and function as a partnership to promote better access to community resources.*
- *To create a replicable system that ensures the health, safety and protection of children and families.*

SAFE services teams operate under a multidisciplinary team designation from the Juvenile Court. They participate in multi-disciplinary team and confidentiality training, meet weekly to staff cases and establish policies and procedures, and schedule on-going training as needed.

The SAFE teams are made up of agency and organizational staff as well as staff that is unique to the SAFE System of Care, such as Regional Coordinators, Site Coordinators and Family Advocates. These unique positions are funded jointly by the partners using agency and grant funding as well as leveraged funding from MediCal billing.

Regional Coordinators provide geographic oversight, staff supervision and community and partner outreach. Site Coordinators keep the flow of services and community and family meetings organized at specific locations. The Family Advocates are the heart of the SAFE System of Care, providing in-home services, transportation, translation and community outreach and education services. They help families navigate the services system and advocate for themselves. Family Advocates function as the supportive friend that everyone needs in challenging times.



## GOALS AND EVALUATION

Each region's SAFE structure and partners are adapted to fit the needs of the communities served but policies, procedures and outcome measures are standardized within SAFE for all sites.

The primary goals of the SAFE system of care are to ensure that all children are:

### ***Safe   Healthy   At Home   In School   Out of Trouble***

Measurable indicators track these goals, which capture the entire range of desirable service outcomes. For example, decreases in child abuse and domestic violence rates increase children's safety; decreased rates of substance abuse contribute to health.

The SAFE Data Management Team has developed standard evaluation tools for SAFE System of Care. All partner agency staff participates in data collection to determine the effectiveness of SAFE services. The evaluation data consistently indicates that families are stabilizing and improving in essential areas such as meeting basic needs, appropriate parenting skills (knowledge of child development, appropriate discipline, communication) and family functioning.

## SAFE MEASURABLE INDICATORS

### **Safe**

- Cared for and protected
- Not subject to physical or emotional violence
- Not placing self at risk of injury or illness

### **Healthy**

- Free of disease or illness; or disease or illness medically managed
- Happy with life and experiencing positive self attitude
- Free of illicit drugs or alcohol
- Not pregnant/not causing pregnancy; if pregnant, participating in prenatal care
- Achieving appropriate level of physical, mental and emotional development

### **At Home** (or appropriate permanent placement)

- Living in a safe, stable and nurturing environment
- Interacting positively with all other persons at current residence
- Receiving appropriate care, shelter, food and other necessities of life.

## **COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

### **In School** (or developmentally appropriate level of care)

- Attending school every school day
- Enrolling in an education program that suits abilities and goals
- Participating, earning good grades and learning
- Participating in school enrichment and extra-curricular activities
- Experiencing positive peer relationships at school

### **Out Of Trouble**

- Obeying all laws
- Engaged in self-controlled, positive, non-violent behavior
- Not involved with the juvenile justice system
- Not associated or involved with gangs or offenders

The SAFE System of Care is strongly supported by County Department Heads and the Directors/CEOs of agencies and organizations across the county. These leaders recognize a direct or indirect benefit to their clients, programs and/or community, even though the agency may not be a SAFE partner or even involved in family services. Family stability impacts all aspects of life across the County.

Community-based services centers mean less travel for staff and clients alike – thus reducing traffic congestion and vehicle wear-and-tear, improving air quality, maximizing time efficiency and reducing lost work time. More stable families means more employment and income, less time lost from school and jobs, better child development and school achievement, and greater community safety. The stronger the family foundations, the better the results for children – safe, healthy, at home, in school and out of trouble.