

**Santa Cruz County  
Child Welfare  
System Improvement Plan**



**February 27, 2008**

**County of Santa Cruz  
Human Services Department**

## Acknowledgements

The Human Services Department would like to thank the numerous individuals and organizations that participated in the local Child Welfare System Improvement Planning (SIP) process.

Human Services would like to extend a special thanks to the members of the SIP Steering Committee who have brought a wealth of experience and talent to this effort.

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## Santa Cruz County Child Welfare System Improvement Plan

In addition, the Human Services Department would like to acknowledge the valuable contributions of staff that supported this effort.

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## I. SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLANNING

Santa Cruz County, Human Services Department, Family and Children's Services is pleased to present the following report and plan for system improvement. A broad-based System Improvement Plan (SIP) Steering Committee, appointed in December 2006 and chaired by the honorable County Supervisor Mark W. Stone, was charged with overseeing the development of a local Child Welfare Services assessment and system improvement plan. To fulfill its charter and guide the process, the SIP Steering Committee utilized three planning principles: inclusion of a broad base of stakeholders in assessment and planning, transparency with stakeholders, and commitment to comprehensive inquiry and planning. As a result, partners with different experiences, priorities, and perspectives joined together and shaped the architecture of both the assessment and plan. Collectively, this process has increased local understanding of the child welfare system, enhanced community partnerships and created a dynamic model of inquiry and collaboration that forms the foundation for ongoing system improvement.

It should be noted that the plan is being adopted in a federal, state, and local budget environment that threatens the Human Services Department's ability to maintain current funding support for mandated child welfare services. It is the intent of the Family and Children's Services Division to implement the full breadth of the plan, however all strategies will be delivered in relationship to potential budget cuts the department may encounter in the coming years.

### **1. Process**

The SIP Steering Committee included foster parents, relative caregivers, the Juvenile Dependency Court Judge, the County Superintendent of Education, attorneys representing minors and parents, County Counsel, Court Appointed Special Advocates, directors of community service providers agencies, directors of Probation and of Children's Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Programs in the County, as well as management and supervisory staff of Family and Children's Services (FCS). The Deputy Director of Human Services, the Human Services Planning and Evaluation Unit, and managers from the Family and Children's Services Division were responsible for staffing the SIP Steering Committee in process development, data collection, and product delivery.

The SIP Steering Committee agreed to a one-year planning process with full committee meetings held monthly, and subcommittee and stakeholder meetings convened as needed. The County Self-Assessment (CSA) was adopted by the SIP Steering Committee in September 2007, approved by the Board of Supervisors in October 2007, and submitted to the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) for approval in November 2007. After completing the CSA, the Steering Committee worked diligently to develop a plan for system improvement.

#### *Assessment (January 2007 – September 2007)*

The initial phase of the planning process focused on increasing stakeholder understanding of the Child Welfare System, identifying assessment questions, implementing the assessment, and reviewing the findings. Human Services staff, Steering Committee members and consultants collected data pertinent to answer the questions that had been identified. Several methods were used to collect information. First, a variety of written and telephone surveys, as well as focus groups were conducted to gather stakeholder input. Second, key informants and experts from the local, state, and national level were enlisted to gather and analyze data. And finally, Human Services staff conducted an analysis of existing data from the dynamic reports of the UC

Berkeley website and designed and completed an in-depth research study on the recurrence of maltreatment in our county.

For six months, each Steering Committee meeting focused on reviewing information that had been gathered. Each presenter reviewed the findings and after group discussion and input, Steering Committee members were asked to adopt "key findings". The following presentations were provided to the Steering Committee:

- Performance Outcomes from AB 636 Measures, April 2007
- Child Welfare Decision Making, April 2007
- Mental Health Services and the Child Welfare System, June 2007
- Substance Abuse and the Child Welfare System, June, 2007
- Probation and Child Welfare, July 2007
- Education and Child Welfare, July 2007
- Prevention in Santa Cruz County, July 2007
- The Court and Child Welfare, July 2007
- Recurrence of Maltreatment, August 2007
- Resource Parent (Mail) Survey, September 2007
- Service Array and Child Welfare, Service Provider Survey, September 2007
- Family and Children's Services Staff Survey, September 2007
- Stakeholder Assessment: Results from Parents, Youth, Caregivers and CASAs, September 2007
- Quality Assurance in FCS, September 2007

*Planning (October 2007 – February 2008)*

Once the Steering Committee adopted the CSA in September, the focus was on the development of the System Improvement Plan. Human Services staff and the SIP Steering Committee translated the key findings from the assessment into goals and strategies for system improvement.

The starting place for designing system improvement was categorizing the numerous key findings from the assessment into thematic areas and clear goals. The findings fell under two broad areas of system improvement needs: 1) providing a broad array of supports and services to children, parents, and caregivers; and 2) promoting increased collaboration and accountability. The findings were then used to develop goals and strategies to address the findings.

The SIP Steering Committee held subcommittee meetings, in addition to its regular meetings, to identify and revise draft goals and strategies for system improvement. Smaller working groups were also convened to develop and revise strategies in the areas of mental health, substance abuse, education, and probation and develop focused strategies in each of these areas. The SIP Steering Committee reviewed recommendations from each of the subcommittees and revised the draft goals and strategies for the final plan.

## **2. Improvement Plans**

Reflecting the personal commitments of the Steering Committee members to system improvement, in January 2008 the Steering Committee adopted a six-year Community Plan. This community plan includes strategies that will be implemented by all the partners who were part of the system improvement planning, such as County Health, Probation and Education

services, as well as community based organizations. The SIP Steering Committee will provide ongoing monitoring and oversight of the community-wide implementation.

A portion of this community-wide plan was selected by FCS to be included in the State System Improvement Plan (SIP), which is discussed in the remainder of this narrative. These strategies were included in the plan because they were highly relevant to the state's outcomes and systemic factors, were able to be defined in concise milestones, and were realistically achievable in the three year period. Strategies included in the State Plan are strategies that address the three outcomes areas of safety, permanency and well being as well as five of the seven systemic factors.

## II. FINDINGS THAT SUPPORT QUALITATIVE CHANGE

### 1. Data Collection Methods and Analysis

As specified in the Santa Cruz County Self – Assessment 2007, extensive information was collected from key stakeholders in the child welfare system. Methods included telephone interviews, on-line surveys, mailed surveys, focus groups, key informant collaborative groups, and experts from the local, state, and national level were also enlisted to gather and analyze data, as listed below.

- Three Telephone Surveys
  - All parents and guardians with a case that opened in the child welfare system in 2005 or 2006 were part of the survey population, and offered a \$25 gift certificate for their time. 114 parents completed the telephone survey out of a population of 295 (a response rate of 39%).
  - All youth ages 12-18 with an open case in 2005 or 2006 were surveyed and offered a \$25 gift certificate for their time. 124 youth out of 356 in the population completed the interview (a response rate of 35%).
  - All foster parents and relative caregivers who had a child placed with them during 2005 or 2006 were surveyed. 131 caregivers out of 334 families in the population responded (a response rate of 39%).
- Two On-line Surveys
  - All community and public agencies that serve child welfare families or foster parents/relative caregivers were surveyed online. There was an 84% response rate (26 out of 31 agencies).
  - All FCS social workers, supervisors, clerical staff, and managers were surveyed with an online tool, with a response rate of 77%.
- Two Mail Surveys
  - All foster parents and relative caregivers that had a child placed with them in 2005 or 2006 were mailed an anonymous survey focused on issues in training and collaboration and communication with FCS. 80 written surveys were returned out of 347 (a response rate of 20%).
  - Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) staff and volunteers were surveyed on children's needs, satisfaction with social workers, and communication and collaboration. 64 out of 120 responded (53%).

- Local Key Informant Groups
  - Four former foster youth attended a focus group where they were asked about their current and past needs and views about the child welfare system.
  - County Probation Directors
  - County Children’s Mental Health and Alcohol and Drug Programs Directors
  - County Education Superintendent and Managers
  - Court Partners, including Dependency Court Judge, Parents and Minors Counsel, and County Counsel
- Key Experts in Specific Topic Areas
  - Child Welfare Decision Making, Raelene Freitag Ph.D, Children’s Research Center
  - Substance Abuse Services and Child Welfare, Sid Gardner, Children and Families Futures
  - Children’s Mental Health, Todd Sosna, Ph.D., California Institute of Mental Health
  - Quality Assurance, Nancy Goodban, Ph.D., Consultant

## **2. Findings**

Considerable amounts of data were collected in the assessment. These data were examined by staff and Steering Committee members in the planning process and used to develop both the community-wide plan for child welfare system improvement and the System Improvement Plan that follows the narrative. Below is a discussion of the relevant findings that led to the development of the System Improvement Plan organized by outcome area or systemic factor.

### *Safety*

Survey and key informant data identified parent’s alcohol and drug issues as a major factor in ensuring child safety. A majority of parents, participating in the telephone surveys, identified substance abuse as one of the top two challenges they faced. Despite this high need, local key informants reported that there was a dearth of substance abuse services for child welfare parents. Parents who had difficulty accessing substance abuse services were parents with children living in the home and parents with children ages three and over in out of home care.

In response to these findings, FCS will be partnering with Health Services Agency, Alcohol and Drug Programs to expand the local Dependency Drug Court to parents with children of all ages living in the home and with children ages three and over in out of home care. In addition, there will be increased access to outpatient and inpatient evidence-based substance abuse treatment and an enhancement to case coordination among the two systems.

### *Permanency*

Multiple findings in the assessment pointed to a need for continued work on ensuring permanent positive connections for children. In January 2007, Santa Cruz placed about half of foster children with all siblings and placed two-thirds with some or all siblings. Placement of sibling groups continues to be a high priority, however it is also a challenge because of the high cost of housing and the difficulty of caregivers being able to afford a large enough home to place sibling groups. Of those caregivers who participated in the telephone surveys, relative caregivers compared to foster parents tended to take in sibling groups. Santa Cruz County has worked to increase the rate of relative and non-relative extended family member (NREFM) placements,

and has made substantial progress. In January 2007, 47.6% of children were placed with relatives compared to 36.6% in January 2004.

As a result of these findings, FCS plans to enhance its effort in promoting connections among families with two key strategies, Family to Family and a Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP). The Family to Family model of family and neighborhood centered system of foster care will enable social workers to prevent out-of-home placements, increase relative placements and improve placement stability through the development of a team approach with caregivers, parents, youth, and communities. The team approach will be further enhanced by the development of a KSSP. Funding has been secured for the planning stage of a KSSP and a collaborative team including relative caregivers is currently carrying out the planning for this program.

In addition, two critical practice areas impacting permanency emerged in the assessment as needing improvement. These were concurrent planning and supervised visitation. Findings related to these practices were:

- In the assessment youth who had at one time been removed from their parents were asked about how they thought visits with their family could be improved. The majority of these youth said the visits could be longer and half said they would have liked more visits. In addition, one third of the youth said they would have liked a “better person” to monitor the visits. The issue of supervised visitation is one that had been selected by the SIP Steering Committee, the Courts, and the FCS staff as a key issue in the system improvement planning. As outlined in the plan, research will be done to identify best practices of supervised visitation, develop an evidence informed local model, and implement a new model for supervised visitation.
- In the quality assurance component of the assessment it was identified that FCS had been implementing concurrent planning in an unstructured manner. Based on these findings, FCS developed a concurrent planning policy and procedure guide and is currently training social workers, caregivers and other key stakeholders on these procedures. Concurrent planning is a key aspect of achieving permanency for a child and FCS will continue to work on internal communication, training and support of caregivers, and monitoring the effectiveness of policies and protocols regarding concurrent planning.

#### *Child Well Being*

Local key informant groups were convened to assess the well being of our child welfare population and the adequacy of the services currently in place. Two important findings were identified. It was found that there is not a systematic approach to mental health screening for children ages 3 and over who are not removed from their homes (these families are receiving Family Maintenance services). In addition, there is a lack of developmental and/or social-emotional screening and assessment for children ages 0 to 3. In order to begin to screen these children FCS will pilot test a developmental screening for young children and will systematically screen for mental health issues for all children in Family Maintenance services. These screenings will be implemented and data will be collected regarding the number of children in need of further assessment or treatment. These data will support advocacy and fund raising efforts to expand mental health services for these children.

#### *Service Array*

Two areas of service are addressed in the State System Improvement Plan, educational supports and housing. Findings related to these services areas were:

- Education was the number one challenge reported by youth ages 12-18 youth in the child welfare system in the 2007 survey. Both parents and caregivers also reported in telephone surveys their concerns about their child's educational needs. Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) reported a high level of unmet needs for educational issues of youth involved in the child welfare system. Additionally in the review of education, it was acknowledged by multiple stakeholders, that there is a high level of need and limited services supporting education of children in the child welfare system. In order to begin to better address this need FCS will be working with the Dependency Court to provide better oversight of children's education, provide education to parents and caregivers on their education rights and how to best advocate for children in the system, and work with the County Office of Education to develop clear roles and responsibilities in implementing AB 490 and document these roles and relevant protocols in a Memorandum of Understanding.
- Housing support was also cited as a service area in need of expansion in particular for youth aging out of the foster care system. The focus group of former foster youth highlighted this as a significant need. Therefore, expanding housing options for older youth is a key component of the SIP.

#### *Case Review System*

The assessment produced many positive results regarding the case review system, however, two areas in case planning emerged as needing enhancement. These were engaging stakeholders in case planning and social worker casework compliance.

- The survey data suggested that overall parents and youth were satisfied with their level of engagement with case planning, however the need for early engagement was identified.
- In the quality assurance component of the assessment it was identified that policies and protocols needed to be updated to ensure that all aspects of casework documentation are completed in a timely manner. As outlined in the System Improvement Plan, FCS will be utilizing SafeMeasures, a case management and reporting system developed by the Children's Research Center which includes CWS/CMS and Structured Decision-Making (SDM) data, to ensure that all case work documentation is being completed.

#### *Foster and Adoptive Parent Recruitment, Certification, Licensing and Retention*

Both of the surveys administered with foster and kin caregivers demonstrated that the majority were satisfied with their social workers. However the results suggested a need to improve overall communication with caregivers and to provide education on parenting issues related to foster children. FCS will be working to address these concerns by educating caregivers on their roles, rights, local policies and parenting issues that may arise while parenting foster children. In addition, to facilitate improved communication, FCS will be training new Social Workers on how to best support and communicate with resource families.

#### *Agency Collaboration*

Information collected through surveys and key informant focus groups suggested that several aspects of agency collaboration were working well, however critical areas needed improvement to ensure clear and consistent communication. An important collaboration that emerged as needing specific attention was the relationship with court partners, particularly with Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs)

- Close teamwork is demanded among all the court partners. In a key informant focus group of court partners (attorneys, advocates, and social workers) it was agreed that the collaboration is constant and effective. However, it was noted that documented protocols are needed regarding communication within and between FCS, CASA, and attorneys. Therefore case consultation protocols will be developed and implemented over the next three years.
- An important relationship in supporting children is the collaboration between CASAs and social workers. CASAs only reported moderate level satisfaction with social workers. In addition, over half (55%) of CASAs reported they felt a lack of support from social workers. Due to these results both FCS and CASA will work to clarify their roles and communication procedures and these will be documented in a Memorandum of Understanding. In addition, regular meetings will be scheduled for both management and social workers to ensure consistent communication.

In addition to these court specific relationships, surveys of staff revealed that staff wanted to access more information on local service providers so they can better coordinate services. This information will be provided to social workers in a variety of ways, as outlined in the System Improvement Plan.

#### *Quality Assurance*

Overall, the assessment findings in this area pointed to the need for formalized procedures and protocols. FCS has adopted a quality assurance policy and framework that includes a process for developing and revising policies, and a number of key policies have been developed or revised, or are currently in the process of development. An Online Practice Guide (OPG) is being developed for easy access to these policies and procedures as well as additional resources for staff.

One critical policy found to need revisions was the policy for receiving and addressing complaints. In the stakeholder surveys, a minority of parents, caregivers, and youth said they had made a complaint to FCS. However, many of those that made a complaint felt that their complaints were not resolved. Importantly, almost half (47%) of caregivers did not know how to make a complaint. A formal process of complaints is viewed as a critical aspect of delivering services however FCS also recognizes the need for informal processes to receive feedback and enhance avenues for communication between stakeholders and FCS. This is included in the System Improvement Plan.

In the assessment, available data on decision-making, demographics of the child welfare population, and participation rates were reviewed intensively. It was found that, in particular, two topic areas warrant continued and regular examination: decision-making and disproportionality.

- With regard to the use of data in decision-making, the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tools are used to assure consistency of decision-making practice. However, it was noted in the assessment that FCS does not have the ability to analyze SDM data for system improvement. In order to better utilize this information and monitor trends in decision making FCS has embarked on a process to obtain regular reports from the Children's Research Center.
- The assessment explored disproportionality of African American and Hispanic children in placement and noted the need for continued examination. Additional research will be conducted by the Planning and Evaluation staff and practice will be modified as needed to ensure equitable decision-making and practices.

### III. PEER QUALITY CASE REVIEW (PQCR)

In January 2007, FCS and Probation completed the Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR) as a tri-county effort with San Benito and Monterey Counties. FCS selected recurrence of maltreatment as the area of focus, while Probation focused on youth transitioning to adulthood. The PQCR was sent to the State in May 2007.

The PQCR final report documented several recommendations for further exploration. A number of these have been implemented, and several are slated to be implemented in the next three years. Examples of these are described below:

- In regards to training, FCS will be implementing three of the training recommendations from the PQCR: substance abuse, assessments, and aftercare planning. As part of the expansion of the local Drug Dependency Court, social workers and service providers will be trained on evidence based substance abuse treatment models. To support the goal of improving children's health, social workers will be trained on and will implement an assessment of child development. In addition, the Community Plan for Child Welfare includes a protocol for the implementation of aftercare plans and once the protocol is finalized, training will be provided for staff.
- The recommendations in the PQCR regarding increasing staff in order to reduce caseloads and allow more time with families, is a goal of FCS. However, at this time due to impending budget cuts it unlikely this will be implemented in the near future.
- FCS management has already implemented new communication vehicles between management and social workers, such as increased all division written notices, informal brown bag lunches, and an on-line satisfaction survey conducted in the assessment.
- The PQCR report noted a need for increased resources for substance abuse assessments and services and these resources have now been obtained. In the SIP, the milestones for supporting these services are outlined.
- The report recommended the exploration of the relationship between voluntary Family Maintenance and recurrence rates. This study will be implemented by the department's Planning and Evaluation unit in the next three years.
- The findings also suggested a need for closer collaboration with Probation, which is now occurring through regular and consistent meetings between FCS social workers and Probation officers to ensure clear communication and service coordination.

In addition to these qualitative practice changes, a significant result of the PQCR was that it informed the development of a comprehensive assessment plan. For example, the PQCR findings pointed toward a need for continued exploration of recurrence, which culminated in an intensive study on recurrence cases. In the County Self-Assessment suggestions for further exploration in the next PQCR were identified and the county continues to see this case review as an opportunity to increase our understanding of the local system of services.

IV. SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN

**I. Safety Outcome: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.**

**County's Current Performance:**

*Indicator S1.1: No recurrence of maltreatment (6 months).* Santa Cruz County's performance improved from 90.6% in 2003 to 94.1% in 2006, almost reaching the federal standard of 94.6%. However, it is still an area of concern, especially when looking at a longer timeframe to recurrence. In the most recent period available on the Berkeley website, 14% of children in Santa Cruz County experienced a recurrence in 12 months, compared to the Statewide rate of 12%.

Survey and key informant data identified parent alcohol and drug issues as a major factor in ensuring child safety. However, local key informants reported that there was a dearth of substance abuse services for parents with children of all ages living in the home (receiving Family Maintenance services) and parents with children ages three and over in out of home.

**Improvement Goal 1.0**

Reduce and prevent parental substance abuse.

**Strategy 1. 1**

Expand and enhance capacity of Drug Dependency Court (DDC)

**Strategy Rationale:** Substance abuse problems are present in the majority of child neglect and abuse cases in the county. Methamphetamine is a particular problem. DDC is an effective approach for engaging parents in treatment.

Milestone		Timeframe		Assigned to	
	<p><b>1.1.1</b> Partner with Alcohol and Drug Programs to implement enhanced DDC model which includes expanded referral criteria and enhanced service delivery.</p>		February 2008 and ongoing		Program Manager/ DI Supervisors
	<p><b>1.1.2</b> Support engagement into DDC by talking with referred parents about DDC benefits and letting them know that parents' attorneys and Alcohol and Drug Specialists will provide information on the program to them at, or immediately following, the initial Court hearing.</p>		February 2008 and ongoing		Program Manager/ DI Supervisors

	<p><b>1.1.3</b> Participate in trainings on evidence-based substance abuse intervention and prevention practices.</p> <p><b>1.1.4</b> Evaluate effectiveness of expanded DDC model.</p>		<p>February 2010</p> <p>February 2008 and ongoing</p>		<p>Program Manager/ DI Supervisors</p> <p>Planning and Evaluation Director and Analyst</p>
<p><b>Strategy 1. 2</b> Document in an MOU the roles and responsibilities of Health Services Agency – Alcohol and Drug and Human Services staff in ensuring clients have access to substance abuse assessment and treatment, and implement and monitor procedures.</p>		<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> ADP provides referral and treatment for parents in the child welfare system. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will document and clarify the roles and responsibilities and improve service coordination.</p>			
<b>Milestone</b>	<p><b>1.2.1</b> Finalize MOU outlining roles and responsibilities of FCS, CareerWorks, and ADP, including data reporting and communication.</p>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<p>March 2008</p> <p>March 2008 and ongoing</p> <p>April through December 2008 and ongoing</p>	<b>Assigned to</b>	<p>Division Director</p> <p>Program Manager</p> <p>Program Manager</p>
	<p><b>1.2.2</b> Establish regular meetings between FCS, CareerWorks, and ADP to review implementation of MOU</p>				
	<p><b>1.2.3</b> Review data reports from MOU and identify client utilization of services</p>				
<p><b>Notes Goal 1:</b> In October 2007, Santa Cruz County received a federal grant to expand Dependency Drug Court, and is in the process of implementing it.</p> <p><b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b> Training and technical assistance on the Matrix Model and Seeking Safety will be provided through the DDC expansion grant. Staff will require training on implementation of the MOU. This can be accomplished internally.</p> <p><b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b> ADP is a key partner, providing or linking to case screening, assessment, referral, management, and treatment resources. The CareerWorks Division provides employment and public assistance to clients who often are also served by FCS as well, and as such is another key partner.</p> <p><b>Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.</b> None</p>					

## II. Permanency Outcome: The family relationships and connections of children served by the CWS will be preserved, as appropriate.

### County's Current Performance:

**Indicator 4A: Children placed together with some or all siblings.** Santa Cruz County's performance has not changed dramatically since the previous CSA, and as of January 2007 is close to the State average. In January 2007, Santa Cruz placed 47.4% of children with all siblings compared to 47.2% statewide, and placed 66.7% of children with some or all siblings compared with 68.9% statewide. However, placement of sibling groups continues to be a challenge because of the high cost of housing, and the difficulty of many caregivers in affording a large enough home to place sibling groups.

**Indicator 4B: Foster care placement in least restrictive setting.** Santa Cruz County has worked diligently to increase the rate of relative and NREFM placements, and has made substantial progress since the last CSA. In January 2007, 47.6% of children were placed with relatives compared to 36.6% in January 2004. During this same time, the percentage placed in foster homes decreased to 26.9% in January 2007 from 40.4% in January 2004. However, the County will continue to focus on this area.

### Improvement Goal 2.0

Improve family connections

#### Strategy 2.1

Implement Family to Family.

#### Strategy Rationale

Family to Family (F2F) is a family centered, neighborhood based system of foster care promoting permanence for all children. One of its core strategies is Team Decision Making, which helps to prevent out-of-home placements, increase relative placements and improve placement stability. F2F stresses a team approach with caregivers, and works to engage parents, youth, caregivers, and the community.

Milestone	Timeframe	Assigned to
<b>2.1.1</b> Hire F2F Coordinator	March 2008	Division Directors & Program Managers
<b>2.1.2</b> Conduct initial F2F assessment with Annie E. Casey Foundation	May 2008	Management Team & F2F Coordinator
<b>2.1.3</b> Establish F2F planning team and initiate planning	May 2008	F2F Coordinator & Planning Team
<b>2.1.4</b> Train staff and resource families on Team Decision Making (TDM) and implement TDM	July 2008	F2F Coordinator & Planning Team, Staff Development
<b>2.1.5</b> Train staff on enhancing relationships and facilitating partnerships with birth families, resource families, and service providers	January 2009 and ongoing	F2F Coordinator & Staff Development

<p><b>Strategy 2. 2</b> Implement a local concurrent planning policy and procedures.</p>		<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> Effective concurrent planning is a critical component of any plan for maintaining family connections for children who do not reunify. Locating viable relatives who can become a concurrent placement and/or finding concurrent homes able to continue contacts with the birth family are important features of any concurrent planning process.</p>			
<b>Milestone</b>	<p><b>2.2.1.</b> Joint unit meetings with all FCS staff to develop communication procedures for the implementation of concurrent planning policy</p>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<p>March - April 2008</p>	<b>Assigned to</b>	<p>Concurrent Planning Quality Team</p>
	<p><b>2.2.2</b> Develop and implement a plan to provide training and support to assist caregivers with concurrent planning.</p>		<p>May 2008 and ongoing</p>		<p>Concurrent Planning Quality Team</p>
	<p><b>2.2.3</b> Review implementation of concurrent planning policy and revise policies and protocols as needed</p>		<p>December 2008 and ongoing</p>		<p>Concurrent Planning Quality Team</p>
<p><b>Strategy 2. 3</b> Develop and implement a Kinship Support Services Program (KSSP)</p>		<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> Kin and non-kin caregivers help to preserve and maintain a dependent child's connection to their birth family. Fifty percent of Santa Cruz County's dependent children are cared for by kin and non-relative extended family member caregivers. These families can benefit from the information, support and specialized services available to them from a Kinship Support Services Program.</p>			
<b>Milestone</b>	<p><b>2.3.1</b> Complete planning process</p>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<p>June, 2008</p>	<b>Assigned to</b>	<p>Program Manager, Division Analyst and KSSP Planning Team</p>
	<p><b>2.3.2</b> Apply for implementation funding</p>		<p>May – June 2008</p>		<p>Division Analyst</p>
	<p><b>2.3.3</b> If funded, initiate implementation, including issuing an RFP, choosing a provider, and developing program design.</p>		<p>June – August 2008</p>		<p>Program Manager and Division Analyst</p>
<p><b>Notes Goal 2:</b> Implementation of KSSP is contingent on availability of state funding.</p>					
<p><b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b> Staff and caregiver training will be necessary for all strategies.</p>					
<p><b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b> The Annie E Casey Foundation will provide technical assistance in the implementation of Family to Family.</p>					

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

It is often difficult to place sibling groups together with relatives because of licensing requirements governing the number of children per bedroom and space. The high cost of housing in Santa Cruz County means that many times, relatives do not have houses large enough to house sibling groups under State requirements. The State might want to consider allowing counties to waive these licensing restrictions under certain conditions, in order to meet the policy goal of supporting family connections and relative placements.

**III. Permanency Outcome: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry to foster care.**

**County's Current Performance:**

*Indicator C1.4: Reentry following reunification (exit cohort).* Santa Cruz County has a low percentage of children re-entering foster care after reunification. The most recent data, from the 2005 exit cohort, show that Santa Cruz had 6.6% of children re-enter foster care compared to a statewide average of 11.9% and the federal standard of 9.9%. The County's performance has also improved substantially since 2003. However, Santa Cruz County desires to continue to ensure safe and lasting reunification.

**Improvement Goal 3.0**

Improve the quality and availability of supervised visitation services.

**Strategy 3. 1**

Identify supervised visitation best practices and implement strategies for quality improvement in order to ensure visits are purposeful.

**Strategy Rationale**

Visitation is one of the most important factors in successful reunification. Progressive, planful visitation supports parents in developing and maintaining healthy relationships with their child(ren) in preparation for reunification.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>3.1.1</b> Identify evidence-informed supervised visitation practices that can be implemented locally	<b>Timeframe</b>	May 2008	<b>Assigned to</b>	Supervised Visitation Quality Team
	<b>3.1.2</b> Utilizing best practices identified, design and document procedures for supervised visitation model that includes levels of supervised visitation, assessment tools, and the development of a visitation plan for each family		July 2008		Supervised Visitation Quality Team
	<b>3.1.3</b> Pilot revised model, evaluate effectiveness and begin full implementation.		August 2008		Supervised Visitation Quality Team

**Strategy 3. 2**

Increase the number of visit monitors to facilitate supervised visits, especially on evenings and weekends.

**Strategy Rationale**

Increased availability of visitation will increase the chances of successful reunification.

Milestone		Timeframe	Assigned to
3.2.1.	Develop tracking system to identify resources required	March 2008	Program Manager
3.2.2	Identify and obtain, if possible, additional staff resources to provide supervised visits	April – August 2008	Division Director
3.2.3	If additional resources are obtained, implement increased visitation including evenings and weekends	September 2008 and ongoing	Program Manager
<b>Notes Goal 3:</b>			
The greatest challenge is finding additional resources to serve the needs of children and parents at a time of tight and shrinking budgets.			
<b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b>			
Training on the new model, including the levels of supervision and how to assess visitation needs and develop a visitation plan, will be needed for social workers and visit supervisors. FCS will seek to contract with Rose Wentz to provide the training.			
<b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b>			
FCS works closely with Children’s Mental Health, which provides therapeutic supervised visitation to children over 3, and the Parents Center, a local nonprofit under contract with FCS to provide visitation to children ages 0-3. Both agencies are participating in an ongoing quality team to review and improve supervised visitation. In addition, caregiver representatives will participate in planning and implementing the new model.			
<b>Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.</b>			
None			

**IV. Wellbeing Outcome: Ensure children receive appropriate services to meet physical and mental health needs.**

**County's Current Performance:**  
 There is currently a lack of developmental screenings for children under three. Children over the age of 3 who have an open CWS case and are still living at home (Family Maintenance cases) are not systematically screened for mental health issues.

**Improvement Goal 4.0**  
 Improve children's health.

**Strategy 4. 1**  
 Pilot FCS Social Workers performing developmental screenings for children (0-3) in CWS and use results of screening to determine the number of children needing further assessment and treatment.

**Strategy Rationale**  
 Early screening and assessment of developmental problems provides the opportunity for early intervention and treatment.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>4.1.1</b> Identify developmental screening tool for young children and train social workers in its use	<b>Timeframe</b>	April 2008	<b>Assigned to</b>	Program Manager
	<b>4.1.2</b> Pilot social workers performing developmental screenings		June 2008		Program Manager
	<b>4.1.3</b> Track and refer children who need further assessment and treatment.		June 2008 and ongoing		Planning and Evaluation

**Strategy 4. 2**  
 Implement Mental Health Screening Tool (MHST) for children in Family Maintenance (FM).

**Strategy Rationale**  
 This tool is currently used for Family Reunification cases, and the CSA identified the need to expand its use to FM cases as well.

<b>Milestone</b>	Administer the MHST to all children in FM	<b>Timeframe</b>	April 2008 and ongoing	<b>Assigned to</b>	Program Manager and Dependency Investigation Supervisors
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**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.** Depending on the selection of the developmental screening instrument, FCS may need to purchase an instrument. Social Workers will need training on the screening, and a tracking system for the completion of the screenings will need to be developed.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.** FCS will work with HSA Children's Mental Health in the expanded implementation of the Mental Health Screening Tool.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**  
 None

**V. Systemic Factor: Service Array**

**County's Current Performance:**

In a 2007 telephone survey of youth receiving child welfare services, two out of three youth said that one of their top needs was school. Parents also listed school as one of their child's top needs. In this survey it was also noted that half (51%) of the youth reported that they had changed schools at least one time since their family was involved in CPS and the top reason (44%) was to live with a relative/ foster family. In addition to these survey findings, the Santa Cruz County Office of Education (COE) reported that AB490 is in place locally, but compliance is not consistent. Further, both FCS and COE identified that compliance is currently dependent on individual efforts of social workers, CASAs, providers and caregivers for children, resulting in inconsistent implementation.

In a 2007 focus group with four former foster youth; three of the four youth in the focus group described themselves as homeless. In addition to this finding, it is important to note that housing is recognized as a significant challenge faced by the community as a whole due to the high and often increasing cost of housing in the area.

**Improvement Goal 5.0**  
Improve educational success of children and youth.

**Strategy 5. 1**  
Implement evidence-informed practices that will enhance Dependency Court oversight of foster children's educational outcomes.

**Strategy Rationale**  
School problems are the most commonly identified by foster youth, and the Court is well-positioned to ensure that educational supports are provided.

Milestone		Timeframe		Assigned to	
	<p><b>5.1.1.</b> Review Beyond the Bench findings on educational oversight with the Court and determine which recommendations to advocate for implementation</p>		March 2008		Assistant Division Director and County Counsel
	<p><b>5.1.2</b> Develop information and recommendations to provide to the Court to support educational oversight</p>		November - December 2008		Assistant Division Director and County Counsel
	<p><b>5.1.3</b> Work with the Court to implement improvements</p>		January 2009 and ongoing		Assistant Division Director and County Counsel

**Strategy 5. 2**  
Train caregivers and parents about education rights and advocacy.

**Strategy Rationale**  
Well-informed and knowledgeable parents and caregivers can improve educational outcomes by effectively advocating for the needs of foster youth within the educational system.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>5.2.1</b> Create and convene a work group of key stakeholders and identify training curriculum or practices already developed in other communities for training caregivers and parents on their educational rights and how to best advocate for children.	<b>Timeframe</b>	September 2008 – January 2009	<b>Assigned to</b>	Program Manager, Human Services Staff Development, Cabrillo College, and Regional Training Academy
	<b>5.2.2</b> Identify training resources and develop curriculum.		February – May 2009		Program Manager, Human Services Staff Development, Cabrillo College, and Regional Training Academy
	<b>5.2.3</b> Devise and implement marketing strategies for both parents and caregivers to attend training, and provide trainings for parents and caregivers.		June 2009 and ongoing		Program Manager, Human Services Staff Development, Cabrillo College
<b>Strategy 5.3</b> Develop an interagency MOU on the implementation of AB490 clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of all parties (schools, placing agencies, caregivers, parents).		<b>Strategy Rationale</b> To ensure that the educational rights of foster youth to receive equivalent educational opportunities are respected and honored, an MOU clearly defining each stakeholder’s responsibility and role in working toward the educational success of foster youth is needed.			
<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>5.3.1</b> Utilize the Foster Youth Education Advisory Board to draft MOU.	<b>Assigned to</b>	January – February 2008	<b>Assigned to</b>	Program Manager and County Office of Education
	<b>5.3.2</b> Obtain feedback from stakeholders, revise as needed, get consensus and finalize. Obtain signatures of all stakeholders		February – August 2008		Program Manager and County Office of Education
	<b>5.3.3</b> Develop and implement training strategies for FCS stakeholders in implementation of the protocols documented in the MOU		August 2008 and ongoing		Program Manager and County Office of Education
<b>Notes Goal 5:</b> Education partners may not be available during the Summer, causing delays.					
<b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b> The Court, the schools, and FCS need to redefine their roles and protocols for communication in order to better serve the educational needs of foster youth.					

**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.**

Training will be necessary to implement the Court oversight, and will be key in providing information on educational rights as well as implementing the MOU. The training can be done by local partners.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.**

The Court is a key partner in agreeing to a stronger role in educational oversight. The Santa Cruz County Office of Education is key to developing and implementing the AB 490 MOU.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

None

**Improvement Goal 6.0**

Expand housing opportunities for transitioning foster youth.

**Strategy 6. 1**

Expand current THP-Plus housing to serve more youth and assess Host Family Model of THP-Plus housing program and determine feasibility.

**Strategy Rationale**

Housing needs are identified as a major problem by transitioning foster youth

Milestone		Timeframe		Assigned to	
	<p><b>6.1.1</b> Expand current THP-Plus housing to serve 20 youth.</p>		January - June 2008		Division Analyst and THP-Plus Provider
	<p><b>6.1.2</b> Assess Host Family Model of THP-Plus housing program and determine if able to implement locally. If viable option and expansion funding is obtained, begin RFP process to contract with provider.</p>		June 2008 – June 2009		Division Analyst and THP-Plus Provider
	<p><b>6.1.3</b> If expansion funding is obtained, expand THP-Plus housing to serve 30 youth.</p>		January – December 2009		Division Analyst and THP-Plus Provider

**Notes Goal 6:**

The expansion of THP-Plus to 30 in 2009 may be dependent on implementing Host Family Model and/or County purchasing dedicated rental units. Additionally, all THP-Plus expansion is contingent on securing State funding.

**Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.**

Expansion of THP-Plus to additional slots will not require systemic changes, unless the Host Family Model is adopted.

**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.**

May need to get technical support from THP-Plus Implementation Project; will need to review other Host Family models in other counties.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.**

The THP-Plus provider will work closely with FCS on all aspects of implementation of this strategy.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

State funding and the State budget will drive the ability for expansion of THP-Plus.

**VI. Systemic Factor: Case Review System**

**County's Current Performance:**  
 The CSA identified the need for enhanced engagement of parents and children in developing and understanding their case plans, particularly at the onset of services. The CSA also found that Santa Cruz County is beginning to develop standardized case review protocols, but these need to be finalized and implemented.

**Improvement Goal 7.0**  
 Increase the engagement of parents and youth in case planning.

**Strategy 7.1**  
 Identify best practices for engaging parents and youth in case planning. Develop and pilot protocols to more effectively engage parents and youth in the development and updating of their case plans.

**Strategy Rationale**  
 Family engagement is essential to a successful case plan. When parents fully participate in the development of the case plan they are more likely to comply with its terms and successfully reunify. When youth are truly involved in the development of their case plan, they are more likely to understand it and want to make it work.

<b>Milestone</b>	7.1.1 Work with Annie E Casey Foundation to research best practices in parent and youth engagement, as part of Family to Family implementation	<b>Timeframe</b>	July 2008 – February 2009	<b>Assigned to</b>	Family to Family Supervisor
	7.1.2 Select engagement strategy and pilot test		March – September 2009		Family to Family Supervisor
	7.1.3 Adjust engagement strategy and implement as needed		October 2009 and ongoing		Family to Family Supervisor

**Strategy 7.2**  
 Develop and distribute Bills of Rights for parents and foster youth

**Strategy Rationale**  
 The child welfare system is stressful and confusing to families. A Bill of Rights empowers the holder, and clarifies his or her rights in the child welfare system and the Courts.

<b>Milestone</b>	7.2.1. Work with County Counsel to review current Bill of Rights for foster youth, and to identify and develop draft elements for Bill of Rights for parents	<b>Timeframe</b>	April - December 2008	<b>Assigned to</b>	Division Director and County Counsel
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	<p><b>7.2.2</b> Partner with foster youth and parent representatives to refine the elements of the Bills of Rights for foster youth and for parents</p>		<p>January – March 2009</p>		<p>Division Director and Program Manager</p>
	<p><b>7.2.3</b> Publish and disseminate Bills of Rights to all foster children and parents, and also on the website and to other agencies as appropriate</p>		<p>April 2009</p>		<p>Program Manager</p>
<p><b>Notes Goal 7:</b>Parent and youth engagement will be implemented with Family to Family.</p>					
<p><b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b> These strategies will support systemic changes within the division to build better partnerships and work more effectively with parents and children in the child welfare system.</p>					
<p><b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b> Training social workers, parents, and foster youth will be essential. FCS will work with Annie E Casey Foundation to develop appropriate training for family engagement.</p>					
<p><b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b> Parents and foster youth are the key partners, along with the Annie E Casey Foundation which will provide technical assistance and support. County Counsel will take the lead in making sure the Bills of Rights comply with federal and state statutes.</p>					
<p><b>Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.</b> None</p>					
<p><b>Improvement Goal 8</b> Improve the case compliance review system.</p>					
<p><b>Strategy 8. 1</b> Develop and implement standardized protocols for casework compliance reviews.</p>			<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> Case review is an important supervisory and training tool to ensure that practice is consistent with policy and that families and children are effectively served.</p>		
<p><b>Milestone</b></p>	<p><b>8.1.1</b> Complete implementation of supervisory and program manager SDM case reviews and finalize policy and procedure</p>	<p><b>Timeframe</b></p>	<p>April - July 2008</p>	<p><b>Assigned to</b></p>	<p>Program Manager</p>
	<p><b>8.1.2</b> Complete implementation of compliance checklist for supervisor review of ongoing cases and finalize policy and procedure</p>		<p>August – October 2008</p>		<p>Program Manager</p>
	<p><b>8.1.3</b> Present on the use of SafeMeasures for child welfare system reviews at annual SDM conference</p>		<p>November 2008</p>		<p>Division Analyst</p>

**Notes Goal 8**

The casework compliance reviews are currently in the process of implementation.

**Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.**

These changes will help to institutionalize consistency and standardization of case reviews.

**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.**

Supervisors and program managers will need to be trained on the case review protocols.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.**

Children’s Research Center developed the SDM reviews and is partnering with the County to develop the SafeMeasures reviews.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

None

**VII. Systemic Factor: Foster and adoptive parent recruitment certification, licensing, and retention**

**County’s Current Performance:**

The CSA identified the need to work more closely with foster parents and relative caregivers to provide appropriate support and training.

**Improvement Goal 9.0.**

Improve support for caregivers.

**Strategy 9.1**

Develop and disseminate Resource Parent Handbook for caregivers.

**Strategy Rationale**

A Resource Parent Handbook will provide caregivers with ready access to key information which will enable them to more easily get resources and support they need.

Milestone		Timeframe		Assigned to	
	<p><b>9.1.1</b> Obtain and incorporate feedback from caregivers and finalize Handbook.</p>		February – March 2008		Program Manager
	<p><b>9.1.2</b> Publish Handbook and disseminate to current caregivers. Post on the Foster Care web site. Implement plan for updating Handbook as needed.</p>		March – May 2008		Program Manager
	<p><b>9.1.3</b> Update Handbook to incorporate Bill of Rights for Caregivers</p>		May 2009		Program Manager

<b>Strategy 9. 2</b> Develop and distribute a Bill of Rights for caregivers		<b>Strategy Rationale</b> Caregivers have expressed the desire for a Bill of Rights, in order to clearly delineate their roles and rights within the child welfare system.	
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>9.2.1.</b> Work with County Counsel to identify and to develop draft elements for Bill of Rights for caregivers	<b>Timeframe</b>	April - December 2008
	<b>9.2.2</b> Partner with caregiver representatives to refine the elements of the Bills of Rights for caregivers		January – March 2009
	<b>9.2.3</b> Publish and disseminate Bill of Rights to caregivers, and also on the website and to other agencies as appropriate		April 2009
		<b>Assigned to</b>	Division Director and County Counsel
			Division Director and Program Manager
			Program Manager
<b>Strategy 9. 3</b> Incorporate guidelines for supporting and communicating with resource families (through reunification and other transitions) into new social worker training		<b>Strategy Rationale</b> Implementation of Family to Family involves new ways of working with families and caregivers. These need to be incorporated into new worker training, as well as in-service for current social workers, in order to ensure that the concepts are integrated into the daily work.	
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>9.3.1</b> Identify elements to be covered in new social worker training	<b>Timeframe</b>	December 2008
	<b>9.3.2</b> Develop curriculum that includes the necessary elements		March 2009
	<b>9.3.3</b> Implement curriculum as part of induction training		August 2009
		<b>Assigned to</b>	Program Manager
			Staff Development Trainer
			Staff Development Trainer
<b>Notes Goal 9:</b> While the development of the formal curriculum is in progress, in-service will be piloted and implemented in all units.			
<b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b> Improving collaboration and communication between FCS staff and caregivers is an important systemic change that was identified under the CSA.			
<b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b> Social workers and caregivers will need to be trained.			
<b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b> Caregivers, including foster parents and relative caregivers, will be key partners in the development and implementation of these strategies. County Counsel will take the lead in making sure the Bill of Rights complies with federal and state statutes. Family to Family technical assistance partners will also play a key role.			

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

None

## VIII. Systemic Factor: Agency Collaborations

### County's Current Performance:

The staff and stakeholder surveys undertaken for the CSA indicated that agency collaboration and communication was an area for improvement. The findings in this area focused on the need for better individual level communication between social workers, partners and stakeholders, as well as, better policy level and systemic collaboration protocols. .

In particular, CASAs reported more moderate satisfaction with social workers than did parents, youth or caregivers. Over half (55%) of CASAs reported they felt a lack of support from social workers. In a discussion with court partners it was highlighted that better case decisions are made when HRA consults with CASA and attorneys prior to taking actions. All partners agree that communication protocols within and between our organizations need to be strengthened.

### Improvement Goal 10.0

Work with partner agencies to improve collaborative relationships.

#### Strategy 10.1

Develop and implement protocols for case consultation with resource parents, CASAs, service providers and attorneys as appropriate.

#### Strategy Rationale

Social Workers, Court partners and CASA have all identified a need to have better and more consistent communication procedures in order to ensure quality decisions are made for families.

Milestone		Timeframe	Assigned to
	<b>10.1.1</b> Develop written guidelines regarding when CASAs and attorneys will be included in HRA sponsored case consultation.	November - December 2008	Assistant Division Director/ Program Managers
	<b>10.1.2</b> Develop written standards of practice for all Court partners about changes in recommendations, new information and potential "hot button" issues prior to hearing and trial dates.	January – March 2009	Dependency Court Systems group
	<b>10.1.3</b> Develop written communication protocols between partners to assist in decision-making regarding reunification and concurrent planning activities.	April – June 2009	Assistant Division Director/ Program Managers

<p><b>Strategy 10.2</b> Improve communication and coordination between FCS and CASA.</p>		<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> Both Social Workers and CASA have indicated that there is a need to maintain regular communication in order to create a deeper understanding of roles and limitations, achieve a higher quality of team approach service delivery and minimize conflict.</p>	
<p><b>Milestone</b></p>	<p><b>10.2.1.</b> Create an annual plan and schedule of monthly meetings between CASA and FCS directors/managers.</p>	<p>March 2008</p>	<p>Assistant Division Director and CASA</p>
	<p><b>10.2.2</b> Implement quarterly meetings between CASA and FCS supervisors and occasional meetings between CASA advocates and FCS social workers, to support and coordinate services.</p>	<p>March 2008 and ongoing</p>	<p>Program Managers, Supervisors, and CASA</p>
	<p><b>10.2.3</b> Develop MOU on working with CASA (including timely notification of placement changes and social worker changes).</p>	<p>November 2008 – February 2009</p>	<p>Assistant Division Director, Program Managers, and CASA</p>
<p><b>Strategy 10.3</b> Ensure that social workers have access to information on community services through staff discussion groups, access to on-line resource directories and better linkages with countywide integration efforts.</p>		<p><b>Strategy Rationale</b> Many families in the child welfare system have inadequate support networks. It is important for social workers to have up-to-date information on resources in order to make successful referrals and to help families link to community-based supports.</p>	
<p><b>Milestone</b></p>	<p><b>10.3.1</b> Share information about community resources with social workers through unit meetings, brown bag lunches, and other means.</p>	<p>March – September 2008 and ongoing</p>	<p>Program Managers</p>
	<p><b>10.3.2</b> Develop Resources section of Online Practice Guide (OPG) to provide staff with current information on resources for families.</p>	<p>July 2008 - June 2009</p>	<p>Division Analysts</p>
	<p><b>10.3.3</b> Incorporate information on community resources into new worker training.</p>	<p>July 2008 and ongoing</p>	<p>Staff Development Trainer</p>

**Notes Goal 10:**

Communication and referral networks are often informal and based on historical experience. Formalizing roles and relationships, and clarifying what resources are available, will be an important improvement.

**Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.**

More effective mechanisms for communication and collaboration are an important systemic improvement that will benefit children and families served by FCS.

**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.**

All stakeholders, including FCS social work staff, will need to be trained on new protocols and MOUs.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.**

CASA, service providers, and attorneys have committed to working closely with FCS to implement these strategies.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

None

## IX. Systemic Factor: Quality Assurance

**County's Current Performance:**

The CSA identified several key areas where quality assurance improvement was needed.

- At the beginning of the CSA, Santa Cruz County did not have a clearly defined quality assurance system and several findings pointed to the need for clarification and review of specific child welfare policies and procedures.
- For example, addressing complaints was an issue brought up through the stakeholder surveys. A minority of parents, caregivers, and youth said they had made a complaint to FCS. However, many of those that made a complaint felt that their complaints were not resolved. Almost half (47%) of caregivers did not know how to make a complaint. One in five parents (22%) said they had made a complaint and two-thirds of those parents said they did not get help in resolving the problem.
- With regard to the use of data in decision-making, the CSA found that Structured Decision-Making tools are used to assure consistency of decision-making practice. However, FCS does not have the ability to analyze SDM data for system improvement.
- The decision-making findings mostly focused on child welfare decision processes, such as screen out rates, case opening rates, disproportionality of African American and Hispanic children in placement, and the possible effects of voluntary services versus court ordered services.

**Improvement Goal 11.0**

Improve quality and availability of program and practice documentation online.

**Strategy 11.1**

Develop an Online Practice Guide (OPG) for FCS staff.

**Strategy Rationale**

An online procedure guide (OPG) will provide the Agency with an efficient way to organize and disseminate information to staff and to keep current with changes in policies and procedures, as well as provide more consistency in practice.

Milestone		Timeframe		Assigned to
	<b>11.1.1</b> Launch first phase of OPG, to include all existing policies and procedures with room to develop others.		March - June 2008	Division Analysts
	<b>11.1.2</b> Develop content for all “placeholders” in OPG and continue to add in all policies and procedures that are developed and updated; Focus on thorough development of resources section and begin to develop internal links.		July 2008 - June 2009	Division Analysts
	<b>11.1.3</b> Continue to add in and modify all policies and procedures as needed and further develop internal linkages; Focus on developing a search function.		June 2009 and ongoing	Division Analysts
<b>Notes Goal 11</b> The OPG is currently under development.				
<b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b> Policies and procedures are currently stored online on the departmental intranet. The OPG will provide a different, more user-friendly interface with internal linkages to forms and other polices.				
<b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b> The Human Services Information Technology Department will develop the technical infrastructure with input from FCS, and provide training to FCS Division Analysts in how to populate it with content.				
<b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b> Will need extensive support from the Human Services Information Technology Department throughout development of OPG.				
<b>Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.</b> None				

<b>Improvement Goal 12.0</b>			
Improve FCS ability to respond to stakeholder concerns.			
<b>Strategy 12.1</b>		<b>Strategy Rationale</b>	
Review and revise existing FCS procedures for addressing complaints from parents, youth, and caregivers and train social workers and stakeholders on improved complaint procedures.		Effectively addressing complaints and grievances is an essential aspect of quality assurance and program improvement.	
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>12.1.1</b> Review and revise existing FCS procedures for addressing complaints from parents, youth, and caregivers	<b>Timeframe</b>	March – May 2008
	<b>12.1.2</b> In addition to the formal complaint protocols, identify and implement alternative pathways such as suggestions boxes and community office hours.		June 2008
	<b>12.1.3</b> Assess effectiveness of complaint resolution system and implement improvements as needed.		December 2008
		<b>Assigned to</b>	Division Director and Program Manager
			Division Director and Program Manager
			Division Director and Program Manager
<b>Notes:</b>			
This is an important area for improvement. The CSA identified concerns from foster youth, parents, and foster parents about understanding the complaint process, and whether FCS was effectively addressing and resolving complaints.			
<b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b>			
Implementation of this strategy will result in a systemic improvement in handling complaints.			
<b>Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.</b>			
Staff will need training, and it will also be essential to broadly disseminate the complaint procedures among stakeholder groups. Technical assistance will be needed to support the review and revision of complaint processes.			
<b>Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.</b>			
Parents, youth, foster parents, and relative caregivers will be key partners in reviewing the complaint procedures.			
<b>Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.</b>			
None			

<b>Improvement Goal 13.0</b>				
Use data to review and improve outcomes and decision-making.				
<b>Strategy 13.1</b>		<b>Strategy Rationale</b>		
Explore the reasons for the decreasing reunification rates of Hispanic families with young children and overrepresentation of Hispanic and African-American children in the child welfare system and implement practice modifications as needed.		The CSA found disproportionality for African American and Hispanic children in the system.		
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>13.1.1</b> Design and conduct research on disproportionality within local child welfare.	<b>Timeframe</b>	June – December 2008	<b>Assigned to</b>
	<b>13.1.2</b> Present findings to staff and identify recommendations for practice modifications to mitigate disproportional ethnic representation in the child welfare system.		January – May 2009	
	<b>13.1.3</b> Implement recommendations and track data trends to review progress.		June 2009 – December 2010	
				Planning and Evaluation Director and Analyst
				Planning and Evaluation Director and Analyst
				Planning and Evaluation Director and Division Director
<b>Strategy 13.2</b>		<b>Strategy Rationale</b>		
Analyze screening decisions, completion of assessment tools, case opening decisions, and placement decisions using CRC standard and ad hoc reports.		Using CRC data reports will help FCS better understand local data trends and provide the opportunity to look at decision making and make practice changes to improve service delivery.		
<b>Milestone</b>	<b>13.2.1</b> Hold monthly Data Team meetings with FCS and Planning and Evaluation staff to determine data requests to CRC and discuss reports provided by CRC in response to data team requests.	<b>Timeframe</b>	March 2008 and ongoing	<b>Assigned to</b>
	<b>13.2.2</b> Review reports to identify trends, and discuss with FCS supervisory and management staff to identify issues and modify practice as appropriate.		June 2009 and ongoing	
				Division Analyst and Data Team
				Division Analyst and Data Team
<b>Notes Goal 13</b>				
This strategy is contingent on renewing the contract with CRC each fiscal year.				
<b>Describe systemic changes needed to further support the improvement goal.</b>				

Typically, program managers and supervisors do not use data to make programmatic decisions. Use of the CRC reports by program managers and supervisors will be a systemic change and improvement in the understanding of data.

**Describe educational/training needs (including technical assistance) to achieve the improvement goals.**

Program managers and supervisors will need to be trained to understand and analyze the reports.

**Identify roles of the other partners in achieving the improvement goals.**

CRC is a key partner in helping to develop and refine the reports.

**Identify any regulatory or statutory changes needed to support the accomplishment of the improvement goals.**

None