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CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL POLICY

UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON GRADUATE COLLEGE OF SOCIAL WORK

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Through the generous support of the Walter S. Johnson Foundation, the Center for the Study of Social Policy (CSSP) and Dr. Alan Dettlaff of the University of Houston initiated work in 2013 with Fresno and Santa Clara counties to support efforts to improve outcomes for 1) Latino youth and 2) Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning (LGBTQ) and Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) youth in the child welfare system. This effort is not meant to be a stand-alone initiative, but rather findings from this initial assessment and strategies employed at the county level are meant to inform the state of California as well as support effective implementation of the CAPP and *Katie A.* efforts currently underway.

From the beginning, this effort placed a high value on ensuring that the work would be a true partnership with the counties. The CSSP team and Dr. Dettlaff worked collaboratively with leadership teams in both counties to develop research questions that would uncover problematic practices and policies that contribute to poor outcomes for Latino youth and youth who identify as LGBTQ and GNC. Once identified, research findings would be available to inform the development and testing of strategies to better support these populations.

This report briefly describes the methodology used to answer the identified research questions, presents the findings and provides preliminary recommendations to inform the strategic planning in the counties. Even though Santa Clara and Fresno counties face different social and economic challenges, information from both counties is presented to help inform strategy development at the county and state level.

METHODOLOGY

In fall 2013 and spring 2014, CSSP and Dr. Dettlaff worked with county administrators to form a leadership team for this work in each county. Once assembled, CSSP and Dr. Dettlaff met with the leadership teams three times over the course of several months to identify the most pressing challenges facing the counties in their practices with Latino youth and LGBTQ youth. As a result of these discussions, the team developed the research questions that each project would address, listed in Appendix A. Once the research questions were finalized, the project team worked with a smaller group of administrators in each county to design the research strategies that would be used to gather data to answer the research questions. These teams met several times during summer and fall 2014 and finalized the data collection strategies.

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the University of Illinois and Santa Clara County, CSSP and Dr. Dettlaff conducted several research activities in spring and summer 2015 with the help of local coordinators. The team reviewed case files; conducted focus groups with youth, caregivers, frontline workers, supervisors and community members; conducted individual interviews with foster parents, educational service staff, program managers and supervisors; and reviewed administrative and county-level data. Focus groups with caregivers and parents were conducted in both Spanish and English when needed. These data collection efforts are summarized in Appendix B.
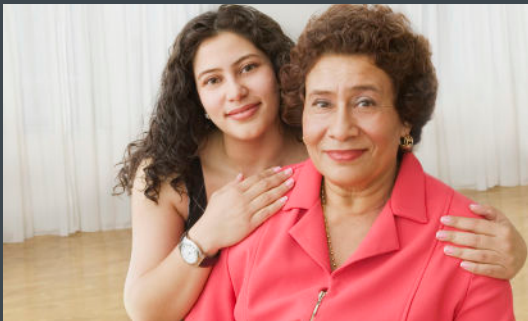
Latino Children, Youth, & Families

Santa Clara and Fresno counties focused on research questions for Latino children, youth and families based on challenges unique to each county. Santa Clara County examined the high incidence of referrals for Latino families and factors contributing to the educational outcomes of Latino youth in foster care. Fresno County explored the challenges and barriers facing undocumented families. Although different areas of focus, some common themes across the counties emerged in the data and are described below.

Challenges Related to Undocumented Family Members

❍ Some Latino families, particularly those who are undocumented, are invisible to the larger society; workers describe these parents as "phantoms," people living in the shadows.

❍ Some parents and children lack informal support from their extended family because often the relatives reside far away, in other counties or countries. Some relatives are undocumented and unable to provide support, such as driving children to service appointments and activities because they do not have or are unable to obtain necessary identification.

Service Needs

❍ There is a lack of accessible and affordable housing for families. Families are living with two or three other families (Santa Clara); in shacks, garages and other settings that are not legally habitable (Fresno).

❍ The community lacks proactive, preventive services. Families living in severe poverty do not have access to concrete and timely services and interventions such as parenting classes and coaching, domestic violence advocacy and health and mental health services.
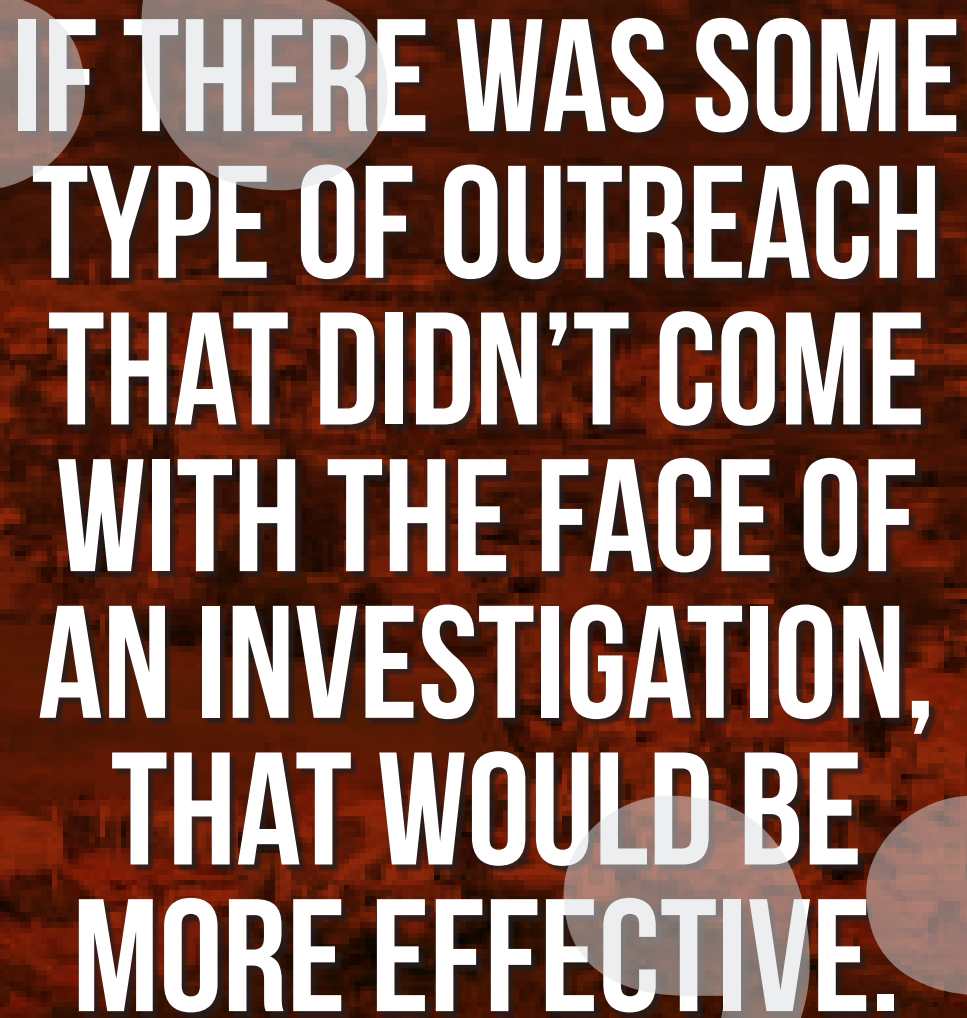
Language Barriers

❍ For monolingual Spanish-speaking families—particularly parents—workers often rely on translators because there are not enough bilingual, let alone bicultural, workers. Bilingual and bicultural services are not readily available for some families – the deficit was particularly large for parenting programs.

Sexual Abuse History of Youth

❍ The case file reviews found a high presence of sexual abuse experienced by child welfare system-involved youth. It is unclear how much of the documented sexual abuse history was due to the skill in identifying this trauma as part of workers' assessments, an elevated issue for this population of youth or both. In a few cases reviewed, we found that undocumented mothers knew of the abuse but described not having any resources to help them protect their child and get away from the abuser. They described feeling dependent on the abuser or abuser's family for economic support.

"IF THERE WAS SOME TYPE OF OUTREACH THAT DIDN'T COME WITH THE FACE OF AN INVESTIGATION, THAT WOULD BE MORE EFFECTIVE."

SANTA CLARA COUNTY

The research team interviewed individual workers; conducted focus groups with workers, youth and caregivers; and conducted a limited case record review. This review found several positive elements and practices in Santa Clara County, including:

- Workers regularly interviewed for and described trauma experienced by youth.
- The educational status of youth in out-of-home care was documented as part of court reports and updated regularly.
- Workers and providers described the county as having many resources, especially in the urban centers. Workers and youth described The Hub, a one-stop shop for adolescents, as a particularly helpful resource.
- Through the implementation of the new Resource Family Approval (RFA) process, the county will now approve prospective caregivers as both foster and adoptive parents. Previously, prospective caregivers were first licensed as foster parents and later, as a case moved toward an alternative permanent plan, an adoptive home study approval process would begin. Now, in the first 90 days a caregiver will be approved for both foster and adoptive parenting through a unified home study process. This single process should speed the time to permanency for those families wishing to adopt youth in their care.

After discussions with Santa Clara leadership and examining local data, the county decided to focus on two areas of concern: 1) the high incidence of referrals for Latino families and 2) the poor educational outcomes of Latino youth in the foster care system. For each focus area, research questions that guided the activities are provided in Appendix A.

High Incidence of Referrals

Interviews and focus groups were conducted with child welfare and school professionals to better understand the high incidence of referrals Santa Clara County receives for Latino families. Santa Clara County noted that Latino children have unusually high referrals to their child abuse hotline, which contributes to Latino children's overrepresentation in later stages of the system. These referrals primarily come from the public schools in the county. Through interviews and focus groups, the following themes were identified.

- **Problematic Practices**
  - ○ Staff hypothesized that one cause of these high referrals from schools may be the effect of a critical abuse incident of a child that occurred

several years ago. A lawsuit was filed because the school had not made timely referrals of any concerns, and in response to this lawsuit, schools may be erring on the side of caution when determining whether or not to make a child abuse referral. Workers believe that the high profile case and lawsuit against the school district is still resulting in the schools taking a hard line approach to "mandated reporting." Whether this is still a factor or somewhat of a myth given the history should be explored further.
  - ○ For some Latino families to access services, a child welfare case must be opened. Workers described some preventive and early intervention services, in particular services offered by the Mexican American Community Services Agency and EMQ Families First, which require families to meet strict and ultimately prohibitive criteria.
  - ○ Schools report truancy but do not attempt any interventions first; they expect truancy issues to be addressed by the child welfare system.

- **Limited Access to and Knowledge of Appropriate Resources in the Community**
  - ❍ "We deal with more and more families where language barriers are an issue and the resources become even smaller for monolingual speaking families."
  - ❍ Community members are not always aware of the available community resources. Community members report a lack of a common resource guide to help them locate and recommend relevant resources to Latino families.
  - ❍ Professionals report that mental health services are nearly impossible to navigate for families without an advocate. There are many restrictions on accessing mental health services and a lack of information on eligibility criteria. It becomes a "learned helplessness situation for the families" who are navigating an unfamiliar system alone.
  - ❍ Community members report a need for more family counseling, parent education, job training and housing assistance. There is a need for more "pre-interventions" in the community for those families who may be stressed and socially isolated.

- **Schools And Community Members Need To Better Engage Families**
  - ❍ *"Families that we are able to get in touch with are families that we generally do not make reports on."* Reporters emphasized the importance of accessing the parental figures, as "they are not phantoms." "Perhaps the referral would not be made if the parent was a phone call away, or you knew you had access to that parent."*
  - ❍ *"Once families understand that they are being investigated, they shut down. They don't answer doors, they don't return phone calls. If there was some type of outreach that didn't come with the face of an investigation, that would*

be more effective. Once the investigation happens all channels of communication shut down."*
  - ❍ New immigrant families do not know or understand California laws on supervision and discipline.

- **Link to Living in Poverty**
  - ❍ Reporters are frequently unable to differentiate poverty from actual abuse or neglect. Rather than linking families living in poverty with services, professionals are simply making a report to child welfare. *"If schools could offer more resources to families, this would prevent the number of calls."*
  - ❍ In areas with high poverty, there are more mandated reporters and more eyes on families. Latino families do not get the *"benefit of the doubt."*
  - ❍ Undocumented children have to be involved with child welfare to access mental and behavioral health services and for these services to be paid.
  - ❍ There are more referrals on the Eastside than in Los Gatos, Cupertino or Saratoga. *"Income is a factor. The kids in Los Gatos are eating breakfast before school. In Los Gatos, the teacher may call a parent first and not CPS. In the west side districts you report to the parents, because the parents run the schools compared to over at Eastside. With this dynamic it would make sense that a parent would be called first before CPS would be called. The parent is so involved that I could work this out with the parent. It may be a policy issue too between districts and how those policies are applied. This may be where the disparity in the system plays out. Each school has their own policy and if it was fair, then there would be a uniform policy applied across the board, regardless of ethnicity."*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Work more intentionally with schools to make appropriate referrals to child welfare.
- Identify preventive services (for referral) that exist within the county that can be used to address early on issues that the schools have identified as concerns that families are experiencing
- Explore the development of collaborative, preventive interventions with schools, particularly in East County, to intervene rather than refer where preventive resources do not exist.
- Focus on specific services that workers and families identify as needed, including domestic violence, substance abuse, adult mental health and affordable housing.
- Emphasize access to and development of community-based mental health and behavioral health services for undocumented children and youth.
- Consider new ways to reach out to and engage families who are disconnected and "living in the shadows."

Educational Outcomes

Santa Clara County officials expressed concern about the poor educational outcomes experienced by many Latino youth in their care. From the data provided, the research team found many youth are struggling to graduate from high school on time, and in some case, graduate at all. In analyzing factors contributing to positive or negative educational outcomes of Latino youth involved with the Santa Clara child welfare system, the research team read court summaries of 140 Latino youth age 14 and older who had been in care for at least 24 months and read 30 of these cases in-depth. Of these 30 cases, approximately half of these youth were identified as experiencing positive educational outcomes (attending school, doing well academically and/or pursuing post-secondary degrees) and half experiencing negative educational outcomes (dropping out of school, struggling with attendance, receiving poor grades and/or at risk of not graduating on time or at all). Focus groups with youth from cases included in the case review were also conducted to gather more information. The research team found youth enrolled in community college or vocational school. However, some youth were enrolled in for-profit colleges, and there were concerns that these youth were acquiring significant debt as a result. Additional themes identified from this analysis follow.

Factors contributing to positive educational outcomes

- Educational stability and positive educational outcomes were associated with youth having both an unconditional support person and a person who advocates for them in school (this might have been the same person or two different people).
- Interns from the Emerging Scholars program were supportive and helpful in keeping youth in school, motivated and able to graduate and enroll in post-secondary education.
- The Educational Services unit, when used, provided individualized support on IEP plans and course selection, generated ideas about good school matches for the individual needs of youth, linked youth with tutoring and other supports in a timely fashion and documented a deep analysis of youth's educational needs.
- Small school settings and settings that supported a youth's cultural identity had a positive impact on youth and their willingness to attend and work at school.
- In larger school settings, having a teacher or someone else (e.g., guidance counselor) that cared about the youth was critical to staying in school.
- In case files, there was evidence of building and using a team regularly to support youth in school and with their overall well-being (including physical and mental health needs).

Factors contributing to negative educational outcomes

- Marginal to poor functioning and well-being of youth
  ○ Extreme mental health needs make education a secondary concern (two youth in case files).
  ○ Youth were at various stages of healing from a sexual abuse history (seven youth in case files).
  ○ Some youth struggle with being overweight and then refuse to go to their physical education classes (four youth in case files).
  ○ One youth dropped out of school to take care of her son and did not appear to have support to both care for her son and go to school. In contrast, in a different case reviewed, a youth had a highly functioning team who supported her in continuing with her education and parenting her son.

○ Files contain limited information on extracurricular activities and other ways a youth may be supported in becoming part of the school community.

- Struggles related to foster care placement
  ○ Youth change schools when they change placements.
  ○ Youth experience a decline in school performance upon placement change.
  ○ Youth are not in school because they have run away from placement.
  ○ Group homes are not following educational plans (e.g., enrolling youth in the community school rather than a specialized setting).

- Considerations related to AB167
  ○ In many cases, students were able to graduate under AB167 by taking the state required credits, rather than the county requirement. These youth graduated, and some then needed to attend community college to get the necessary required classes to apply to a four-year college. In some instances, it was not clear that the youth fully understood the results of graduating under AB167, and they were frustrated with not being able to attend a four year college right away.

- Focus group participants report that judges review the identified educational supports that are supposed to be provided to children and youth, but that the judges and leadership do not hold the department or providers accountable to ensure that these educational supports are received.

MARGINAL TO POOR FUNCTIONING AND YOUTH WELL-BEING CONTRIBUTING TO NEGATIVE EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES IN SANTA CLARA

2 of 30 cases reviewed

EXTREME MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Mental health needs can make education a secondary concern in a few cases.

4 of 30 cases reviewed

OVERWEIGHT AND OBESITY

Weight struggles are an issue and cause youth to refuse physical education classes.
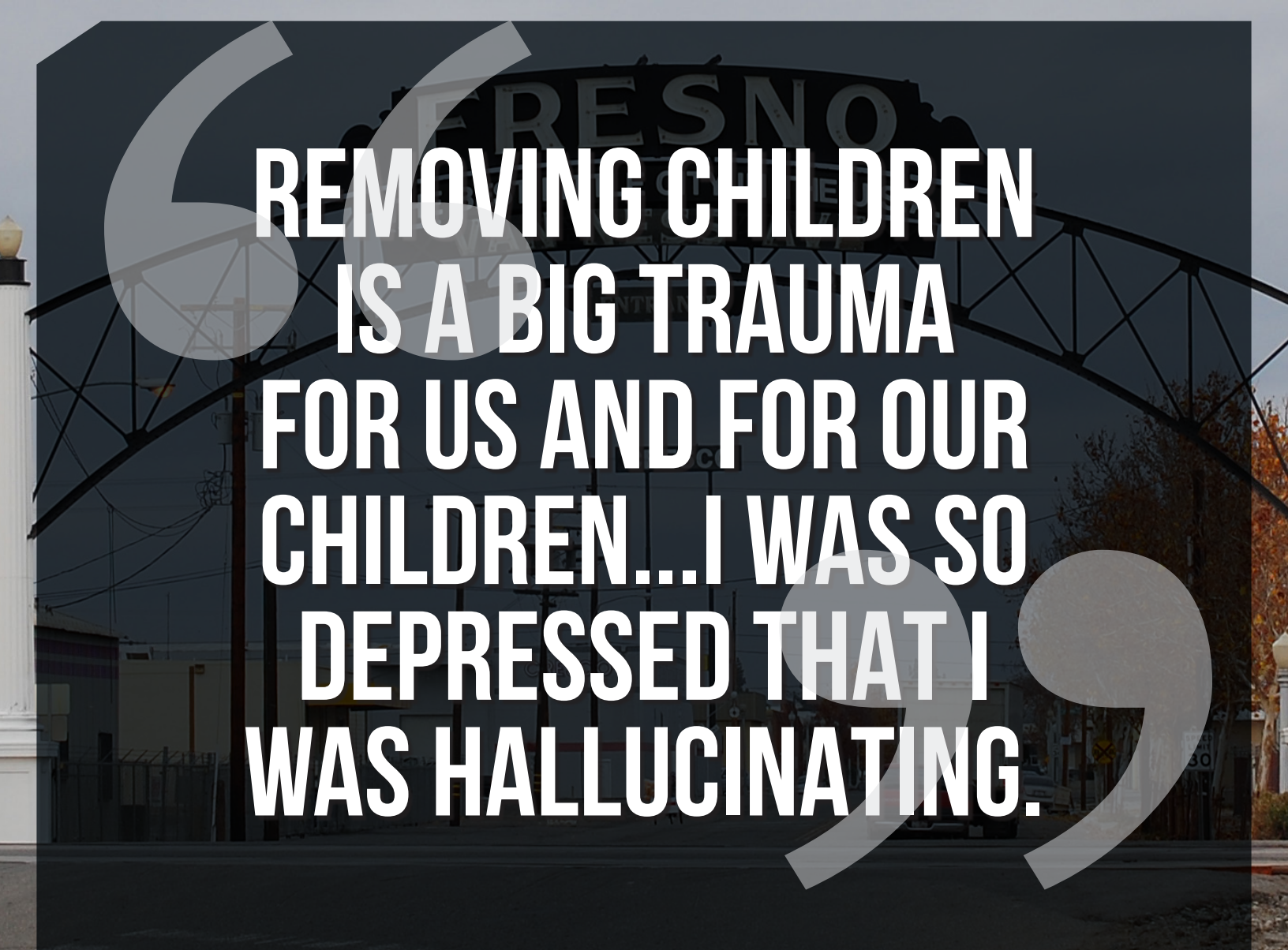
7 of 30 cases reviewed

SEXUAL ABUSE HISTORY

Numerous youth were in various stages of healing during case review process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Youth need advocates to support and monitor individualized education plans, including selecting courses, finding appropriate school placements, problem-solving around peer issues, attendance issues, etc.; youth need advocacy around their IEPs, monitoring that youth have enough credits to graduate and graduate on time, and supporting youth in understanding the consequences – good and bad – of graduating under AB167.

- Youth must have adults in their lives who have high, yet realistic expectations of their abilities.

- Workers should have regular communication about the Education Services Unit; many workers still do not know about or use this unit. When this unit was used, outcomes were usually positive.

- Attention must be paid to supporting youth with severe mental health needs and modifying educational goals while a youth is stabilizing.

- Consider bringing back Department of Family and Children Services (DFCS) workers on site at schools and have more intentional and coordinated work with probation and mental health providers.

- Add more mentors. Boys & Girls Club, for example offers very strong mentoring programs and could be a resource for youth in care.

- Have higher expectations of and accountability for workers about what should be included in court reports about education. Workers provided inconsistent amounts of information about youth and their educational experiences.

> **REMOVING CHILDREN IS A BIG TRAUMA FOR US AND FOR OUR CHILDREN...I WAS SO DEPRESSED THAT I WAS HALLUCINATING.**

FRESNO COUNTY

Fresno County chose to examine the experiences of undocumented families with the child welfare system to identify their unique challenges and needs and how the Department of Social Services (DSS) can better support families where some or all family members are undocumented. The research team interviewed individual workers; conducted focus groups with workers, supervisors, parents, caregivers and youth; and conducted a limited case record review.

This review found several positive practices that appeared to be consistently implemented and supportive to families, including:

- DSS regularly holds Team Decision-making (TDM) meetings and invites informal supports to these meetings.
- DSS repeatedly looks to place children with extended family (not just at the beginning of a case).
- DSS consistently works to obtain Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) for children in out-of-home care. Cases involving undocumented youth are referred to the immigration liaison who appears knowledgeable and thorough in guiding youth and caregivers through the SIJS process.
- In two cases, DSS relatively quickly allowed unsupervised visits between children and their parents rather than delaying these visits until the next court hearing.
- Workers capture quality information about the needs and desires of children by using the three houses practice – asking children to describe their "House of good things, House of worries, and House of dreams."
- In some cases, there was documentation of significant work engaging with older youth to support them in keeping their case open until they are 21 and to pursue college (three cases).
- In cases involving large sibling groups, DSS makes efforts to place all siblings together or to place them with at least some of their siblings. For example, there was a case where six children were removed and two homes were identified, so three children were placed in one home and three in the other. In a different case, a family of five children were removed and placed together in the same foster home.

The data show, not surprisingly, that undocumented or mixed documented families live in poverty and often are not able to or are fearful of accessing public supports. Thus, the areas of concern regarding practice focus on

this dynamic of living in poverty, in the shadows, fearful of deportation and often isolated without family close by to help. Additionally, workers described the lack of flexible dollars to support families as challenging when working with undocumented families. More specifically, the data show:

- **There is a need for access to concrete supports and community resources, such as health, mental health and domestic violence services.**
  ○ Children are not consistently getting dental care before DSS involvement. For example, in one case, a youth had 14 cavities, and her brother had to have most of his baby teeth removed.
  ○ Parents with significant mental health issues are not getting effective interventions. For example, a mother was hospitalized and released with psychotropic medication, but had no resources to pay for medication and deteriorated to the point of being unable to care for herself or her children.
  ○ Housing is marginal for many families. Case examples include:
    ▪ Mother living in an abandoned house with children
    ▪ Mother and children living in a "shack" with no running water, no windows, only mattresses, tarp paper roof, hot burner and with a big extension cord to power supply
    ▪ Family living in a garage
    ▪ Families doubling up with other family members – e.g., family of six sleeping in a living room with family of three

- **Several parents worked in the fields and refused services, TDMs or treatment because it would interfere with their work schedule.**
  ○ A mother was a blueberry picker

who earned $600 a month and her rent was $300 a month; she expressed concern about being able to comply with the case plan because every day of work she missed for services would be a loss of income.
○ In a 2014 court report, a father stated he "could not participate in services because he needs to work in order to remove the debt he is in." He works out of town and was struggling to comply with the case plan.

- **Transportation is a challenge for parents and caregivers.**
○ For example, a potential relative was unable to be a caregiver because this person had no driver's license and alternative public transportation is extremely limited.
○ Parents living in rural parts of the county must take a bus into town for services. A single bus leaves in the morning and returns in the afternoon. If they miss this bus they must find another way home. This sole form of public transportation also means they miss a day of work to attend a single service appointment.

- **Parents require translation support frequently at court and with workers but this support is not always readily available.**
○ Some case plans are in a Spanish template, but have information completed in English.
○ *"One time I had to call a mental health place and when the person picked up the phone she said she didn't speak Spanish. I told my worker either you help me or I will have to complain to my attorney because I don't speak English."*

- In nearly a third of case files reviewed, sexual abuse by fathers, stepfathers or a mother's boyfriend had occurred. In several cases mothers were aware of the abuse, but not sure what to do

1/3 In nearly a third of case files reviewed, sexual abuse by fathers, stepfathers or a mother's boyfriend had occurred. In several cases mothers were aware of the abuse, but not sure what to do or how to protect their children.

She enters a drug treatment program and her boyfriend calls the program several times a day to get information about her. He asks the worker, *"Why can't you guys allow me to talk with her. It is kinda harsh."* *"I am having a nervous breakdown."* The boyfriend follows the mother around town. The worker notes that *"Mother has identified him as a support to transport her to her visits as well as a person who helps her financially so that she can have money to buy food to take to her visits with her children...The Department is concerned if [mother] chooses to continue her relationship with Mr. X that she will be unable to provide for the safety and well-being of her children."* The case record contains no information about supports available to the mother to support her in understanding and dealing with this unsafe relationship.

or how to protect their children.

○ For example, a mother was blind and unemployed. She knew about the sexual abuse of her daughter for at least three years. However, when she confronted her husband, he kicked her and the five children out and the family spent the nights in a park. She felt totally dependent on him, reported that she did not know of any resources to go to for help and returned to him with her children. In another case, a young girl was sexually abused by her stepfather. Her stepfather worked and the family received financial support from the stepfather's parents. The mother and extended family encouraged the girl to recant her story.

• **Inadequate assessments and services exist to support parents with trauma histories and domestic violence.**

○ In some cases, there are suggestions that the parents have significant trauma history, but the documentation is unclear about the nature of the trauma or how the trauma is being explored or addressed with the parent. For example, one mother mentioned to the worker that she has a history of sexual abuse and another mother noted that she was involved in a controlling and violent intimate partner relationship, yet in these cases there is no documented follow-up with the mother.

○ Parents are traumatized by the removal of their children. *"Removing children is a big trauma for us and for our children; like I said I was so depressed that I was hallucinating. When I was home without them, I would see that they were opening the door and coming back from school; it was terrible to be home by myself."*

• **DSS workers do not appear to understand dynamics of domestic violence.**

○ For example, a mother reports domestic violence with her boyfriend.

In another example, a youth went to her boyfriend's house to pick up some of her belongings. When the social worker found this out, she told the youth to stay away from boyfriend given all concerns reported with domestic violence. The social worker advised her to surround herself with positive people. No assessments or supports appear to have been offered to the youth in managing this relationship.

• **Cases had prior involvement/ investigations and repeat investigations, sometimes within a very short period of time for the same allegations – mostly general neglect and emotional abuse.**

○ An extreme example is 21 referrals in seven years, most in the last three years.

- **Adoptions are delayed due to finalizations of SIJS (outside of DSS's control). Older youth needed Mexican passport and health form; another youth just delayed in processing paperwork.**

Finally, there are complications regarding the issue of payments to undocumented youth and caregivers and workers report their confusion. All children regardless of status are eligible for child welfare services and appropriate placement but not all children are eligible for foster care payments. Guidance we have received from immigration and child welfare experts includes:

- **Federal foster care payments** are not available unless the child is either a U.S. citizen or a qualified immigrant. If the child has been in a qualified status for less than five years, the parent or guardian must be a citizen or qualified immigrant. Further, at the time the child was removed from the home, the child needs to have had a status that would have made him/her eligible for AFDC – under the old AFDC.
- **State foster care payments** – which generally go to non-relatives – are available to support youth who are Permanent Residents Under Color of Law (PRUCOL). PRUCOL is not a federal immigration status, but a benefits eligibility category, which is interpreted differently from program to program. SIJS applicants generally have been considered PRUCOL for this purpose. California SB 1569 also made applicants for U non-immigrant status visas and pre-certified trafficking survivors eligible for these benefits.
- **Undocumented youth who have not filed an application for SIJS or U non-immigrant status, and who do not have another claim that they are PRUCOL would fall under the jurisdiction of the county.** This is one reason Los Angeles and a few other counties actively work to get attorneys to help with their immigration cases.

The data show, not surprisingly, that undocumented or mixed documented families live in poverty and often are not able to and/or are fearful of accessing public supports. Thus, the areas of concern regarding practice focus on this dynamic of living in poverty, in the shadows, fearful of deportation and often isolated without family close by to help.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Identify existing community resources that may assist families, regardless of immigration status, with some of their concrete needs and ensure that caseworkers routinely refer families to these resources.

- Identify resources available for undocumented families with health or mental health concerns and ensure that caseworkers routinely refer families to these resources.

- Where resources do not exist, work with immigrant advocacy groups and other community advocates to develop needed resources.

- Ensure that caseworkers understand the very real concerns that participation in case plan tasks may have on a family's income. Efforts may be needed to meet with families and to identify services outside of regular working hours. In cases where these services are not available, ensure that participation in this activity is essential to achieving case goals.

- Continue to hire bilingual workers and identify services and supports that are provided in Spanish and are respectful to culture.

- Explore options for providing transportation for family members to participate in case plan activities.

- Ensure that caseworkers understand how to assess for and address trauma in immigrant families. Identify resources and supports for families who experience trauma.

- Consider working with community partners to raise awareness about sexual abuse and how to safely receive services.

Safe and Affirming Placements for LGBTQ and GNC Youth

Santa Clara County

Santa Clara County has multiple resources that support LGBTQ youth, including The HUB, the Bill Wilson Center, the Billy DeFrank Lesbian and Gay Community Center and the LGBTQ Youth Space. The five youth in the focus group felt they were able to access resources that they needed from these and other places. These youth also expressed feeling supported by their current workers and able to talk to most workers about their sexual orientation and gender identity.

While some youth reported they have "good placements," youth and providers noted that some youth live in homes that are rejecting. The department agrees that a lot of work remains to develop and strengthen placements for youth who identify as LGBTQ. Specific areas of concern about placements include:

- Youth focus group participants attributed negative placements to conservative religious beliefs and homophobia. These factors made youth feel unsafe and alienated. In one circumstance, a young person was beaten and kicked out of the home for identifying as lesbian.
- The county partners with faith-based communities, and many foster parents are recruited from these communities. Unfortunately, workers note that some foster parents feel guided by their religious beliefs to not accept LGBTQ youth into their home, or if these youth are in their homes, these foster parents are not supportive and affirming.
- Foster parent training includes "LGBTQ training," and foster parents are asked about their sensitivity to caring for an LGBTQ youth. However, workers describe there is no more depth offered beyond that inquiry.
- Foster parents often do not know what to say or do when an LGBTQ youth is in their home, and these parents do not currently have a resource person to support them.
- In some instances, youth choose to not disclose their sexual orientation to remain in foster homes. One gay youth, who did not disclose his sexual orientation to his foster parents, described feeling safe and bonded to his foster parents and found support and affirmation of his sexual orientation through his social networks outside the home.
- Between 10 to 12 percent of youth are placed in group homes in and out of the county, and for LGBTQ youth, these group home placements may be safe one day and then become unsafe because of high staff turnover and new youth entering these placements. There are a "handful of foster parents through the county and FFAs (foster family agencies) that are sensitive" to LGBTQ youth, but most of the time their homes are full.
- Targeting recruitment efforts to the LGBTQ community does not result in enough foster homes for older LGBTQ youth.
- Not all staff feel comfortable and competent to talk with families about LGBTQ issues. Supervisors who identify as LGBTQ report that the person who assigns cases informally picks their units to send cases when there are evident LGBTQ issues. In some cases, a liaison for LGBTQ resources is brought in to consult on cases involving LGBTQ youth. For example, workers consulted with this liaison on a case where a boy wanted to wear lipstick and a dress in a foster home that would not support this self-expression.

Both Santa Clara and Fresno counties examined how they can be more supportive of LGBTQ and GNC youth and ensure that out of home placements are safe and affirming. In both counties, information was primarily collected through interviews and focus groups. These provided good information and insight. However, the focus groups with youth were small, particularly in Fresno, so findings are made with that caution.

In both counties, in spite of the state's nondiscrimination law, youth reported experiencing rejection and homophobia in their foster home placements.

Fresno County

Workers, county leadership and foster parents describe Fresno County as having conservative views on LGBTQ issues. Those interviewed noted the lack of community-based resources to support LGBTQ youth and adults. Those working with LGBTQ youth were concerned about how many youth do not disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity in placements because of fear of rejection. Leadership was concerned about holding a focus group as such a group might unsafely make known a youth's sexual orientation or gender identity to their foster parents or other youth in foster care. Unfortunately, despite significant efforts from the county, only one LGBTQ-identified youth was available to be interviewed. In the case record review of undocumented Latino youth, however, there was documentation of two youth who were experiencing challenges related to their sexual orientation or gender identity and expression. Additionally, the data showed:

- The religious beliefs of foster parents sometimes interfere with their willingness to accept LGBTQ foster youth and create a safe and affirming home.
- Two foster parents interviewed, who describe themselves as very religious, described needing time to pray on accepting foster youth who are LGBTQ. With time and more understanding, these foster parents realized the importance of not only accepting these youth into their homes but in providing opportunities to affirm their identity.
- Three foster parents described different ways they actively worked to support the sexual orientation and gender identity of the youth – attending gay pride parades with the youth, talking with the youth about romantic relationships and setting similar rules around dating as with the youth in the home who identify as straight.
- One foster parent also is a parent partner and uses her journey to acceptance as a way to talk with other caregivers who are struggling to accept LGBTQ youth.
- Workers have received an initial training on SOGIE (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression). Workers in the focus group reported that the training was very basic and stated they were already knowledgeable on issues faced by LGBTQ youth.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BOTH COUNTIES

PLACEMENT

- While every placement should be a safe and affirming placement for any child, a key first step is to expand the number and types of placements that are supportive and affirming of LGBTQ and GNC youth.
- Have a "Meet and Greet" between foster parents and youth to determine if the placement will be a good fit.
- Have a resource specialist to support LGBTQ youth in their current placements.

- Begin discussion about implementing policy and practice changes that ensure all new foster parents commit to being welcoming and affirming of all kids. Incorporate this into the new RFA process.
- Provide more education to foster parents about the needs of LGBTQ youth in foster care and dispel possible myths about LGBTQ youth.

SUPPORT

- Contracts should be enhanced to support LGBTQ competency training and services.
- Have a contract liaison to hold providers accountable for meeting the needs of this population.
- A guide/resource booklet should be made available for foster parents to help them understand some of the specific needs of LGBTQ youth and how they can act in supportive and affirming ways with these youth in their care.
- There are youth who are managing to live in rejecting environments. Workers need tools to understand the

clinical implications for youth in these environments and how to help them negotiate them so that they can access support. Bring together a small group of clinicians and others in the agency who can quickly design a tool or process to help workers best support these youth.
- Child welfare and its partners should consider ways to thoughtfully develop and strengthen connections with youth in middle school who may be LGBTQ.
- Offer youth a mentor to support them and make sure that youth have mentors in college.

RECRUITMENT

- The resource family approval process is changing, and there is an opportunity to explore a family's ability to accept and affirm LGBTQ and GNC youth in the home study process.

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1: Santa Clara Research Questions for Latino Youth and Families

FOCUS AREA	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Incidence of Referrals for Latino Families	• What are the high volume reporters for Latino families? • Are there unique profiles or characteristics of high volume reporters? • Do referral patterns differ by report source and maltreatment type? • What are the contextual factors associated with entry into the system (e.g., income, resource availability)? • What is the relationship between resource availability and Latino children's entry into the system? • From the perspective of mandated reporters, what could have prevented entry into the system? • Among schools, what are the differences between families that get reported and families that do not get reported? • What factors are associated with differences in rates of referral among school districts?
Educational Outcomes	• What strategies facilitate positive educational outcomes, particularly for youth who remain in the system longer than 24 months? • What services are effective in promoting positive educational outcomes? • What systemic factors are necessary to achieve positive educational outcomes for Latino youth? • What strategies are effective in ensuring that youth's educational needs are being properly identified? • What supportive services are available within the schools that can help facilitate positive outcomes?

Table 2: Santa Clara County Research Questions and Findings Related to LGBTQ Youth

FOCUS AREA	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Safe and Affirming Placements for LGBTQ Youth	• What are the factors that create a positive placement experience for LGBTQ youth? • What are the conditions needed for youth to feel safe and affirmed in their placements? • What services/strategies are effective in promoting safe and affirming placements? • What are the characteristics associated with affirming foster parents/caregivers? • What strategies can be implemented to recruit affirming foster parents? • What would foster parents need to become affirming? • What resources can the agency provide to develop and support affirming placements?

Table 3: Fresno Research Questions for Latino Youth and Families

FOCUS AREA	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Improved Understanding of Challenges/Barriers Facing Undocumented Families	• What are the factors that bring undocumented families to the attention of the system? • What are the barriers to providing services to undocumented families? • What are the barriers to obtaining necessary resources, particularly in rural communities? • To what extent are issues of immigration status barriers to relative placements? • Are youth who are eligible for immigration relief being identified?
Strategies that Facilitate Positive Outcomes for Undocumented Families	• What services are currently being provided for undocumented families? • What is the effectiveness of services provided to undocumented families in meeting their needs? • What strategies are effective in ensuring undocumented families receive the resources/services they need? • What strategies can be implemented so that families feel safe discussing their immigration status? • What strategies are effective in facilitating relative placements? • What strategies are effective in ensuring that all family members are fully involved in case planning? • What is the role of the Mexican consulate in facilitating positive outcomes? • What is the relationship of the Department with ICE and USCIS, and can those relationships be improved?

TABLE 4: Fresno Research Questions Related to LGBTQ Youth

FOCUS AREA	RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Safe and Affirming Agency Environments for LGBTQ Youth	• Do youth feel safe discussing issues of SOGIE with staff? • What strategies facilitate youth feeling comfortable discussing SOGIE with caseworkers? • Do staff feel safe discussing issues of SOGIE? • What strategies can facilitate staff feeling comfortable talking about SOGIE issues? • How are staff responding to the needs of LGBTQ youth? • What strategies are effective in improving staff's response to LGBTQ youth? • What is necessary to create an agency environment in which LGBTQ youth feel safe and affirmed?
Safe and Affirming Placements for LGBTQ Youth	• How are caregivers trained about SOGIE? • How are caregivers responding to the needs of LGBTQ youth? • What are the characteristics of safe and affirming placements? • What are the expected behaviors of caregivers? • What strategies are effective in building the capacity of caregivers to meet the needs of LGBTQ youth? • What strategies are effective in reducing bias? • What resources can be provided to caregivers to improve their response to LGBTQ youth?

APPENDIX B

TABLE 5: Santa Clara Research Methods

RESEARCH METHOD	QUANTITY
Interviews and Focus Groups	• 5 focus groups • 4 individual interviews with agency leadership
Case Record Reviews	• 30 cases
Summaries of Educational Issues in Court Reports	• 140 summaries

TABLE 6: Fresno Research Methods

RESEARCH METHOD	QUANTITY
Interviews and Focus Groups	• 4 individual interviews (3 foster parents, 1 youth) • 8 focus groups
Case Record Reviews	• 20 cases

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