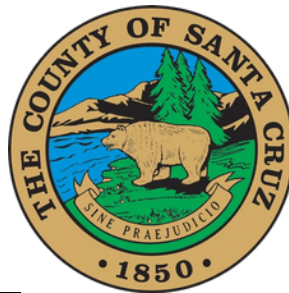


California - Child and Family Services Review

Santa Cruz County

System Improvement Plan 2025-30



APPROVED


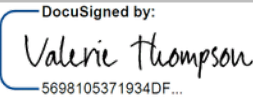

CONSENT AGENDA

RESULT:	Approved [5 to 0]
MOTION/SECOND:	Cummings, De Serpa
AYES:	Koenig, De Serpa, Cummings, Hernandez, Martinez
NAYES:	None
ABSTAIN:	None



California – Child and Family Services Review Signature Sheet

For submittal of: CSA SIP Progress Report

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SIP Period Dates	2028-2030
Outcome Data Period	Q1 2024
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Introduction

About Santa Cruz County

Santa Cruz County (SCC) is a diverse community of 267,551 residents situated at the northern tip of Monterey Bay, approximately 65 miles south of San Francisco. Its natural beauty is present in the pristine beaches, lush redwood forests, and rich farmland. The County’s strong local economy is anchored by technology, agriculture, and tourism. The school system includes Cabrillo Community College and the University of California, Santa Cruz. There are four incorporated cities in the County: Capitola, Scotts Valley, Watsonville, and the city of Santa Cruz, which has the largest population (61,950)¹.

The most important improvement effort already underway in Santa Cruz County is the coordinated, community wide focus on Prevention. To further this effort, The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 and California’s related Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) Program offer an unprecedented opportunity to systematically shift from reactive responses to earlier and more proactive support. Through an inclusive planning process and the next steps to implement and monitor progress, counties in California have been offered a pathway to shift mindsets, policies, funding, and programming “upstream” through the continuum of prevention for children, youth, and families. In March of 2021, FCS and Probation jointly opted to receive FFPSA funding for prevention efforts in Santa Cruz County and formed the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet.

Santa Cruz County public, community and family partners have made an unwavering commitment to work together to align government, community, and family stakeholders to maximize wellness for our county’s children and their families. The vision of Santa Cruz County’s Family First Prevention Services Program is thriving children and families living in a resilient, just community.

Family and Children Services (FCS) and Juvenile Probation are the county leads for the Child Youth and Family Well-Being Cabinet and the cross-sector Cabinet partners include the Office of Education, Behavioral Health Department, other health partners, parenting programs, local nonprofit and community based organizations, First 5, the Public Health Department, family resource centers, youth

¹ <https://www.santacruzcountyca.gov/AboutUs.aspx>

advocacy groups, the Public Defender's office, school district representatives, and others who touch the lives of children and families in our community.

The Cabinet has been meeting monthly from September 2022 to the present. Together, the Cabinet developed a Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) to align with the California Department of Social Services Family First Prevention Program. The CPP describes the local approach to building systems for prevention so that more children and youth can stay safely in their homes and their communities and fewer children, and youth will become involved with child welfare systems. The CPP has been informed by needs, assets, and gaps, determined by quantitative and qualitative data, and prioritized through the guidance of the Cabinet. At the broadest level, this plan articulates and elevates shared commitments to prevention, made possible through collaboration, related initiatives, funding, and continued attention to results. The plan was approved in August of 2023 and the Cabinet is engaged in the initial steps of implementation. Areas of focus for the Cabinet compliment needs identified by the CSA process. Specifically, to increase services for parents exiting the child welfare system and identifying families at risk for entering the system. Efforts are underway for increasing capacity for parenting education and to lift the voices of parents with lived experience.

About The C-CFSR

The California Child and Family Services Review (C-CFSR) is a result of Assembly Bill 636 (2001) which provided a framework for the development of a new outcome-based review to be conducted in all 58 counties. The purpose of the C-CFSR is to strengthen the accountability system used in California for the entire continuum of services from prevention through aftercare for the child welfare and juvenile probation systems. Foremost, it establishes core outcomes that are central to maintaining an effective system of child welfare services, based on the mandated federal outcomes and measures. By design, the C-CFSR follows closely the federal emphasis on safety, permanency, and well-being. Included in the C-CFSR are the County Self-Assessment (CSA), which includes the Peer Review, and the SIP and SIP Progress Reports.

The County Self-Assessment (CSA) is the first component of the five-year C-CFSR cycle, and it informs the development of the County System Improvement Plan (SIP). The CSA is a comprehensive assessment of the county population, child welfare and probation services, C-CFSR outcome measure performance, and includes a Peer Review process. The CSA also fulfills some of the child abuse prevention requirements for a needs assessment that was previously known as the OCAP Plan. Santa Cruz County completed its most recent CSA in 2024-25.

The CSA's Peer Review component provides counties with qualitative information about their programs by examining child welfare practices and policies that impact outcomes for children and families. The Peer Review also offers the opportunity for sharing successful efforts across counties. Peers from other counties assisting with the review share information on best or promising practices used in their own county.

Following the CSA is the completion of the operational agreement between the CDSS, and the county known as the System Improvement Plan (SIP). The SIP is developed every five years by the lead agencies in collaboration with their local community, prevention and early intervention partners and is approved by the county Board of Supervisors (BOS). It provides an outline for how the county will improve their system of care for children and families. The SIP also identifies how programs and services funded with CAPIT/CBCAP/PSSF funds will address priority needs within the CWS continuum.

Following the development of the five-year SIP, County Child Welfare Departments and Probation Placement Agencies, in collaboration with their community partners, will develop and submit to the CDSS an annual SIP Progress Report.

The stakeholder feedback received during the CSA influenced the development of the county's SIP.

Stakeholders and core representatives provided insight into the needs of child welfare and probation service recipients and their experiences. In addition, the CSA included quantitative data collected about Santa Cruz county's demographics, child welfare and probation populations, and outcome measure performance. The county has used the information to identify service strengths and gaps and determine the needed strategies in response to improve services and performance.

Santa Cruz County Approach to Planning the C-CFSR

Santa Cruz county chose to utilize Q1 2024 data as the baseline for the County Self-Assessment (CSA) development. The C-CFSR Team completed the CSA utilizing a variety of methods. The Team engaged the community in conversations about the quality of the child welfare and juvenile probation placement system and provision of services to children and families. Feedback from the community who might benefit or be affected by changes made to the system is critical. This feedback was also used to inform the development of the CAPIT/CBCAP/PSSF service provision plan.

A variety of methods were used to gather stakeholder and community feedback for the CSA. This included focus groups, interviews, and an in-person community stakeholder meeting. The Peer Review was held Sept. 16-20, 2024. Peer reviewers included workers from child welfare and juvenile probation agencies across ten counties.

SIP Narrative

A. C-CFSR TEAM AND CORE REPRESENTATIVES

The county engaged the community in a conversation about the quality of the child welfare system and provision of services to children and families. Feedback from members of the population who might benefit or be affected by changes made to the system was critical to informing the county self-assessment process.

C-CFSR Team

To ensure continuous quality improvement, Santa Cruz County identified a team that acts as the driver of the C-CFSR process. The team met regularly to ensure that all aspects of the C-CFSR were conducted. The C-CFSR Team was led by representatives from the county's Family & Children's Services, Juvenile Probation Division, and the California Department of Social Services (CDSS):

Table 1: Santa Cruz County C-CFSR Planning Team

Santa Cruz County C-CFSR Planning Team	
FCS	JPD
Gloria Carroll -Division Director	Jose Flores – Division Director
Claudia Herrera-Sandoval – Ass't Division Director	Jimmy Cook – Ass't Division Director
Bridget Semlek – Sr. Human Svcs Analyst	Diane Culcasi –Data Analyst
Deborah Bresnick – QI Program Mgr	Christine Berge – Sr. Analyst
Casey Coneway – Sr. Human Svcs Data Analyst	
CDSS Consultants – Kiana Vicari (Performance & Programs Improvement Bureau)	
LaFatima Jones – OCAP	
Consultant – Leslie Ann Hay	

List of Core Representatives

All required core representatives participated either in the C-CFSR Planning Team or the stakeholder input events held for the County Self-Assessment (which includes the Peer Review, focus groups, and the in-person stakeholder meeting). Distinct stakeholder groups were identified as important contributors to the C-CFSR focus group process and targeted for participation. Across both Child Welfare and Probation, a total of 116 participants contributed their input over the course of 19 focus group sessions. Participants represented multiple aspects of the Child Welfare and Probation systems—from parents and youth to staff and management to courts and community partners:

Table 2: Santa Cruz County C-CFSR Core Representatives

Stakeholders Involved in the CSA Process	
FCS	Community Stakeholders
Child Welfare Clerical & Social Workers Child Welfare Supervisors & Managers Child Welfare Parents Child Welfare Resource Parents	CASA of Santa Cruz County Community Action Board Community Bridges Conflict Resolution Center of SC County County Office of Education
JPD	Encompass Community Services
Probation Officers/Supervisors Probation Administrator Probation Youth & Parents Probation Resource Parents Placement Team	HSA - Children’s Behavioral Health & Substance Use Disorders Services Luna y Sol Familia Center Monarch Services Optimal Solutions Consulting Pajaro Valley Prevention & Student Assistance Parents Center Public Health Superior Court, Juvenile Court Watsonville & Dominican Hospitals

The 2024-25 Santa Cruz CSA was a collaborative effort involving many external stakeholders and internal county staff. Their contributions provided essential information to this assessment and to ensuring the success of this SIP. These focus groups and conversations explored strengths and needs within Santa Cruz County from prevention through the continuum of care. These focus groups and community meetings asked for feedback on the county’s current levels of performance, procedural and systemic practices, and available resources, as they related to children, youth, and families at risk or in need of child welfare or probation services.

A variety of community-based organizations, consumers, service providers, and county staff participated in these group meetings. Each focus group was facilitated by non-county personnel (Hay Consulting) to encourage open participation on a variety of topics. Most participants were paid for their time by coming during regular business hours as a representative of a county agency or community-based organization. Birth parents/legal guardians, youth, and resource parents who attended focus groups were provided an incentive (gift cards, meal) for their time by Santa Cruz County.

Some community partners were invited and strongly encouraged to attend meetings and provide feedback in a variety of ways; however, other competing priorities kept them from active participation. Through ongoing relationships with community organizations, feedback is continuous, and those collaborations are detailed throughout this document.

B. PRIORITIZATION OF OUTCOME DATA MEASURES/SYSTEMIC FACTORS AND STRATEGY RATIONALE

Family & Children Services

Over the past five years, the number of children reported to the county with allegations of abuse or neglect has dropped 20%, due largely to the declining child population. **Source:** [California Child Welfare Indicators Project \(CCWIP\) \(berkeley.edu\)](#). The child population dropped 10% from 2018 to 2023 **Source:** [American Community Survey \(ACS\)](#) while the allegation rate per 1,000 children has dropped only 6% from 2019 to 2024. Latino children continue to be referred at slightly higher rates than white children. Black children, who represent less than 1% of the child population, have had the highest allegation rates over the past five years.

After a sharp decline in 2020, substantiated allegations have stabilized between 110 and 130 per year. In 2023 there were 2.3 substantiated allegations per 1,000 children which has decreased from 3.6 in 2019. Changes in legislature regarding the criteria for General Neglect will likely continue to lower these rates as efforts to divert families experiencing economic and housing insecurity from child welfare are active in the community.

Substantiated allegations have been highest among children under 3 which has been consistent from the last County Self-Assessment. The prevalence of substance abuse in the county and the number of infants born substance exposed make up many the substantiations in this age group. More concerted efforts around prevention services for expectant mothers are a focus of the Child, Youth and Family Well-being Cabinet.

General neglect has consistently been the most common type of allegation (53%), followed by physical abuse (25%) and emotional abuse (11%).

Perhaps the most significant changes since 2019 have been the sharp drop in total children in care and the declining disproportionality between Latino and white children. The number of Latino children in care has declined 57%, while white children in care have declined 31%. The increased use and buy in of social workers for utilizing Safety Organized Practice and safety planning has likely influenced the number of children coming into care as these tools provide social workers with alternatives to foster care while still addressing safety threats.

Child Welfare supervised 161 children in foster care (point in time) on July 1, 2019, which was 25% below the average of the most recent five-year period (214). The range was between 267 (2019) and 183 (2023) children under child welfare supervision in foster care. Most of these cases (96) were children in permanent placement and youth in supportive transition. For the past five years there has been no meaningful difference in rates between Latino and white children in care per 1,000 children. In 2023 the majority of children with first entries were Latino (18/39, 46%). For children or youth who re-entered child welfare during 2023, the majority were White (8/16, 50%) which is consistent with the trend from 2019.

It is difficult to make meaningful inferences about trends related to Black, Asian/Pacific Islander and Native American children in care because their counts have remained between 0 and 6 per year over the past five years. Counts in this range are more suitable for examination by case review than by quantitative or rate-based analysis. Similarly, the count of ICWA-eligible children has remained between 3 and 7 per year.

A review of Q1 2024 data indicated that FCS did not meet the national performance standard for three measures (P4 - 19.5%, P3 -21.7% and 2F -94.8%) During the County Self-Assessment (CSA) process, the P4 – reentry into foster care was identified as the focus for the 2025-2030 cycle. This decision was made due to data performance and was further examined and reinforced during the Peer Review process.

The focus for the 2020-2025 SIP cycle was improving performance in P-1 – timely exit to permanency within 12 months. FCS made significant improvements in this measure which can be attributed to a variety of factors, including a robust Child and Family Team practice and social workers increased use of Safety Organized Practice. Paradoxically, the improved performance in P1 may also be related to the decreased performance in P4. Taking less time to ensure families are prepared for reunification may increase the likelihood that children and youth will re-enter care later. Since 2019, the percentage of children re-entering foster care within 12 months of their discharge date has mostly remained higher than the national standard of 5.6%, including a recent jump from 3.8% in Q1 2022 to 19.5% as of Q1 2024. This jump is partially due to the steady decline in the overall number of children entering care. The absolute number of children re-entering care remains relatively small (Under 5 per reporting period), while the denominator is shrinking.

Going forward, the aim is to reduce the number of re-entry incidents to better meet the national standard. In examining other reasons for re-entry, stakeholder input suggests that re-entry patterns match the original reason for entry into care which are parental substance use disorders, parental chronic mental health issues and domestic violence. Moreover, families can destabilize post-reunification due to economic stressors (e.g., housing insecurity, unemployment) that result in re-entry for reasons of neglect. These are all circumstances that require intensive aftercare planning, concrete supports, an engaged support network and accountability structures to guard against relapse. The CSA process reinforced the need to address these needs upon case dismissal as families report many of these services are difficult to navigate or are no longer available to them once they are no longer system involved. Aftercare services are not currently available and have become a primary focus over the next SIP Cycle.

The following Peer Review findings focus on strengths and challenges across a range of topics related to child welfare’s P4 outcome area: re-entry into care.

Re-Entry

Strengths

- Social workers met the families where they were at, completed comprehensive assessments, and the identified needs were met with appropriate services.
- Social workers did thorough assessments and service delivery, prior to case closure.
- Social workers offered strong support to help keep parents motivated toward case plan goals.

Challenges

- Lack of adequate MH support is de-stabilizing to a family and leads to re-involvement with FCS.

- Lack of transitional planning and using SDM to its fidelity.
- Lack of ongoing after care support at case closure.

To address these challenges and improve the P4 – Re-entry into care outcome, FCS is committed to implementing three innovative strategies described below.

Strategy #1: Enhance aftercare planning and connection to prevention providers by preparing families for exiting the system from the opening of their case.

Providing aftercare to families exiting the child welfare system is a critical strategy for reducing re-entry into foster care. When families transition out of the system, they often continue facing challenges— financial instability, emotional strain, and difficulties in parenting—that, if unaddressed, can lead to children re-entering care. Aftercare services, such as parenting support, mental health counseling, financial assistance, and community-based resources, help stabilize families during this vulnerable period, reinforcing their ability to maintain a safe and nurturing home environment. FCS has contracted with Social Change Partners to develop a community pathway as part of our Comprehensive Prevention Plan. This work will be necessary to fulfill this strategy. FCS anticipates using state block grant funds and title IV-E funds to sustain these services.

Data from child welfare outcome systems—such as those reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (Outcome 4.2)—demonstrates that sustained family support post-discharge correlates with lower foster care re-entry percentages. ([Outcome 4.2: Reentries into Foster Care - Child Welfare Outcomes](#))

This strategy will build on current efforts that began during the last SIP cycle aimed at Prevention efforts. The most recent collaboration is the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet of Santa Cruz County. The Federal Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) of 2018 and California’s related Family First Prevention Services (FFPS) Program offer an unprecedented opportunity to systematically shift from reactive responses to earlier and more proactive support for families. In March of 2021, FCS and Probation jointly opted in to receive FFPSA funding for prevention efforts in Santa Cruz County and formed the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet.

The Cabinet’s initial focus was to develop the required Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) that was submitted to the State in July 2023 and was subsequently approved. FCS and Probation received approximately \$1 million in State block grant funds to assist with the development and implementation of Primary, Secondary and Tertiary prevention services. Since that time, a Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet has been established including our system partners, community-based organizations and those with lived experience. The Wellbeing Cabinet has met monthly with the purpose of developing and implementing the Comprehensive Prevention Plan for Santa Cruz County. Members of the Cabinet include:

Public Health, Parents Center, CASA, Behavioral Health, First 5, United Way County office of Education, Monarch, Pajaro Valley Prevention Services Association, Community Action Board, Encompass, District Attorney’s Office, Public Defenders Office, Conflict Resolution Center, MENTors, Positive Discipline, Triple P, Community Bridges, Pajaro Valley Unified School District, A Better Way and Safe Families.

During the last year, the Cabinet has implemented the training component of the CPP and contracted with three community partners (Positive Discipline, Triple P and MENtors) to increase the delivery of parenting education and fatherhood engagement within the county. Training and certification of additional facilitators will commence in June of 2024 with the goal of increasing the number of providers to deliver parenting education throughout the community.

Another achievement of the Wellbeing Cabinet was contracting with four Community based Organizations to assist the Cabinet with getting feedback from youth and parents with lived experience. The feedback from these efforts will be used to inform future implementation of CPP and the next SIP.

Together, the Cabinet developed a Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) to align with the California Department of Social Services Family First Prevention Program. The CPP describes the local approach to building systems for prevention so that more children and youth can stay safely in their homes and their communities resulting in fewer children, and youth becoming involved with child welfare systems. The plan was approved in August of 2023.

The CPP includes attention to post-dismissal as a direct result of feedback from people with lived experience. This finding was supported by input from birth parent and community partner focus groups during the CSA indicating that parents still have a need to access services after their case closes and for a variety of reasons (lack of finances, support and access) are unable to obtain ongoing services. Both parents and youth often feel lost and abandoned by the abrupt cessation of services, supportive relationships, and accountability mechanisms established during their time with FCS. This strategy will enable FCS to take the lead in this tertiary prevention effort.

During the next SIP Cycle, FCS anticipates improvement to the P4 outcome measure with the following activities related to enhancing aftercare services.

1. Establish internal workgroup to identify target population for aftercare planning and design pilot program, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #1 implementation.
2. Design aftercare pilot program elements including:
 - a. Selection of aftercare target population that meets the same criteria for candidate populations for Santa Cruz County Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP) so that FFPS funding can be leveraged
 - b. Define prevention provider requirements through the contracting process to match service needs of aftercare population
 - c. Integrate methods to strengthen service partnership between FCS & SUD providers to emphasize aftercare/recovery support services
 - d. Develop client identification process, aftercare planning integration into CFT practice and referral pathways for aftercare population to connect with providers
 - e. Determine FCS unit(s) to participate in aftercare pilot program
 - f. Define qualitative & quantitative metrics to measure impact of aftercare pilot program utilizing participation rates and participant feedback.
3. Develop policies & procedures to guide aftercare pilot program, including aftercare plan template, engagement tools and other team resources.
4. Establish contracts with prevention providers to fulfill aftercare pilot program requirements.

5. Develop curriculum & train FCS staff participating in aftercare pilot program on new policies, procedures & tools.
6. Launch aftercare pilot program.
7. Evaluate impact of aftercare pilot program using qualitative data from case review & quantitative data from CWS/CMS/CARES.

Strategy #1 will begin with design and development in 2026 and conclude in 2028 with full implementation and evaluation of enhanced aftercare services.

Strategy #2: Improve parent engagement through targeted educational & support activities

Rationale

Increasing parent education about the court process significantly reduces re-entry into child welfare by empowering families with knowledge, confidence, and the ability to navigate legal requirements effectively. When parents understand their rights, responsibilities, and the expectations set by the court, they are better equipped to comply with reunification plans, meet legal standards, and advocate for their children.

Several studies highlight the connection between parent education and reduced re-entry into child welfare. Research from the Northern California Training Academy (~~final re-entry lit review 2~~) emphasizes that enhancing caregiver skills and competencies through education significantly lowers the likelihood of children re-entering foster care. Another study assessing parent education programs for families involved in child welfare found that structured parenting programs improve compliance with reunification plans and strengthen family stability. (Re-entering foster care: Trends, evidence, and implications.)

These studies point out key benefits of providing these enhanced parent education activities that correlate to reduced re-entry into care:

- Improved Compliance with Court Orders – Parents who understand case plans, visitation rights, and required services are more likely to follow through, reducing the likelihood of reunification disruptions. Stronger Advocacy & Decision-Making – Knowledgeable parents can more effectively communicate with attorneys, judges and caseworkers, ensuring they make informed choices that benefit their children. Reduced Stress and Fear of the System – The child welfare system and specifically the legal process can feel overwhelming, but education demystifies complex procedures and reduces parental anxiety, increasing cooperation. Better utilization of Support Services – Parents educated on available resources (therapy, parenting classes, substance abuse programs) are more likely to engage in services that strengthen family stability. Increased Long-Term Stability – Understanding child welfare expectations helps parents sustain positive changes, even after reunification, preventing future system involvement.

This strategy is also aimed at improving skills of social workers and resource parents in engaging with parents that have complex needs such as mental health and substance abuse. This finding was supported by input from birth parent and community partner focus groups during the CSA indicating that social

workers do not always feel they have adequate engagement skills for parents with complex needs. Improvements suggested included additional training of social workers and resource parents in trauma, high needs issues, substance use & recovery, engaging persons with complex mental health issues, more local treatment options and an expansion of the parent advocate program.

During the next SIP Cycle, FCS anticipates improvement to the P4 outcome measure with the following activities related to improving parent engagement through education and support activities.

1. Establish an internal Parent Engagement Workgroup to plan and develop a series of integrated education & support activities, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #2 implementation. Partner with key stakeholders to design details of Parent Engagement enhancements including:
 2. of Parent Engagement enhancements including:
 - a. Improve parent's understanding of dependency court process to help them be better informed participants in their child's case planning.
 - b. Identify opportunities for getting feedback from current Parent Partners & recently reunified parents, staff surveys.
 3. Explore best practices in engaging with families with complex needs such as mental health and substance use.
 - a. Identify skill gaps and provide skill building opportunities for social workers.
 - b. Design method to evaluate parent engagement experiences using case review interview data.
 4. Design method to evaluate parent engagement experiences using case review interview data.
 - a. Consult with Bay Area Learning Collaborative about using case review data to improve parent engagement programming.
 - b. Identify case review information requirements and incorporate into parent interview questionnaire.
 - c. Extract key content from parent interviews on a flow basis.
 - d. Capture and report parent engagement themes to continuously improve FCS programming.
 5. Develop policies & procedures to guide parent engagement education & support activities.
 6. Develop curriculum & train FCS workforce on new policies, procedures & tools.
 7. Evaluate impact of parent engagement education & support activities using qualitative data from case review & quantitative data from CWS/CMS/CARES.

Strategy #2 action steps consider suggestions shared by fathers/parents from prior engagement efforts that were limited in success. Suggestions include developing a continual feedback loop from parents throughout the entirety of the case and at critical case points such as transitioning from social workers and/or programs. Another incorporated suggestion was to provide social workers with skills for early identification of engagement barriers such as mental health issues, financial and legal issues so that social workers can assist parents with accessing appropriate resources.

(These suggestions were collected by Santa Cruz County MSW Interns under the supervision of a Sr. Social Worker as part of the Intern Community Project.)

Strategy #2 will begin with design and development in 2026 and conclude in 2029 with full implementation and evaluation of enhanced parent engagement, education & support activities.

Strategy #3: Increase networks of support for every family entering the system.

Building a family's network of natural supports—such as extended family, friends, mentors, and community connections—significantly reduces re-entry into foster care by creating a sustainable, stable environment for children. Benefits of increasing family networks of support include:

Strengthens Family Stability

- When parents have reliable emotional and practical support, they are better equipped to handle challenges that might otherwise lead to re-entry into the system.
- Ongoing encouragement and assistance from trusted individuals promote consistent caregiving and healthy family dynamics.

Improves Crisis Response

- Families with strong natural support networks can turn to relatives or close friends in times of stress rather than facing isolation or system involvement.
- Supportive individuals can step in to mediate conflicts, provide temporary care, and offer guidance before situations escalate.

Enhances Parenting & Child Well-Being

- Peer mentoring and community engagement help parents develop new parenting strategies, increasing their ability to meet their child's emotional and developmental needs.
- Children benefit from stable relationships with familiar adults, reducing the trauma associated with repeated foster care placements.

Promotes Long-Term Connection & Accountability

- Parents with engaged support networks feel less isolated and more motivated to follow through with reunification plans.
- Supportive figures provide consistent encouragement, reminding parents of their progress and helping them navigate post-reunification challenges.

Prevents System Re-Engagement

- Strong natural support systems reduce reliance on formal services by providing real-world solutions for childcare, financial stress, and other daily needs.

These findings were supported by input from birth parents and community partners. Focus group participants reported insufficient outreach, engagement and development of natural networks of support for families throughout the case life cycle.

(Sources: [A systematic review of social support interventions for youth in foster care - ScienceDirect](#), [SComm_Family-Resource-Centers.pdf, mackcenter.berkeley.edu](#))

During the next SIP Cycle, FCS anticipates improvement to the P4 outcome measure with the following activities related to increasing networks of support:

1. Establish Networks of Support Workgroup to plan and develop an internal process for engaging networks of support, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #3 implementation.
2. Operationalize the work of the newly formed Family Finding Unit to enhance engagement of families' natural supports.
 - a. Develop method for early identification and assessment of families with limited networks of support.
3. Enhance current Child and Family Team Meeting structures to include networks of support
 - a. Increase the number of natural supports attending CFTs through increased communication and engagement with families
 - b. Implement a tracking system to document the number of natural supports invited and their attendance, as well as how they commit to supporting the family
 - c. Hold a dismissal CFT for every family exiting the system that includes a plan for how families will utilize their natural and community supports upon exiting the child welfare system.
4. Integrate networks of support from case entry to case dismissal
 - a. Develop plan for how networks of support will be integrated into the case plan based on individual needs of families
 - b. Develop method for measuring strength of network of supports building on work already started with the Judicial Council Leadership team
5. Enhance Resource Parent Support through support groups, coaching and respite.
 - a. Incorporate feedback from the Resource Parent Retention and Workgroup to improve resource parent's capacity
 - b. Incorporate feedback from parents and resource parents to facilitate activities that will improve and sustain relationship with resource parents and parents.

Strategy #3 will begin with design and development in 2026 and conclude in 2029 with full implementation and evaluation of increased networks of support for every family involved with FCS.

Monitoring & Evaluation

In addition to the monitoring and evaluation efforts described for strategies above, the Department will also be conducting efforts to monitor overall performance for the P4 measure. Monitoring of CFSR 4 performance measures will continue on a semi-annual basis. To implement the SIP Strategies effectively in FCS, the following supports and infrastructure changes are planned:

Systemic changes – FCS will develop a workgroup at the onset of each SIP strategy. Membership in the individual workgroups will be intentional to ensure that subject matter experts are present during the design and implementation of each strategy. FCS Leadership will determine the composition of workgroups which may include FCS staff, county and community partners and those with lived experience. FCS will also utilize existing resources such as the Fatherhood Engagement Council, the SOP Advisory Council, the Race and Equity Team and the Resource Parent Recruitment and Retention Workgroup.

Data Analysis Support: Data tracking will also be a key component of infrastructure needs for the implementation of SIP Strategies. FCS will partner with the Business Analytics Unit to develop quantitative

methods of tracking progress on SIP Strategies such as monitoring the number of natural supports attending CFTs, etc. FCS will also partner with the Case Review Unit to develop qualitative methods of evaluating impact of strategies.

Fiscal Support: To ensure adequate fiscal resources are allocated to support SIP Strategies Specific activities such as analysis of current funding streams including FFPS State Block Funds and FURS to provide support for prevention related activities outlined in the SIP.

Leadership and Staff Engagement: Support from agency leadership will be essential in the successful implementation of SIP strategies. FCS Leadership will ensure that SIP Strategies are prioritized, and staff resources are available to develop, implement and monitor strategies throughout the SIP cycle.

Leadership will seek out and develop relationships with community and county service providers that are identified as necessary to implement strategies.

Program Managers will provide ongoing support and oversight to ensure SIP strategies are prioritized and integrated into areas of program identified as necessary for implementation.

Analysts will provide Policy and Procedure Development as defined by implementation needs. Analysts will also provide support for tracking progress on implementation and will develop a communication plan to ensure that staff are fully aware of practice changes.

Social workers will receive supervisory guidance to promote consistent application of the knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities to successfully integrate practices related to strategies. Supervisors will also monitor the transfer of learning for social workers.

Education, training, and technical assistance needs – Training and coaching will be a critical part of implementing the SIP Strategies. Identified needs include additional training of social workers and resource parents in trauma, high needs issues, substance use & recovery, and engaging persons with complex mental health issues. FCS is in communication with Staff Development to ensure training availability to support implementation of the SIP Strategies and how we can expand these training opportunities to partner agencies and community-based organizations. The Department does not anticipate receiving technical assistance from the National Resource Center for Family-Centered Practice, Western Pacific Implementation Center or a Quality Improvement Center. However, FCS has contracted with a consultant (Haye Consulting) to assist with initial implementation of our SIP Strategies. FCS is also working with UC Davis for technical assistance for the implementation of CANS through our CFT process.

Roles of Community Partners – Several key partners will play an essential role in the implementation and sustainability of our strategies. The Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet members will be essential partners in the success of the development of a pathway for aftercare services. The Parent’s Center is a critical partner for our strategy to increase parent engagement and participation in the Parent Partner Program since they have recently assumed the contract for these services. Our Court Partners will also play an important role in the development of parent education and engagement with the Court system, specifically parent and minor’s attorneys who will have key insights on areas court knowledge needs to be expanded and can partner with us in the development of educational materials. Other partners will be identified as FCS explores contracting with providers for the aftercare pilot program.

Juvenile Probation Division

Introduction

Santa Cruz County Department Juvenile Probation has undertaken a comprehensive assessment to evaluate its current practices, outcomes, and opportunities for systemic improvement. Central to this effort is the continued shift from a punitive model toward a coaching approach that focuses on prevention, family-engagement, and youth-centered system. This narrative reflects a review of population trends, system factors, performance data, and lessons learned to inform the 2025 System Improvement Plan (SIP).

Population and Risk Profile

The average age of entry into juvenile probation in Santa Cruz County is 16.8 years, highlighting a trend of late-entry youth who often focus more on independence than family reunification. As of early 2025, there were 16 probation youth identified as being involved with the foster care system, with most over age 18 and engaged in extended foster care or transitional housing. Notably, no youth have been placed in Resource Family Approval (RFA) homes for the past three years, very few placed out of home prior to their 18th birthday in a Short Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP), which underscores the department's commitment to exhausting all alternatives before placement.

Santa Cruz County continues to see disproportionate juvenile justice involvement among Latino teen males from South County. These youth often face more severe charges, school-based challenges, and family system stressors. Socioeconomic instability, limited access for parents to obtain assistance due to work and/or transportation, and language barriers further exacerbate these issues. School mobility, truancy, and behavioral health needs are common, yet service reductions and, at times, community-based agency staffing shortages due to funding stream depletion, all pose persistent barriers to early interventions.

A persistent barrier to youth engagement relates to the limited availability of appropriate local placement options. While Probation works to identify the best possible STRTP match by contacting multiple providers, most suitable programs are located two to four hours outside Santa Cruz County. This distance reduces opportunities for consistent family contact and limits the frequency of in-person supervision by Probation Officers, compared to youth placed within the county.

These geographic challenges can also affect placement stability. When youth feel disconnected from their caregivers or perceive a placement as not meeting their needs, they are more likely to leave without permission. These episodes disrupt treatment, delay access to services, and often result in the loss of the placement, increasing the likelihood of short-term detention for non-compliance with court orders.

Probation remains committed to securing placements that support stability, reduce placement mobility, and actively engage youth in decision-making. Nonetheless, placement distance, readiness for treatment, and developmental factors will continue to influence youth adjustment and outcomes. Routine and a minimum of monthly in-person contact as well as virtual and telephone contact will be crucial to building the rapport necessary for Probation Officer and their client to be fruitful. In addition, documentation of contacts is critical to ensure that our commitments and expectations for assisting youth with health

boundaries, establishing community safety, and family bonding to occur. The variability in 2F monthly timely visit performance reflects the fragility of outcomes within a small caseload context. When only a handful of youth meet criteria for out-of-home placement, even a single episode of absence, AWOL, or detention can disproportionately affect reported compliance. This highlights both a data-interpretation challenge and a service-delivery challenge.

The fluctuation is not merely statistical; it signals instability in placement engagement and youth readiness for treatment. Episodes of leaving placement without permission often stem from developmental, relational, and environmental factors rather than simple non-compliance. Instability then disrupts the continuity of meaningful casework, making timely contact requirements difficult to achieve despite diligent staff efforts.

Santa Cruz Probation mitigates these gaps by maintaining alternate means of outreach (e.g., phone, text, and family-based contact); however, these substituted contacts may not fully replace the developmental value of in-person contact required by policy intent. The issue underscores a system-level need to strengthen placement readiness, enhance engagement support for distant STRTP settings, and incorporate youth voice and expectation-setting early in the placement process. Addressing these drivers should reduce absences, stabilize placement, and improve visit consistency—moving performance closer to the spirit of the measure rather than simply the numeric standard.

Strengths in Practice

Santa Cruz Juvenile Probation has made notable progress in culturally responsive, family-centered, and collaborative practices:

- Probation Officers have adopted coaching and engagement roles, with many trained in the Integrated Core Practice Model (ICPM), motivational interviewing, and Child and Family Team (CFT) facilitation.
- The department prioritizes upstream prevention efforts, placing probation officers in schools in the role of mentors and linkages to community-based services. Strong collaboration with Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) and Family & Children's Services (FCS) has strengthened cross-system communication and 241.1 coordination for Dually Involved Youth. Many youth exit care in family-like settings with informal permanency (e.g., reunifying after age 18, SILP placements with relatives, and/or THP housing).

Challenges and Areas for Growth

Despite these strengths, there are critical gaps to address:

- There are no STRTPs for male or female identified youth within the county, leading to out-of-county placements that complicate family engagement and delay permanency. Most recently, the last STRTP in Santa Cruz County closed due to the low number of youth being ordered to out of home placement for juvenile justice and dependency involved youth locally.

- The South County area must continue to increase culturally and linguistically appropriate services that do not limit family participation and youth engagement. Farming communities, necessity to work more than one job, and the importance of responding to family's needs beyond the hours of 9 a.m.-5 p.m. sets the stage for low participation in services or attending to a child's school needs. The sunseting of the Probation re-entry services for youth exiting detention, STRTP, Ranch and/or Ranch settings back into the community re-entry, funded by Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC), threatened a key support mechanism for transition-aged youth. However, Probation has developed a plan with grant involved community partners and other agencies to fill this gap through staffing and partnerships developed through the life of the grant.
- Post-permanency support can be lacking in some areas, particularly for families managing youth's re-entry and independence. There has not yet been fully developed peer parent support organized locally and housing, as well as continuity in counseling or substance use services can present a challenge in some areas of the community.

Data Trends and Outcome Measures

Over the past year, the Santa Cruz County Probation Department has seen a significant decline in the number of youths on probation, decreasing by 30% between 2023 and 2024. This reduction reflects ongoing efforts to divert youth from formal/deeper system involvement and promote community-based alternatives. Despite this progress, systemic challenges continue to impact outcomes for probation youth and Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs). About half of NMDs remain with family, while the rest reside in transitional housing or STRTPs. While many youth achieve permanency informally or after turning 18, these pathways are often not captured in conventional child welfare data systems, obscuring the full picture of long-term stability and support. Moreover, factors such as administrative barriers from discontinued STRTP transfer policies, the impact of geographically distant placements, and workforce shortages among community-based providers contribute to decreased service accessibility and youth-family engagement. These realities highlight the need for continued cross-system collaboration and innovation to ensure all youth receive the support and permanence they deserve. These data trends are summarized below:

- The total number of youths on probation has dropped from 130 in 2023 to 90 in 2024.
- About 50% of Non-Minor Dependents (NMDs) reside with family on Supervised Independent Living Plan (SILP), while the remainder are in transitional housing (25%) or STRTPs (15%). The remaining 10% were youth on probation under age 18 and placed in an RFP home by Family and Children's Services under a Dependency Court order.
- Most probation youth achieve permanency informally or after age 18, which is not fully reflected in traditional child welfare data systems (SafeMeasures).

Additional system factors affecting permanency performance:

- The elimination of presumptive STRTP transfer policies has created administrative barriers to timely placement across counties.
- Long travel distances for placements reduce family engagement and increase isolation for youth- and beginning in 2025, Santa Cruz County has no remaining STRTPs. Decrease in staff and staff mobility, especially among community-based providers, has resulted in lower referral rates from probation and poses a threat to maintaining substantive services over

the next few years. Specifically, Juvenile Probation decreased staff by one full time Supervisor and one full time Deputy Probation Officer in the 2024/2025 fiscal year.

Background for Selection of SIP Strategy

SIP Implementation and Strategic Direction for 2025-2030 includes a focus on front-end diversion, reentry from detention facilities and/or STRTP support, family engagement and permanency planning as well as addressing an overall organizational culture shift. Investment in community-based services, differential response models, and culturally responsive parenting programs, can provide families with support before challenges escalate to system involvement. Cross-system initiatives have focused on addressing the root causes of family instability, including poverty, housing insecurity, and behavioral health needs.

Enhanced coordination between child welfare, probation, behavioral health, education, and community-based organizations has resulted in earlier identification of potential system involved youth and provide a more effective, holistic response. Ongoing efforts can be made by Probation to establish a deeper understanding founded in the principles of the Integrated Core Practice Model such as: Child and Family Team Meetings (CFTMs), early and often identification of youth/family natural supports, and Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) approaches have proven to help ensure that families have a voice in planning and that supports are tailored to their needs.

Probation and FCS have expanded the use of diversion programs, restorative justice practices, wraparound services, and informal support to keep youth safely at home and in their communities. These efforts have prioritized avoiding out-of-home placement and unnecessary justice system involvement, with an emphasis on support for Latino youth who continue to be disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice system.

Examples of some of the ways that Probation will be addressing these systemic enhancements with specific strategies in the SIP include:

Front-End Diversion: The department is piloting a community-based diversion program to reduce unnecessary court filings and engage youth in services before formal/deeper system involvement. The objective is to divert youth to community-based services that will guide their family to get the help they need and prevent formal system involvement entirely. The Two-Tiered Diversion will include offering brief, specifically designed services to youth that have committed a first offense in Tier 1 and more extensive services such as behavioral health interventions, individual counseling and/or substance use education/treatment as needed in Tier 2.

Reentry Support: Probation is restructuring roles to expand reentry services with a focus on youth guidance, family engagement, and building long-term connections to community and natural supports. During this phase—while youth are pending charges and awaiting a court decision—officers will transition from a traditional law enforcement role into a coaching role. Like diversion programming, the goal is to minimize further justice system involvement and address the root factors that led to the youth's custody.

Family Engagement & Permanency Planning: Continuing to strengthen family voice and choice through structured child and family teaming, the use of natural supports, and shared accountability across systems, which can include Wraparound services if and when the family and youth commit to participation in this voluntary program, supports maintaining youth in the home and in their community

Summary of CSA Report – Strategy Implementation (May 2025)

Santa Cruz County Juvenile Probation selected this Strategy – Family Connections Practice to improve permanency outcomes-after identifying delays and instability among probation youth in out-of-home care. The strategy targets enhanced family engagement and community support to accelerate reunification or permanent placement.

Key Objectives:

- Improve connections with biological families, extended kin, and trusted adults.
- Facilitate early permanency planning.
- Stabilize placements through strengthened support networks.

Evidence Base:

The approach is supported by national research emphasizing that family engagement and relational permanency significantly improve outcomes for youth in juvenile and child welfare systems (e.g., Annie E. Casey Foundation, Child Welfare Information Gateway).

Implementation Timeline:

1. Design Phase (July 2025 – June 2027): Develop the Family Connections model.
2. Policy & Procedures (July 2026 – July 2027): Create guidance for integration into case management.
3. Training (Jan – July 2027): Deliver training to probation staff and supervisors.
4. Program Launch (July 2027 – June 2030): Begin implementation with the Placement Unit.
5. Monitoring & Evaluation (June 2026 – June 2030): Use data systems to track impact on family engagement levels and permanency outcomes.

Systemic Supports Needed:

- Integration into existing protocols and interagency collaboration.
- Supervisory structures that reinforce family-centered practices.
- Assurance that probation officers have tools (i.e. Motivational Interviewing) and capacity to meet youth at their residence.

Key Partnerships:

- Child Welfare, Children’s Behavioral Health and CBOs for service coordination and joint planning. (Currently, existing partnerships include South and North County based agencies committed to serving youth involved with Probation)
- Schools and local nonprofits for connecting youth to mentors and supportive adults.
- Family and their natural supports

Improve the post-permanency support landscape with enhanced transition resources for probation youth, their parents, and natural networks (high-fidelity wraparound). What this means:

- Strengthen the continuum of support for probation youth transitioning out of formal system involvement, ensuring that youth, their parents, and identified natural support have clear, accessible resources and guidance to sustain stability and well-being after case closure.

How it will look in practice:

- Develop clear transition protocols aligned with high-fidelity wraparound principles.
- Create resource guides and connection plans for families and youth. Link youth and families to ongoing community supports (e.g., mentorship, behavioral health, education, housing stability) before case closure. Utilize existing wraparound teams to continue check-ins post-case closure where possible.

Strengthen capacity and role of all Probation Officers during the case lifespan to prepare for the aftercare phase by shifting from monitoring to coaching, guidance, and family engagement. What does this mean:

- Transition of the probation officer role from primarily compliance monitoring to incorporating coaching and family-centered practices, ensuring families and natural supports are prepared to continue supporting the youth once formal supervision ends.

How it will look in practice:

- Train Probation Officers in coaching and family engagement techniques.
- Incorporate future-oriented planning into regular case meetings, emphasizing post-probation goals.
- Engage parents and natural supports earlier in the case to build shared ownership of goals.
- Regular meetings in-person, virtual and by telephone with youth in placement.
- Use CFTMs and case contacts to identify barriers and opportunities for family and network involvement throughout the case.

Outcomes for this strategy:

- Increase the number of natural supports identified for youth
- Increase the number of natural supports actively engaged in the youth's case plan
- Ensure monthly in-person meetings with youth take place in their residence

How we will track progress:

- Use CFTM tracking tools to document identified and engaged natural supports.
- Monitor during case reviews and through contact notes and Safe Measures.
- Assess changes in network strength from initial case assessment to case closure.
- Document examples of natural supports taking active roles (e.g., attending CFTMs, participating in goal planning, providing transportation, mentorship).

Workgroup: SCC Leadership Committee:

- Who will oversee this strategy: The Santa Cruz County Leadership Committee working under the broader Court-sponsored initiative to expand networks of support for probation youth.
- Members include Juvenile Court, CASA, SCCOE, Behavioral Health, County Counsel, Juvenile Probation, Family & Children's Services, and additional community partners.

Role of the workgroup:

- Guide implementation and accountability.
- Identify barriers to cross-system collaboration.
- Support training and resource development.
- Align with Court initiatives and ensure sustainability.

Goal of the Program:

The goal of Family Connections Practices is to strengthen family and natural network connections for probation-involved youth, ensuring stability, well-being, and community support as they transition out of system involvement.

Who It Serves:

The program serves probation-involved youth, with a focus on those needing additional support and youth in foster care, along with their families and identified natural supports.

Interventions & Services Provided:

- Family-centered coaching and case planning by Probation Officers.
- Structured identification and engagement of natural supports during the case lifespan.
- Resource guides and connection plans to link youth and families to ongoing community supports (mentorship, behavioral health, housing, education).
- Coordination with child welfare partners and community providers for high-fidelity wraparound support.
- Structured CFTMs focused on transition and aftercare planning.

Duration of the Program:

Integrated throughout the case lifespan, with focused transition planning during the final 3-6 months before case closure, and linkage to post-permanency supports as youth exit probation.

Indicators of Program Success:

- Increased number of natural supports identified and actively engaged in each youth’s case plan.
- Youth maintain stability in the community post-probation by obtaining employment and/or attending higher education or vocational training, as well as housing.
- Families and natural supports report readiness and confidence to support the youth, documentation in Probation database will be crucial to monitor this effectively-staff to be trained on this practice.
- Decreased need for higher levels of care or further system involvement post-exit.
- Positive feedback from youth, families, and system partners regarding transition experience.

Additional Considerations & Ideas to Strengthen the Strategy for Probation to consider over the next 5 years:

1. Youth Voice Integration: Develop feedback loops (e.g., youth surveys or focus groups) to ensure youth perspectives inform the Family Connections model and adjustments are made in real time.

2. Natural Support Mapping: Incorporate a structured tool for staff to help youth identify and reengage with positive natural supports, including coaches, mentors, teachers, or spiritual leaders. Peer Mentor Involvement: Recruit system-involved youth alumni to serve as peer mentors or co-facilitators in family meetings, increasing credibility and engagement. Cultural Responsiveness: Ensure all training and materials reflect the cultural, linguistic, and lived experiences of families served, particularly Latinx and Indigenous youth. Early Identification of Disconnection Risk: Use screening tools to flag youth at risk of relational isolation early in their supervision, allowing preventive work with families to begin sooner. Internal and Cross-System Training and Awareness: Offer training to school districts and healthcare providers on the Family Connections approach to increase alignment and referrals across systems. Sustainability Plan: Begin identifying long-term funding streams and leadership champions early to support sustainability beyond the initial implementation window.
- 3.
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- 5.
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C. PRIORITIZATION OF DIRECT SERVICE NEEDS

The Child Abuse Prevention, Intervention and Treatment (CAPIT), Community Based Child Abuse Prevention (CBCAP), and Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) funding sources are designed to strengthen protective factors in families and prevent deeper involvement in the child welfare system.

Focus groups during the CSA demonstrated a need for strengthening the prevention services for the most vulnerable in the county such as families experiencing complex mental health and substance use challenges. Also, stakeholders desired to see increased transition and aftercare services and enhanced/expanded prevention services aimed at avoiding removal for parents.

As the focus of the SIP is P4 Re-Entry into Care Within 12 Months, the prevention services that are funded support efforts in improving this measure in Santa Cruz County, both by decreasing the number of children entering and preventing re-entry into our system.

In 2021-2022, the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet, which is the workgroup for the development and implementation of the County's Comprehensive Prevention Plan, conducted an analysis of the needs of children, youth, and families. In line with this analysis, neglect continues to be the highest substantiated type of abuse, and the most frequent risk factor driving children into the CWS system is substance abuse. Families Together (differential response) and our Health Services Agency (HSA) provide the bulk of substance use disorder treatment and HSA has a comprehensive referral network for treatment providers throughout the county. FCS also provides funding for substance use disorder treatment, mental health treatment, and concrete supports in the form of flex funds for resource families who are planning to provide permanency by adoption or legal guardianship.

The Comprehensive Prevention Plan supports the current prevention strategies that have been implemented by FCS using the CAPIT, CBCAP, and PSSF funding sources. To support these strategies, the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet assists in implementation of evidence-based or evidence-informed practices throughout the county such as all levels of the Positive Parenting Program, also known as Triple P.

The focus group feedback during the County Self-Assessment (CSA) process supports these strategies and their expansion. Some of the feedback consisted of Families Together being an effective program and the need to expand it, continued need for concrete supports and services for families to prevent them entering the child welfare system. Other feedback included increasing coordination and collaboration of child, youth, and family serving agencies to strengthen families. The current means to support families and prevent their entering the child welfare system are the following:

Countywide Differential Response: Families Together is a comprehensive child abuse early intervention and prevention program serving the entire county. This initiative, using a differential response model, is a collaborative effort between the FCS Division and Encompass Community Services. Funding from First 5 and Santa Cruz County Health Services and Human Services Departments are braided together to support this program. HSD funds include County Children's Trust Fund (CCTF), CAPIT, and PSSF Family Support.

Families Together is an essential part of the diversion and prevention strategy developed in Santa Cruz County to reduce child abuse and neglect. It is an evidence-based program that utilizes home-based,

individualized services with an emphasis on the parent-child relationship and child development and parent education. Goals of the program include:

- Improved parent-child relationship
- Improved family support
- Improved community engagement
- Improved child safety
- Improved child health and development
- Improved child well-being

Participation in Families Together is voluntary. FCS refers parents to this program when they've been reported to FCS and the referral has been either assessed out or investigated and the case has been closed with an inconclusive allegation or substantiation with low risk and a safety plan. Once a referral is identified, an FCS social worker contacts the family to engage them in voluntary community-based services. The following services are provided:

- Assessment using SDM assessment tools, Ages and Stages Questionnaire (ASQ) and the Nursing Child Satellite Training (NCAST)
- Provision of basic needs – food, housing, diapers, transportation, clothing, job search
- Advocacy – for medical care, legal issues, education
- Housing assistance – rental assistance, housing resources, budgeting skills
- Parent education and skill building – early childhood education, Triple P Parenting education
- Mental health services – counseling, psychological assessment, support groups, development of life skills
- Referral to other community resources including substance abuse assessment and treatment

Families Together has been expanded in the last two years through a grant from the county Employment and Benefits Division to support families who are participating in Welfare to Work and are potentially at risk of entering the child welfare system.

2. CWS Flexible Fund: A flexible fund provides tangible support to families receiving Child Welfare Services, to facilitate reunification and family preservation by providing flexible, family-based, intensive time limited, and culturally competent intervention and treatment services to families in crisis. This program is supported through PSSF Family Preservation funds.

3. Flexible Fund Program for Adoption Promotion and Support: The Flexible Funds for Adoption Promotion and Support Program is designed to enhance permanency outcomes for children in foster care by supporting activities that encourage and sustain successful adoptions. These funds may be used by adoptions social workers to implement innovative, family-centered services that promote adoption readiness, facilitate placement, and provide post-adoption support.

The Flexible Spending Program is also designed to promote and support normalcy for children in foster care both prior to and following adoption. The program provides financial assistance to families so children can participate in everyday experiences that nurture a sense of belonging, stability, and emotional wellness. By covering the costs of these normalcy activities, the Flexible Spending Program

empowers caregivers to provide children with experiences that mirror those of their peers and allow them to thrive emotionally and socially.

4. Therapeutic Supervised Visitation: Therapeutic supervised visitation promotes and encourages healthy parent-child relationships and assists children and natural parents in the work of family reunification. A trained bilingual visit supervisor who is culturally competent supervises Court-ordered visits for families referred by FCS. The visit supervisor is supervised by a licensed or license-eligible clinician. This program incorporates Triple P and is supported through PSSF Time Limited Family Reunification funds.

5. Coordination and Integration of Children's Services: CBCAP funds are designated to provide services and perform activities to enhance the coordination and capacity building functions of the Children's Network. The Children's Network is a countywide council of child-serving agencies whose primary purpose is to advance system change through cross-sector collaboration by elevating youth voice and implementing the Children & Youth Bill of Rights. United Way of Santa Cruz (the sponsoring agency for the Children's Network) will support and participate in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Cabinet (County of Santa Cruz, Family & Children's Services, comprehensive prevention plan implementation workgroup. The United Way will also attend and actively contribute to the Santa Cruz County Child and Youth Wellbeing Cabinet to ensure alignment of efforts across agencies that participate in the Children's Network. The network serves as a vehicle for planning, coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing. Children's Network meetings occur on a bimonthly basis where child, youth, and family serving agencies come together to discuss child abuse prevention and how their individual agencies can contribute to the overall child maltreatment prevention efforts in the county. Some examples of actions the Children Network members have engaged in are disseminating information about resources to their clients, referring clients to member organizations for support, engaging in Child Abuse Prevention Month activities (social media, Board of Supervisors proclamation, etc.) and training staff on mandated reporting. The Children's Network is responsible for the Children's Network Symposium, a one-day countywide event focused on:

- Uplifting the role of community-based organizations as essential partners in systems change.
- Strengthening cross-sector collaboration to improve alignment, relationships, and impact.
- Advancing the Children and Youth Bill of Rights by aligning efforts to its values and priorities.
- Supporting the safety, stability, and long-term well-being of children and families by aligning with child welfare goals, including prevention, early intervention, and placement stability.

The intent of the Children's Network is to encourage the development of a comprehensive and collaborative delivery system of services to the children and youth of Santa Cruz County. Many Children's Network members are also involved in the other major prevention initiatives in the county such as the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet, ACEs Aware Network, and the Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments initiative. The plan is to have all these various networks and workgroups, including Children's Network, be part of a unified approach to child maltreatment prevention. In recent years, it has been challenging to coordinate prevention services due to the numerous needs of our county. Therefore, FCS and the Children's Network have renewed a commitment to increase coordination of prevention services that was launched in January 2019 with the Office of Child Abuse Prevention (OCAP) Prevention Summit in San Diego.

SIP 5-YEAR CHART

Family and Children Services

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: P4 – Re-entry into Care

National Standard: 5.6%

CSA Baseline Performance: 9.8% (Q4 2024 data extract)

Current Performance:

Target Improvement Goals:

YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3	YEAR 4	YEAR 5
N/A	8.8%	7.8%	6.5%	5.6%

The first year of the 5-year SIP cycle will be focused on integrated design and implementation of the three strategies. Therefore, no change is expected in the target outcome until year two. At that point, an average of about a 1% improvement each year is the goal.

The charts below describe the action steps, timing and responsible persons to support putting these strategies into practice.

CHILD WELFARE STRATEGY 1: Enhance aftercare planning and connection to prevention providers by preparing families for exiting the system from the start.	<input type="checkbox"/> CAPIT <input type="checkbox"/> CBCAP <input type="checkbox"/> PSSF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	Applicable Outcome Measure: P4 – Reentry into Care	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project	
1. Establish workgroup to identify target population for aftercare planning and design pilot program, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #1 implementation.	January 2026	June 2026	Division Director/Program Managers
2. Design aftercare pilot program elements including: a. Alignment of aftercare target population with candidate populations for SCC Comprehensive Prevention Plan (CPP). b. Define prevention provider requirements to match service needs of aftercare population. c. Integrate methods to strengthen service partnership between FCS & SUD providers to emphasize aftercare/recovery support services. d. Develop client identification process, aftercare planning integration into CFT practice and referral pathways for aftercare population to connect with providers. e. Determine FCS unit(s) to participate in aftercare pilot program. f. Define qualitative & quantitative metrics to measure impact of aftercare pilot program.	January 2026	June 2026	Assistant Division Director/ Ongoing Program Manager/FCS Analyst
3. Develop policies & procedures to guide aftercare pilot program, including aftercare plan template, engagement tools and other team resources.	June 2026	December 2027	Division Director/FCS Analyst
4. Establish contracts with prevention providers to fulfill aftercare pilot program requirements.	January 2027	December 2027	Division Director/FCS Analyst

5. Develop curriculum & train FCS staff participating in aftercare pilot program on new policies, procedures & tools.	January 2027	June 2027	Division Director/Staff Development
6. Launch aftercare pilot program.	July 2027	July 2028	Assistant Division Director/Ongoing Program Manager
7. Evaluate impact of aftercare pilot program using qualitative data from case review & quantitative data from CWS/CMS/CARES.	August 2028	December 2028	Division Director/FCS Analyst/Planning and Evaluation Division

CHILD WELFARE STRATEGY 2: Improve parent engagement through targeted educational & support activities.	<input type="checkbox"/> CAPIT	Applicable Outcome Measure: P4 – Reentry into Care	
	<input type="checkbox"/> CBCAP		
	<input type="checkbox"/> PSSF	<input type="checkbox"/> Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project	
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A		
1. Establish Parent Engagement Workgroup to design a set of concrete parent education & support activities, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #2 implementation.	January 2026	June 2026	FCS Director/Program Managers
2. Partner with key stakeholders to design details of two specific Parent Engagement enhancements. a. Improve parent’s understanding of dependency court process so that they are better informed participants in their child’s case planning. Multi-pronged approach includes: • Collaborate with birth parent advocates to translate large process map outside of SCC dependency courtroom into brochure format in multiple languages.	Mar 2026	December 2026	Assistant Division Director/ Investigations Program Manager/FCS Analyst

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop interactive online version of court process map for parents to have a customized experience for their case. • Incorporate court process map tools into CFT and other existing practices. • Refresh training of Parent Partners to support social workers in answering parents’ questions about dependency court process & encouraging participation. <p>b. Implement best practices in engaging parents with complex behavioral health needs in case planning.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify skill gaps of FCS direct service workforce regarding engagement of this parent population. • Collaborate with adult mental health and SUD subject matter experts to identify recommended engagement skills to determine if existing curriculum meets the needs of social workers. • Utilize training contracts with Northern Academy and Bay Area Academy for existing curriculum that meets identified training needs. • Deliver training to FCS workforce using skill building curriculum. • Provide opportunities for social workers to practice new skills & reinforce with regular coaching. 	January 2027	December 2029	Division Director/ Staff Development Manager/ Investigations Prog. Manager
<p>3. Design method to evaluate parent engagement experiences using case review interview data and staff participation rates in relevant trainings.</p> <p>a. Consult with Bay Area Learning Collaborative about using case review data to improve parent engagement programming.</p>	January 2027	December 2029	Division Director/Planning and Evaluation Division

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> b. Identify case review information requirements and incorporate into parent interview questionnaire. c. Extract key content from parent interviews on a flow basis. d. Capture and report parent engagement themes to continuously improve FCS programming. e. Increase the number of staff participating in Motivational Interviewing training. 			
4. Develop policies & procedures to guide parent engagement education & support activities.	July 2027	December 2027	Division Director/FCS Analyst
5. Develop curriculum & train FCS workforce on new policies, procedures & tools.	January 2028	June 2028	Division Director/Staff Development
6. Evaluate impact of parent engagement education & support activities to indicate practice change using: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Increased qualitative data with targeted questions through case review interviews with parents. b. Parent questionnaires measuring increase in court process knowledge. c. Increased staff participation rates in motivational interview training. d. Quantitative data from CWS/CMS/CARES. 	January 2029	December 2029	Division Director/FCS Analyst/Planning and Evaluation Division

CHILD WELFARE STRATEGY 3: Increase networks of support for every family entering the system	<input type="checkbox"/> CAPIT <input type="checkbox"/> CBCAP <input type="checkbox"/> PSSF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	Applicable Outcome Measure: P4 – Reentry into Care	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project	
1. Establish Networks of Support Workgroup to plan and develop an internal process for engaging networks of	January 2026	September 2026	Division Director/Program Managers

support, along with a leadership feedback loop to ensure oversight of Strategy #3 implementation.			
2. Operationalize the work of the newly formed Family Finding Unit to enhance engagement of families' natural supports.	November 2026	April 2027	Division Director/Supportive Services Program Manager/FCS Analyst
3. Enhance current Child and Family Team Meeting structures to include networks of support a. Increase the number of natural supports attending CFTs through increased communication and engagement with families b. Implement a tracking system to document the number of natural supports invited and their attendance, as well as how they commit to supporting the family c. Hold a dismissal CFT for every family exiting the system that includes a plan for how families will utilize their natural and community supports upon exiting the child welfare system.	May 2026	December 2027	Division Director/Supportive Services Program Manager/FCS Analyst
4. Integrate networks of support from case entry to case dismissal a. Develop plan for how networks of support will be integrated into the case plan based on individual needs of families b. Develop method for measuring strength of network of supports building on work already started with the Judicial Council Leadership team	January 2026	June 2027	Assistant Division Director/FCS Analyst/Investigations Program Manager
5. Enhance support for Resource Parents, Relative Caregivers and NERFM placements through support groups, coaching and respite. a. Incorporate feedback from the Resource Parent Retention and Workgroup to improve resource parent's capacity	January 2027	December 2029	Division Director/Support Services Manager

b. Incorporate feedback from parents and resource parents to facilitate activities that will improve and sustain relationship with resource parents and parents.			
6. Increase role of community providers in expanding families' networks of support leveraging the work of the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing cabinet a. Develop process for linking families to community supports prior to dismissal of cases	June 2026	December 2028	Division Director/FCS Analyst
7. Develop policies & procedures to guide networks of support engagement & support activities.	January 2027	March 2027	Division Director/FCS Analyst
8. Develop curriculum & train FCS workforce on new policies, procedures & tools.	March 2027	June 2027	Division Director/Staff Development
9. Evaluate impact of networks of support activities using qualitative data from case review & quantitative data from CWS/CMS/CARES.	December 2026	December 2029	Division Director/Planning and Evaluation Division

Juvenile Probation Division

Priority Systemic Factor: Staff Training - Family Engagement

National Standard: N/A

CSA Baseline Performance: N/A

Target Goals:

Year 1: Design Family Connections practice in consultation with community partners and research of best practices. Establish baseline data for family engagement.

Year 2: Develop policy & procedures around Family Connections, establish training plan and roll out dates.

Year 3: Train all placement DPOs and Supervisors in Family Connections practice; establish feedback loop for CQI.

Year 4: Launch Family Connections practice: Start monitoring and evaluation according to data listed in Action Step 5 in the chart below.

Year 5: Adjust Family Connections practice as needed according to feedback from probation staff and supervisors; continue program progress and evaluation, and comparison to baseline data.

JUVENILE PROBATION STRATEGY: Strengthen community and family support networks to promote permanency for probation youth.	<input type="checkbox"/> CAPIT <input type="checkbox"/> CBCAP <input type="checkbox"/> PSSF <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> N/A	Applicable Outcome Measure: Systemic Factor – Staff Training - Family Engagement	
		<input type="checkbox"/> Title IV-E Child Welfare Waiver Demonstration Capped Allocation Project	
1. Develop Family Connections practice to design methods that strengthen community and family support networks to promote permanency for probation youth.	Dec 2025	June 2027	Division Director, Asst Division Director, Sr Analyst
2. Develop policy & procedures to guide probation staff in the Family Connections practice enhancements described above.	July 2026	July 2027	Division Director, Asst Division Director, Placement Supervisor
3. Training to probation staff & supervisors using the above curriculum.	July 2026	July 2027	Division Director, Asst Division Director, Placement Supervisor
4. Launch Family Connections practice with Placement Unit.	July 2026	June 2030	Division Director, Asst Division Director, Placement Supervisor
5. Track and monitor progress of Family Connections in achieving implementation milestones and desired outcomes i.e. number of CFT mtgs, number of natural supports, active engagement by natural supports, timeliness to reunification/permanency, and monthly face-to-face contacts by probation with youth in care (non-custodial placement).	January 2028	June 2030	Asst. Division Director, DPO III's, Senior Data Analyst

SERVICE PROVISION FOR CAPIT/CBCAP/PSSF PROGRAMS

PROGRAM NAME

Flexible funds for Adoption Promotion and Support

SERVICE PROVIDER

Family and Children’s Services of Santa Cruz County

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

The Flexible Funds for Adoption Promotion and Support Program is designed to enhance permanency outcomes for children in foster care by supporting activities that encourage and sustain successful adoptions. These funds may be used by adoptions social workers to implement innovative, family-centered services that promote adoption readiness, facilitate placement, and provide post-adoption support. The Flexible Spending Program is also designed to promote and support normalcy for children in foster care both prior to and following adoption. The program provides financial assistance to families so children can participate in everyday experiences that nurture a sense of belonging, stability, and emotional wellness. By covering the costs of these normalcy activities, the Flexible Spending Program empowers caregivers to provide children with experiences that mirror those of their peers and allow them to thrive emotionally and socially.

These funds can be used for a wide variety of age-appropriate activities that contribute to a child’s social development and overall well-being, including but not limited to:

Adoption Recruitment	Targeted child-specific recruitment, professional photography, media campaigns, matching events
Family Readiness	Training for prospective adoptive parents, completion of pre-placement assessments, readiness workshops
Child Preparation	Life books, therapeutic support, adoption readiness camps, cultural heritage activities
Normalcy Activities and Support	Extracurricular activities (sports, arts, music lessons) School-related events and items (field trips, tutoring, yearbooks, graduation) Recreational opportunities (summer camps, swimming lessons) Social experiences (birthday celebrations, outings with friends) Personal enrichment (clothing that reflects a child’s identity, books, hobbies)
Post-Placement Support	Adoption celebrations, Counseling, mentoring, respite care, support groups, individualized services for families and children

FUNDING SOURCES

SOURCE	LIST FUNDED ACTIVITIES
CAPIT	
CBCAP	
PSSF Family Preservation	
PSSF Family Support	
PSSF Time-Limited Family Reunification	
PSSF Adoption Promotion and Support	Concrete supports, counseling, respite, extracurriculars

IDENTIFY PRIORITY NEED OUTLINED IN CSA

CSA pp. 115, 123

- P4 – Reentry into foster care within 12 months of exit
- Post permanency-Support
- Supporting Caregivers

TARGET POPULATION

Current dependents in the foster care system with a case plan goal of adoption, families exploring adoption, families with children who have had a finalized adoption.

TARGET GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Countywide

TIMELINE

SIP CYCLE: JULY 1, 2025– JUNE 30, 2030

EVALUATION

PROGRAM OUTCOME(S) AND MEASUREMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) MONITORING

Desired Outcome	Indicator	Source of Measure	Frequency
All Pre/Post Adoptive families who need concrete or other supports to encourage and sustain successful adoptions will receive them.	All Pre/Post adoptive families who request flex funds receive them	Internal tracking system As requested, monitored by FCS.	

CLIENT SATISFACTION

Method or Tool	Frequency	Utilization	Action
Verbal feedback and client stories provided to CWS social worker	After request has been processed	Feedback will be used to target needs and services	Problem areas addressed by staff, as appropriate to resolve issues and ensure continuous quality improvement

PROGRAM NAME

Children’s Network Coordination, Symposium and Capacity Building

SERVICE PROVIDER

United Way of Santa Cruz County

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Perform activities to enhance the coordination and capacity-building functions of the Children’s Network. The Children’s Network is a countywide council of child-serving agencies whose primary purpose is to advance system change through cross-sector collaboration by elevating youth voice and implementing the Children & Youth Bill of Rights. United Way of Santa Cruz (the sponsoring agency for the Children’s Network) will support and participate in the Child and Youth Wellbeing Cabinet (County of Santa Cruz, Family & Children’s Services, comprehensive prevention plan implementation workgroup. The United Way will also attend and actively contribute to the Santa Cruz County Child and Youth Wellbeing Cabinet to ensure alignment of efforts across agencies that participate in the Children’s Network. The network serves as a vehicle for planning, coordination, collaboration, networking and information sharing. Children’s Network meetings occur on a bimonthly basis where child, youth, and family serving agencies come together to discuss child abuse prevention and how their individual agencies can contribute to the overall child maltreatment prevention efforts in the county. Some examples of actions the Children Network members have engaged in are disseminating information about resources to their clients, referring clients to member organizations for support, engaging in Child Abuse Prevention Month activities (social media, Board of Supervisors proclamation, etc.) and training staff on mandated reporting.

The Children’s Network is responsible for the Children’s Network Symposium:

- Design and implement the Children’s Network Symposium, a one-day countywide event focused on:
 - o Uplifting the role of community-based organizations as essential partners in systems change.
 - o Strengthening cross-sector collaboration to improve alignment, relationships, and impact.
 - o Advancing the Children and Youth Bill of Rights by aligning efforts to its values and priorities.
 - o Supporting the safety, stability, and long-term well-being of children and families by aligning with child welfare goals, including prevention, early intervention, and placement stability.

The intent of the Children’s Network is to encourage the development of a comprehensive and collaborative delivery system of services to the children and youth of Santa Cruz County. Many Children’s Network members are also involved in the other major prevention initiatives in the county such as the Child, Youth and Family Wellbeing Cabinet, ACEs Aware Network, and the Collective of Results and Evidence-based (CORE) Investments initiative. The plan is to have all these various networks

and workgroups, including Children’s Network, be part of a unified approach to child maltreatment prevention.

FUNDING SOURCES

SOURCE	LIST FUNDED ACTIVITIES
CAPIT	
CBCAP	Network Development
PSSF Family Preservation	
PSSF Family Support	
PSSF Time-Limited Family Reunification	
PSSF Adoption Promotion and Support	
OTHER Source(s): De-Link	

IDENTIFY PRIORITY NEED OUTLINED IN CSA

CSA p. 131,132

- P4 – Reentry into foster care within 12 months of exit
- Collaborations
- Responding to Families with Intensifying, Complex Needs
- Service Accessibility & Responsiveness

TARGET POPULATION

Vulnerable families at risk of abuse or neglect. Children’s Network members provide various services to at-risk families and the connections with each other facilitate provision of resources and referrals along with understanding how the services they provide impacts child abuse prevention.

TARGET GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Countywide

TIMELINE

SIP CYCLE: JUNE 1, 2025-JUNE 30, 2025

EVALUATION

PROGRAM OUTCOME(S) AND MEASUREMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) MONITORING

Desired Outcome	Indicator	Source of Measure	Frequency
Reduce the likelihood of child abuse and neglect by convening family	90% of participants believe that the Children’s Network is	Program developed survey at the close of each meeting	Completed by participants at the end of each meeting

<p>serving agencies to coordinate and support community-based efforts to expand services and programs that strengthen and support families</p>	<p>facilitating integrated prevention services for children, youth, and families.</p>		
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CLIENT SATISFACTION

Method or Tool	Frequency	Utilization	Action
<p>Collaboration Survey</p>	<p>Completed by participants at the end of each meeting</p>	<p>Surveys reviewed annually</p>	<p>Problem areas addressed by staff, as appropriate to resolve issues and ensure continuous quality improvement</p>

PROGRAM NAME

Child Welfare Services Flex Fund

SERVICE PROVIDER

Family and Children’s Services of Santa Cruz County

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

A flexible fund provides tangible concrete support to families receiving Child Welfare Services. Flex funds are provided to any child welfare involved child, youth, or family (birth or resource) to facilitate reunification, promote family preservation, maintain placement by providing flexible, family-based, intensive time-limited and culturally competent intervention and treatment services. Some examples of concrete supports and services provided include summer and afterschool camps, transportation (flights, gas, etc.), rental assistance, utilities, laptops for youth, and specialized therapy.

FUNDING SOURCES

SOURCE	LIST FUNDED ACTIVITIES
CAPIT	
CBCAP	
PSSFFamily Preservation	Basic needs, concrete supports, respite care, extracurricular activities
PSSFFamily Support	
PSSFFamily Reunification	
PSSFAdoption Promotion and Support	
OTHERSource(s):	

IDENTIFY PRIORITY NEED OUTLINED IN CSA

CSA pp. 106-108, 120

- P1 – Permanency in 12 months for children entering care
- Enhance services to birth parents
- Concrete supports
- Housing and homelessness services and support
- Coordination and collaboration between FCS and other departments interacting with child welfare involved families

TARGET POPULATION

Children, youth, and families involved in the child welfare system.

TARGET GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Countywide

TIMELINE

SIP CYCLE: JULY 1, 2020 – JUNE 30, 2025

EVALUATION**PROGRAM OUTCOME(S) AND MEASUREMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) MONITORING**

Desired Outcome	Indicator	Source of Measure	Frequency
All children, youth, and families in the child welfare system who need concrete supports to support case plan goals receive them	All children, youth, and families who request flex funds receive them	Internal tracking system monitored by FCS	As requested,

CLIENT SATISFACTION

Method or Tool	Frequency	Utilization	Action
Verbal feedback and client stories provided to CWS social worker	After request has been processed	Feedback will be used to target needs and services	Problem areas addressed by staff, as appropriate to resolve issues and ensure continuous quality improvement

PROGRAM NAME

Supervised Visitation

SERVICE PROVIDER

Parents Center

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Supervised visitation promotes and encourages healthy parent-child relationships and assists children and biological parents in the work of family reunification. Different levels of supervised visitation occur depending on the issues that brought the family to the attention of FCS. All supervised visits can occur in the office, parent's home, or in the community except for Level 5. The levels of supervised visitation are as follows:

- Level 5: Therapeutic Visits/Sessions — these visits shall be supervised by a mental health professional and serve the clinical purpose of helping the client and/or child overcome barriers preventing them from moving to less structured parent/child visits. Therapeutic visitation shall only be provided as a result of a Court order and shall take place in the provider's office.
- Level 4: Highly Structured Supervision (Purposeful) — these visits require continuous, close monitoring the parent/child interaction by the visit supervisor, and shall provide coaching, mentoring, structure and safety of the child.
- Level 3: Moderately Structured Supervision (Monitored) — the visit supervisor shall be present during all visits. Supervision ranges from being close by during the visit to ensuring the visit occurs in a public setting with the visit supervisor checking in periodically. Visit supervisors may provide some coaching and mentoring during these visits.
- Level 2: Intermittent Supervision — for these visits, the visit supervisor shall be present for a check-in at the beginning and/or end of the visit and may provide some coaching regarding activities before the visit. Visit supervisors may provide some coaching and mentoring during these visits.
- Level 1: Unsupervised — for these visits, the visit supervisor is not required to be present for the majority or any of the visit but may check in with the visit participants through a phone call or receive feedback after the visit.

A trained bilingual, bicultural visit supervisor who is culturally competent supervises Court-ordered visits for families referred by FCS and provides Triple P services. Triple P levels 2-5 are provided during the visits dependent on the intensity of the parenting intervention needed and the behavior problems a family experiences. The visit supervisor is supervised by a licensed or license-eligible clinician. Services are available in Spanish for monolingual Spanish-speaking families.

Father-friendly principles have been added to Parents Center's contract in an effort to increase father-focused services and practices in the context of supervised visits, therapy, and parenting classes.

FUNDING SOURCES

SOURCE	LIST FUNDED ACTIVITIES
CAPIT	
CBCAP	
PSSFFamily Preservation	
PSSFFamily Support	
PSSFFamily Reunification	Parent/sibling visitation
PSSFAdoption Promotion and Support	
OTHERSource(s):	

IDENTIFY PRIORITY NEED OUTLINED IN CSA

CSA pp. 113, 118-122

- P1 – Permanency in 12 months for children entering care
- Family engagement
- Supervised visitation availability after work hours and on the weekends
- Father engagement

TARGET POPULATION

Children and youth that are removed from their home and placed in a resource family home or short-term residential treatment program (STRTP)

Parents or primary caregiver of such a child, in order to facilitate the reunification of the child safely, appropriately and in a timely fashion

TARGET GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Countywide

TIMELINE

SIP CYCLE: JULY 1, 2020 – JUNE 30, 2025

EVALUATION

PROGRAM OUTCOME(S) AND MEASUREMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) MONITORING

Desired Outcome	Indicator	Source of Measure	Frequency
Parents increase in knowledge of parenting skills	30% decrease in child problem behaviors and parental stress as determined by the PAFAS and CAPES questionnaires; 25%	Parent and Family Adjustment Scales (PAFAS), Child Adjustment and Parent Efficacy Scale (CAPES) administered at	Completed by parent at regular intervals and program exit

	improvement in overall parenting style as determined by the PAFAS questionnaire	beginning of services, regular intervals during services, and at exit	
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CLIENT SATISFACTION

Method or Tool	Frequency	Utilization	Action
Satisfaction survey	Completed by participants semi-annually	Surveys reviewed semiannually	Problem areas addressed by staff, as appropriate to resolve issues and ensure continuous quality improvement

PROGRAM NAME

Families Together (Differential Response/Diversion Services)

SERVICE PROVIDER

Encompass Community Services

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Families Together is a comprehensive child abuse early intervention and prevention program serving the entire county. This initiative, using a differential response/diversion model, is a collaborative effort between the FCS Division and Encompass Community Services. Funding from First 5, and Santa Cruz County Health Services and Human Services Departments (including CCTF, CAPIT, and PSSF Family Support) are braided together to support this program. Families Together is an essential part of the differential response/diversion strategy developed in Santa Cruz County to reduce child abuse and neglect. It is an innovative program that utilizes in-home, individualized services with an emphasis on the parent-child relationship and child development and parent education. Goals of the program include:

- Improved parent-child relationship
- Improved family support
- Improved community engagement
- Improved child safety
- Improved child health and development
- Improved child well-being

Participation in Families Together is voluntary. FCS refers parents to this program when they've been reported to FCS and the referral has been either assessed out or investigated and the case has been closed regardless of the disposition of the referral (unfounded, inconclusive, substantiated). During the pandemic, Families Together has continued to provide services virtually. Services can be provided up to 6 months and the frequency depends on the specific needs of the family.

Once a referral is identified, FCS contacts the family to engage them in voluntary community-based services. The following services are provided:

- Case management including intake, assessment, service plan development, linkage to resources and monitoring of progress in achieving service plan objectives.
- Parent education and skill building – early childhood education, Triple P Parenting education (Levels 2-5).

FUNDING SOURCES

SOURCE	LIST FUNDED ACTIVITIES
CAPIT	Differential Response, case management, parent education
CBCAP	
PSSF Family Preservation	
PSSF Family Support	Differential Response, case management, parent education
PSSF Time-Limited Family Reunification	
PSSF Adoption Promotion and Support	
OTHER Source(s): County Children’s Trust Fund, First 5	Differential Response, case management, parent education

IDENTIFY PRIORITY NEED OUTLINED IN CSA

CSA pp. 113, 117-119, 128

- P1 – Permanency in 12 months for children entering care
- Family engagement
- In-home support services for families
- Concrete supports
- Housing and homelessness services and supports

TARGET POPULATION

- Families with children at risk of abuse or neglect
- Families with one or more risk factors
- Families that have already demonstrated a need for intervention

TARGET GEOGRAPHIC AREA

Countywide

TIMELINE

SIP CYCLE: JULY 1, 2020 – JUNE 30, 2025

EVALUATION

PROGRAM OUTCOME(S) AND MEASUREMENT & QUALITY ASSURANCE (QA) MONITORING

Desired Outcome	Indicator	Source of Measure	Frequency
Participants will demonstrate increased	80% of primary caregivers who participate in	Structured Decision-Making tool (SDM)	Completed with participants at exit and compared to initial Risk

protective factors and decreased risk	Differential Response will demonstrate reduced risk based on a final assessment		Assessment provided by FCS
Primary caregivers will have increased parenting skills	80% of primary caregivers will have improved parenting	Protective Factors Survey	Completed with participants at entry + exit

CLIENT SATISFACTION

Method or Tool	Frequency	Utilization	Action
Satisfaction survey	Completed by participants at exit	Surveys reviewed after each exit from program	Problem areas addressed by staff, as appropriate to resolve issues and ensure continuous quality improvement