



**Department of Social Services
Child Welfare 2011 Annual Report**

County of Fresno Department of Social Services
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Letter from the Director

2011 was an important year for advancing improvements in child welfare practice in Fresno County. Together with our community partners, the County of Fresno Department of Social Services began implementing recommendations put forth in the voluntary Institutional Analysis study conducted by the Center for the Study of Social Policy to improve the over-representation of African American children in the system. In 2010, we welcomed the thorough identification of the issues in the IA report; and in 2011, we set out on a deliberate and focused course to address them.

The strength of our response and the ability to achieve success in this important endeavor begins with the strength of our relationship with the community and the many partners committed to children and family well-being throughout the county. In the past year, these partnerships have generated significant progress in our three priority outcomes: increased safety, improved permanency and decreased racial disparity.

I am pleased to share with you the 2011 annual report which highlights the major strategies employed by DSS in 2011 to achieve these priorities. Without you — the individuals, agencies and citizen volunteers who have rallied to take on the task of improving our local child welfare system — the work delineated in this report would not have been possible. Most recently, your support and engagement resulted in an expansion of the Cultural Broker Joint Community Response Program which served more than 300 adults and over 600 children last year; in the development of a community informed staff training curriculum that is improving our daily engagement with families countywide; and in regular advice to the Department from community Key Advisors about racial equity issues and participation in the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) Federal Permanency Innovations Initiative to reduce long term foster care.

These are just a few examples of the extraordinary local response which has helped to establish Fresno County as a leader in the challenging work of racial disparity elimination. This leadership led to our involvement in the California Partners for Permanency Initiative and the unique opportunity it affords us to adopt a comprehensive practice model approach to child welfare system change. In 2011, Fresno County laid a strong foundation for the implementation of this family-centered practice model. We are pleased to be the first county to adopt the model beginning this Spring and anticipate, as a result, a more responsive and family-centered practice leading to improved outcomes for the children and families we serve. As we continue this important work in 2012, I wish to gratefully acknowledge each of you for your contributions which inform the work of the Department on a daily basis. With your continued engagement and support, Fresno County is well positioned to create significant and sustainable improvements on behalf of children and families.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Howard K. Himes".

Howard K. Himes, Director

Department of Social Services

June 20, 2012



FOSTER CARE STANDARDS AND OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

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Staff Support: Jennifer Kish, Staff Analyst, Department of Social Services

Child Welfare Organizational Chart



DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES

Howard Himes, Director

Joy Cronin
Deputy Director
Child Welfare Services
Patty Gidney, Secretary

Judy Lemos
Deputy Director
Administration
Gloria Bengochea, Secretary

SAFETY -- PERMANENCY -- WELL-BEING -- SAFETY -- PERMANENCY -- WELL-BEING -- SAFETY -- PERMANENCY -- WELL-BEING

Vacant
Program Manager
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Voluntary Family Maintenance
Team Decision-Making
Child Focus Team
Visitation
PROJECT LEAD
Putting Pride into Practice
Ready to Succeed
SPECIALIZED
DV Liaisons
CV/RC Liaison
MDC/PC Liaison
Education Liaisons
Patti Gidney, Secretary

John Dufresne
Program Manager
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Caroline
Central Desk
Court Services
Linkages/CallWORKs
PROJECT LEAD
ICWA Intake
Court Relations
Community Resources
SPECIALIZED
JV 180
JV 220
Immigration
TAP
Probate 241
Emergency Housing
Lisa Mitchell, Secretary

Lauri Moore
Program Manager
EMERGENCY RESPONSE
Voluntary Family Maintenance
Parenting/K-8
Parent Partners
Court Services
PROJECT LEAD
Dual Response
Differential Response/
Cultural Brokers/
Ice Breakers
SPECIALIZED
SCAN
CART
Law Enforcement/MDC Liaisons
Maria Reyes, Secretary

Maria Aguirre
Program Manager
FAMILY REUNIFICATION
Permanent Plan Living Arrangements
High School Based
Teen Services
PROJECT LEAD
ICWA Ongoing
Safe Care
SPECIALIZED
SB163
KinGap
Outreach to Missing Dependents
Bonnie Smith, Secretary

Katherine Martindale
Program Manager
FAMILY REUNIFICATION
Permanent Plan Living Arrangements
Independent Living Services
Adoptions / Adoptions Assistance Program
PROJECT LEAD
AB12
SPECIALIZED
Transitional Housing
Chris Chapman, Secretary

Wendy Oskafo
Program Manager
CA PARTNERS FOR PERMANENCY INITIATIVE
2011 - 2016
PROJECT LEAD
California Youth Connection
SPECIALIZED
CASA/FUSD Advocacy Project
Outcome Evaluation
Family Finding Coordination
Youth Voice Liaison
Racial Equity Coordination
Maria Padilla, Secretary

Deborah Martinez
Program Manager
FOSTER CARE RESOURCES
Foster Parent Resource
Home Approval
Licensing
SB163
PROJECT LEAD
Kinship Resource Center
California Endowment
Quality Parenting Initiative
SPECIALIZED
FFA Liaison
Resource Family Recruitment
Veronica Martinez, Secretary



Vision & Mission

To lead an integrated network of community partners that supports, protects and strengthens children and families.

To promote a system of best practice in partnership with the community, committed to prevention and early intervention, that ensures child safety, permanence and stability, family well-being, that is proactive, strategic, outcomes-based and fiscally responsible to the children and families served.

To fulfill this mission, County of Fresno employees and community partners provide assessment, intervention, prevention, placement and mental health treatment services for infants, children, youth and families of Fresno County.

***During the spring and summer of 2012, in partnership with the community, we will be updating our vision and mission statements and developing our strategic plan for the next four years.



Executive Summary

The longstanding commitment of the County of Fresno Department of Social Services (DSS) to address the disproportionate representation of African American children in the child welfare system has resulted in steady improvements. The percentage of African American youth in foster care has steadily decreased from nearly 24% of all youth in care in 2000 to approximately 15% of all youth in care in 2011. The entries into foster care of African American youth have decreased overall, but have fluctuated from the highest rate in 2002 of nearly 18% to the lowest rate in 2006 of just under 10% to the current rate of 12% in 2011.

In 2011 DSS, together with community partners, continued to address the disproportionate representation of African American children in the system through a comprehensive set of system and practice change strategies intended to improve outcomes for every child and family touched by the child welfare system. This report provides an overview of the strategies employed, many of which are in direct response to the findings and recommendations found in the 2010 Institutional Analysis (IA), and all of which are intended to improve three priority outcomes: increased safety, improved permanency and decreased racial disparity.

The Institutional Analysis, and the local response from the community, established Fresno County as a leader in the difficult work of racial disparity elimination, so that in 2010, the County was asked to participate with the State in the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP), Federal Permanency Innovations Initiative to reduce long term foster care, particularly for African American and Native American children. Through this opportunity, Fresno expanded its focus on racial disparities to include Native American children through engagement with tribal partners.

As one of four CAPP counties, which include Humboldt, Los Angeles, and Santa Clara, Fresno County helped to develop a comprehensive family-centered practice model in 2011 which has the potential to impact the child welfare system and thousands of children and families both at a state and national level. A hallmark of this work has been the extensive community engagement, partnership and input from all four counties. The participation of community partners in Fresno County helped to create the strong foundation for Fresno to be the first county to begin implementation of the practice model in March, 2012. Elements of this foundation include a committee of Key Advisors who provide regular input to the DSS Director regarding CAPP implementation and racial disparity improvements, the restructuring of the system into integrated case management divisions and the deepening of practice through group supervision and coaching. Additionally, DSS has begun to reorganize its structure to better serve children and families by reframing and revitalizing social worker roles; by promoting a uniform approach to reunification services; staff trainings and coaching to improve “racial sobriety”; quality coaching for supervisors to better guide staff towards optimal outcomes; enhanced staff supervision to model engagement practices and cultural humility; and the increased use of data to inform and evaluate practice, including data-informed coaching with Emergency Response staff.

The Department also initiated significant practice changes in 2011 that support family engagement and permanency outcomes. These include expansion of the Cultural Brokers program to include Joint Community Response allowing Cultural Brokers to support frontline staff engagement with families for improved initial contacts, communication and assessments; Permanency Teaming to surround families with support systems at the beginning of involvement with the system to ensure successful permanency plans for children; and enhanced family access to services through culturally specific specialized services and expanded visitation hours and locations. All of these changes are aimed towards improving the lives of the more than 1,600 children in foster care in Fresno County and the children and families at risk of entering into the child welfare system. System reform takes both time and commitment. The Department is fortunate to have a community so willing to dedicate time to Fresno’s children and families, which has greatly improved the Department’s responsiveness, engagement and ability to formulate and begin implementation of a child and family centered practice model in 2012. What follows are the elements and strategies we believe address the findings and recommendations of the Institutional Analysis. They serve as an initial framework from which we can begin to measure our progress and determine our success.



I. System Restructuring in Support of Improved Outcomes

Reassessing Agency Structure

The 2010 Institutional Analysis report found that DSS would benefit from revisiting policies and procedures in order to create administrative triggers to assist families to move through reunification services in a more efficient and timely manner. As a result of this finding, DSS conducted a reassessment of the agency structure and policies to ensure support for maximum family engagement. Child Welfare divisions were reorganized in their entirety to ensure the efficacy of services delivered to children and families through an integrated case management model.

DSS also conducted an assessment of the agency structure and the use of specialized staff to identify barriers to relationship building and the effective provision of services for children and families. As a result, key areas of the agency were restructured to reduce the number of social worker changes that a family experiences, lessen service gaps, and create a more streamlined process. The reorganization, intended to move away from the traditional pattern of segmented experiences for clients — Emergency Response, Family Reunification, Permanency Placement, or Adoptions — and to provide a more seamless and continuous experience with social workers, includes:

- Combining Adoptions and Assessment
- Consolidating all placement services
- Linking Prevention with Emergency Response
- Integrating Child Focus Teams with Emergency Response
- Integrating Home Assessments and Family Reunification with Emergency Response
- Adding a 3rd Program Manager to Emergency Response / Frontend Services
- Reallocating Administration Responsibilities
- Beginning Vertical Case management within ongoing division

Reframing and Revitalizing Social Worker Roles

The Institutional Analysis found that generally caseworkers lacked the ability to act as advocates for families and lacked sufficient tools to build and nurture relationships with families. Specialized assignments, case transfers, and high caseloads did not allow case workers to connect with families. Additionally, staff was not guided to minimize or address conflict among families, which could help foster change.

In response to these findings DSS developed the goal to reframe social worker's jobs. Staff members across the Department were encouraged to improve their advocacy skills for children and families rather than focusing too heavily on process. The Department established the expectation for staff members to elevate issues that impede service delivery to families and permanency for children to supervisors when they run into system barriers that they cannot resolve themselves. This shift in paradigm has set the stage for the empowerment of employees to think outside the box and to resolve issues quickly.

Strategizing as to how the Department can continue the revitalization of social worker roles continues, including encouragement for ongoing feedback from other staff and from the community. Community inclusion and agency transparency — core values of the Department — are to be reflected at all levels of the Department, particularly with line workers. Much of the reframing of social worker roles will be accomplished through the use of Quality Supervision, a practice in which supervisors critically and analytically provide more tools and guidance for staff to develop skills that will help them engage with families. Quality Supervision will be discussed more thoroughly in sections to come.



Systems Thinking and Race Training

The Institutional Analysis also served to show that the problem of disproportionality and disparities was not only perpetuated on a case by case level, but rather were systematic practices and barriers that contributed to African American and Native American families experiencing different outcomes and service. In order to have a better understanding of systems, race, and disproportionality, the Department invited Dr. John A Powell, the Executive Director of the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at The Ohio State University, and a national expert on civil rights and civil liberties, to provide a training to Program Managers, Supervisors, and community partners on Systems Thinking and Race.

Through this training, staff were able to gain knowledge in Structural Racialization — a concept that posits the idea that we are more than just the product of our own efforts. Segmentation or classification of groups of people is often perceived as an individual action rather than a societal act. Many of the problems faced by families are not only based on class but have a race factor. Professor Powell lectured on the structures of opportunity, “situatedness” of individuals (their positioning in a system), as well as implicit bias and mind science. Many of the biases demonstrated by the general population operate in the unconscious mind — conditioned by society from a very early age. Dr. Powell provided insight on power and organizations, and how social workers can intervene and impact the lives of families through an increased awareness of all of these factors.

Improved Access to Services

Many families involved with Fresno DSS require economic supports in addition to social services provided by the Department in order to improve their ability to safely care for their children. In order to effectively link families to housing, food, and other concrete supports, cross-division connections needed to improve so that current available resources in multiple divisions were made available to families.

The Institutional Analysis found that instruments such as domestic violence courses and mental health assessments were not conducted as needed and were instead conducted at two points in the case. As a result of this, a team of DSS staff in collaboration with service providers developed treatment modalities for both Domestic Violence and Anger Management Treatments that were more responsive to timelines of the Juvenile Court. Visitation was also outlined as a systemic barrier to reunification services given that most service providers did not offer services outside of regular business hours which often conflicted with work hours for parents. As a result, DSS clarified protocols that address utilization of visitation services. Visitation contracts were modified to include expanded visitation hours (9am-8pm, Monday through Saturday and Holidays) to increase the visiting options for families with school age children. Additionally, providers are now required to offer visitation services in three main communities in which our clients reside.

Also noted in the IA was the underutilization of services for which DSS clients had priority. DSS developed specific strategies to improve access to services by enhancing linkages between system improvements efforts and service systems. DSS adopted a coordinated case planning approach to link families involved with the Child Welfare system to CalWORKS services, which can facilitate family reunification and economic stability. DSS also created a Community Partnership Network to continually assess available services, fill identified service gaps and improve access to community based services for families. DSS hired a Community Partnership Coordinator to work with the community to access, assess, and advocate for services. The Department also established the Community Resource Network, a committee dedicated to creating resources for families. The Community Resource Network has successfully hosted two resource fairs in the last year where Fresno County residents can identify and access natural and community resources.

As a preventative measure for child abuse and neglect, the Department has begun implementation of its version of Differential Response. In the new process staff contact clients for whom there was not sufficient risk for formal Departmental involvement, but who would benefit from services that would avert potential risk factors. The Department has also taken part in conversations with other courts such as Probation and Family Court to ensure that services are not doubled for families involved in more than one court system and service completion is recognized by all three courts.



The Department has developed a process for self-referral for consideration for placement for interested relatives of children in foster care. Relatives and Non-Relatives will now have a different avenue to submit applications to be considered for placement even if they do not have access to the information of the case carrying social worker. Moreover, the use of JV 285 and JV 287 forms with both the Department and court will allow for relatives to maintain relationships with children and serve as an extra support to the family. These forms provide information to the court on the family's desire to keep ties to the children through visits, transportation, or phone calls even if placement is not a responsibility a relative can take on at that time.

A new tribal service was created recently to meet the specific needs of the Native American Community with regards to Parenting and Anger Management Treatment. The specialized curriculums address the cultural differences in parenting practices and anger management services. Services such as these have also been created for African American parenting courses that also have specialized curriculum that address the historical trauma these populations have been exposed to.

Promoting Safe Stable Families (PSSF)/Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention Team (CAPIT)

Promoting Safe and Stable Families (PSSF) and Child Abuse Prevention and Intervention Team (CAPIT) are federal funding streams with objectives to prevent unnecessary child removal, develop the quality care and services to children and families, and ensure permanency for children by family reunification, adoption or other permanent living arrangement. The services are designed to help child welfare agencies and eligible Indian tribes create and operate integrated, preventative family preservation services and community based family support services for families at risk or in crisis. These funds along with the Child Welfare Services funds are a small but integral part of State social service systems for children and families who need assistance in order to keep their families together. These funds, often combined with State, local government and private funds support the relationship-building parenting and healthy marriage classes, respite care for caregivers of children with special needs and numerous other unique and innovative programs and services for at risk families.

Following the Institutional Analysis, and with the realization that services were not sufficiently addressing the needs of the African American community, the Request for Proposals (RFP) process was revamped in an effort to better meet the needs of the community. RFPs for PSSF and CAPIT funds were developed through a lens of Disproportionality with the effort to cast the widest net and improve access to services for this population. At the same time, this change in process aimed to eliminate bureaucratic barriers that would hinder smaller grassroots organizations from applying. Key Advisors provided input and recommendations that allowed smaller organizations to become eligible to apply, provided special consideration for bidders who partnered with grassroots organizations, broadened the budget for proposals, as well as identified the request for more integration of service components. RFPs submitted for consideration by service providers were to include a plan on how they would address issues on disproportionality. As the Department is working to provide services that are much more in tune with the complex needs of the community, this approach will allow more small grassroots organizations to compete for funding opportunities. This will ensure that contracted service providers work towards the same goals as the Department — reducing disproportionality and disparities in services, and healing families to create more permanency for youth.

Kinship Resource Center

The Institutional Analysis identified a lack of supportive services to youth and relatives in kin placements. As a result, Fresno County DSS has been working to develop a Kinship Resource and Support Services Project. A Kinship Resource and Support Center will partner with the community to identify, develop and provide supportive services, and implement the policy and systemic changes to better meet the needs of relative placements. The project has three components: Relative Care Provider focus groups, Assessment and Planning, and Pilot Implementation. The first component, convening relative care provider focus groups, consists of setting up a series of neighborhood-based meetings with relative caregivers to discuss the ongoing supports needed to maintain guardianships and eliminate barriers for the families. During the Assessment and Planning phase, key learnings garnered from the focus groups will be utilized in combination with evidence-based models to provide kinship support. Lastly, locations and resources for the Kinship Resource Center will be



established and services provided according to the expressed needs of the community. The ultimate goal is to offer support and assistance to kin providing care for children in foster care.





II. Deepening Practice

Cultural Brokers

After adopting the Family-to-Family Initiative in 2003, Fresno County community representatives who participated in Team Decision Making Meetings observed a need to provide extra support to families struggling to navigate the child welfare system. From that need came the idea of Cultural Brokers, created by Margaret Jackson, an active community member and previous DSS employee, and Fresno State Instructor. Cultural Brokers are community members that have received extensive training on the child welfare system and the Family to Family Initiative, including TDM meetings and Family Group Conferences. Ideally the Brokers will be of the same culture as the family and or have an extensive knowledge base of the family's culture. Cultural Brokers have extensive knowledge of not only ethnic groups but of specialized topic areas such as substance abuse, domestic violence, ICWA, and immigration/undocumented persons. Through this expertise, Cultural Brokers know how best to serve families with issues in these specific areas. The Cultural Broker helps the agency work with the family, and the family work with the agency. Cultural Brokers are trained in DSS program activities and purposes, Child Welfare mandates, and how to work with the Juvenile Court. Cultural Brokers bridge cultural gaps by communicating differences and similarities between cultures. Cultural Brokers serve as Liaisons, Cultural Guides, Mediators, and Change Agents who mediate and negotiate complex processes within organizations, government, communities, and interest groups.

Some of the key functions of Cultural Brokers include assisting with team meetings and providing information about the family, helping link the family with supportive resources, partnering with DSS on behalf of high risk families, and alerting DSS if the risk level changes. Other duties include attending court with the family and providing helpful written reports to the case manager, which can provide needed documentation for court purposes. Cultural Brokers have served as the bridge between community members involved with the child welfare system and DSS staff. Through the use of Cultural Brokers, the Department has been able to provide preventative services, successfully reunify families, and prevent unnecessary Departmental involvement by wrapping the family with support. Cultural Broker services have been so successful that the Department expanded their contract to increase their capacities to respond to Joint Community Response Emergency Response referrals.

Joint Community Response

In October of 2010, Cultural Brokers moved to a formal contract with the County in order to provide a Joint Community Response (JCR) protocol to child abuse referrals with Emergency Response supervisors, social workers and Cultural Brokers. This strategy involves a coordinated joint response between social workers and Cultural Brokers to successfully engage with African American families and thereby conduct a more accurate initial assessment of a family's needs. In this way social workers utilize the services of Cultural Brokers from the very first meeting with families to assist with family engagement in the most critical time with the Department.

Thus far, the Joint Community Response program data analysis is showing that Cultural Broker involvement in referral assessments resulted in more engagement with families, less cultural misinterpretations, and overall improved cooperation of families with the Department. Entries into the child welfare system have decreased overall. The Department is currently exploring the implementation of a Joint Community Response expansion plan to include non-crisis referrals, evenings and weekend hours, and ongoing cases.



Permanency Teaming/Building Circles of Support

Prior to Fresno County's participation in the California Permanency Project, steps had been taken to promote engagement and teaming practices rather than the traditional use of meetings. Fresno County adopted the Permanency Teaming approach which makes higher efforts in locating or building family supports for young people in foster care, no matter their age, current placement, or unique challenges. The process brings together all adults recognized as important to a young person in order to work together with the youth and Department staff to map and prepare for the minor's adulthood, while strengthening and building family connections. This is a shift from traditional practices in that it emphasizes team building around the specific needs of each child. The goal of this approach is for young people to exit care with enduring family ties and fewer severed relationships.

The Department of Social Services administrative team has developed a full implementation/roll-out plan, and established a leadership structure and communication plan that leverage the child welfare reorganization to promote a one-agency approach. The Department has worked arduously to develop protocols for Permanency Teaming practices, and train all agency supervisors and workers on Quality Supervision and Permanency Teaming practice. Key Department staff and coaches have developed tools to help staff with engagement and difficult conversations with children and families. The Department established the Family Youth Engagement Subcommittee in which DSS staff and community partners such as Parent Partners provided feedback on improving teaming practices to maximize engagement and buy-in from families.

The purpose of this approach is having the social worker become familiar with the case prior to a meeting, in order to successfully engage the family. Through Permanency Teaming, Fresno County DSS anticipates permanency will increase for African American and Native American children and youth. The main Departmental goal consists of increased and timelier reunification, through a Quality Family Engagement and Teaming practice. Through the establishment of trusting relationships among social workers and families, we can promote better outcomes for families.

Quality Supervision

Fresno County DSS adopted the use of Quality Supervision, a practice in which supervisors model engagement practices, cultural competence, and best social work practices with their staff, which in turn carry over to social worker's interactions with children and families. Program Managers and Coaches have designed this model of supervision to be reflective rather than authoritative. This approach allows the social worker to critically think of the best solution to the problems that may arise in complex cases. Through this practice, the supervisors coach the social worker on best practices according to the family's needs, in an effort to remove bias from the decision making process.

Fresno County DSS has begun to use Group Supervision, a practice in which social workers are afforded the opportunity to present cases that could be particularly challenging to either the family or worker. During this supervision, fellow social workers can make recommendations regarding the resources or solutions to those particular complications. Through this process the Department hopes to ensure that cases for with potential for bias or permanency challenges are handled with utmost care to guarantee a fair service to families. Supervising staff monitor the utilization and effectiveness of tools and assess ongoing staff development of social workers and supervisors by creating a feedback loop for all staff.

Through Quality Supervision, the Department hopes to establish an approach that supports supervisors in modeling, coaching and guiding Fresno County social workers to continuously expand and improve their engagement and teaming skills with families.



Racial Sobriety Training and Coaching

“Racial Sobriety” (www.racialsobriety.org) training and coaching was introduced in the Department to help address the Institutional Analysis finding that the Department did not understand the unique strengths and problems of African American families. The goal of racial sobriety is to understand the implications of institutional and personal bias and its impact on child welfare practice. The training was provided to all child welfare staff and focused on creating “racially sober” social workers through “witnessing to ourselves and others that our thinking, feeling and acting reflects our commitment to seeing each person as a member of the same human family. Racial Sobriety requires a self awareness that examines our prejudices in regard to another’s racial caste in society.” The coaching supports that have followed the training are focused on the integration of family engagement with the tenets of racial sobriety.



III. Towards a Comprehensive Family-Centered Practice Model

California Partners for Permanency (CAPP)

The previously mentioned changes and strategies have provided a strong foundation for Fresno County's involvement in the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP) Federal Grant Project. CAPP is a federally funded project that looks to reduce long-term foster care while improving the lives of children and families that become involved in the child welfare system. CAPP is a five-year, federally funded project in which partners at every level: state, county, community, and Tribal, are collaborating to improve the outcomes of overrepresented groups, such as the African American and Native American populations. This holistic approach of collaboration looks to create effective interventions for improving outcomes at both practice and system levels. The first year of the grant (2011) was dedicated to research, planning, collaboration, and development of a model and implementation plan that will potentially become the model of practice for child welfare systems throughout the state. Currently there are four counties (Fresno, Humboldt, Los Angeles and Santa Clara) that are serving as pilot counties in the development and implementation of a child and family practice model.

The CAPP practice model is an approach that continuously explores and engages a broad network of family, cultural, community, and Tribal relationships in an ongoing circle of support that recognize the value of family and cultural strengths, solutions and resources, attends to current and historical trauma and loss, keeps children safe, and supports the family and their well-being during and after child welfare system involvement. The model's essential practices consist of: inquiry, engagement, self-advocacy, advocacy, well-being partnerships, recovery, safety and well-being, teaming, and shared commitment and accountability.

The CAPP Theoretical framework is a divergence from the more traditional frame to one that recognizes the parents, child, youth, and family, Tribes and community as true allies in developing solutions. Each value identified in the model is exemplified by practice principles that demonstrate the value in action, and will be subject to community participatory evaluation. The values include: recognition of the power of family, healing, community and collaboration, honesty, transparency, trust, safety, fairness, equity, empowerment, and accountability and results. CAPP's efforts to reduce long-term foster care and improve the lives of children and families are rooted in implementation science — a body of study and experience that maintains that in order to be successful, we must pay attention not only to child and family practice, but also to thoughtful implementation and system alignment.

Each of the four counties' African American and Native American community partners have contributed to the development of the model's core elements and the 23 practice behaviors, and will participate in the evaluation of each of the four counties' outcomes. Fresno will lead implementation of the practice and system reforms, with West Fresno Regional Center social workers beginning March 2012. Metro Division will follow next and other divisions thereafter. Fresno County's CAPP implementation will be led locally by the Implementation Team (DSS project staff, coaches/trainers, and African American and Native American community representatives) and Leadership Team. The Implementation Team will also be advised by several community stakeholder groups: the Key Advisors, the Racial Equity Action Team (REAT) Steering Committee, and Fresno County's Tribal communities.



California Partners for Permanency
Reducing Long-Term Foster Care



Community Engagement

The Department of Social Services has worked diligently since the adoption of Family-to-Family in 2003 to promote community engagement. The Fresno County community has been tremendous allies in the Department's philosophical shift. The collaboration with representatives from the community, key advisors and tribal representatives has allowed the Department to learn and implement changes that are accommodating to the complex needs of the community.

Their use of Key Advisors has afforded this Department the opportunity to receive feedback on the effectiveness of services. The establishment of several committees has created opportunities for community member to become involved in the development of a practice model that is not only culturally informed but considerate to the effects trauma has not only in children but in families. Quarterly Racial Equity Action Team (REAT) meetings have also allowed community representatives to voice their concerns with regards to disproportionality and systemic barriers to the prompt reunification of families. Other committees such as the Family Youth Engagement Committee have created a feedback loop on the necessary changes for the successful engagement of families in the child welfare system. The Department has also worked to develop not only reactive resources but preventative services for families through the Community Resource Network through the development and establishment of resource linkages for children and families.

Lastly, the CAPP Project has allowed the Department to reach out to the community for support in this cause. CAPP has reinforced the proverb "It takes a village to raise a child" and has created opportunities for community members to participate in the healing and rehabilitation of children and families.

Our Work with the Native American Community

In September of 2012 the Department began having Listening Sessions with our local Native American Tribes and service providers. The purpose of these Listening Sessions is to give the Tribal Community an opportunity to discuss issues and challenges they face when dealing with the Department and to establish communication and trust between the two groups. We are now on our seventh month of Listening Sessions. During the past months, we have had Elders, Chairperson, ICWA Representative and other Tribal leaders attend, along with several Central Valley Based Native American service providers.

One of the first issues that arose was the lack of Native American services that were recognized by the Dependency Courts. Inter-tribal Council, Big Sandy Rancheria and Fresno American Indian Health Project brought forward programs that were reviewed and presented to the court and all have been accepted as service providers for our families. The Department then took the next step and developed relationships with the Family Law, Probation, and Probate Courts, and worked out an arrangement so that the Courts now accept any program that has been vetted by the Dependency Court. We have also secured a locked mailbox in the court so that ICWA Liaisons no longer have to go to a different building to pick up reports and other correspondence. Finally, DSS and Tribal Representatives have visited ICWA Units offices in San Diego and Los Angeles in anticipation of the development of a Fresno County ICWA Unit.

Data Tracking/Data Informed Practice

Since the adoption of Family-to-Family in 2003, Fresno County DSS has been committed to evaluating its practice to ensure the effectiveness of services. Fresno DSS routinely conducts self-evaluation to expand opportunities to collect and analyze data in areas outside of the traditional data system (Child Welfare Services/ Case Management System). The gathered data often supports Departmental strategic development of improvement strategies.

Data has served to inform and inspire the agency and community to embrace and engage initiatives such as Family-to-Family by effectively describing the interaction of activities and outcomes as measured by outcome indicators. Best Practice strategies are examined in the context of data to guide decision making related to services, interventions and resources. Data Analysis is a critical element that serves to demonstrate the relationship between policy and practice decisions and their impact on outcomes.



More recently with the implementation of CAPP and the assistance of Coaches and Key Advisors, our Department has worked to evaluate available data and areas for which data collection would assist in the improvement of services. For example, among other research projects, data analysis of unfounded referrals is now being utilized to create more preventative resources for families, determine if findings made by social workers are accurate, and create a system of accountability for prompt response and documentation of referrals. In reviewing referral data, Department staff and Coaches are working to ensure that decisions are made based on available facts and not assumptions. Data provides staff with a quantified basis for policies and procedures, and creates realistic expectations regarding needs, efficiency, and outcomes.

Key Advisors and Coaches

Along with community engagement efforts, use of Cultural Brokers, and collaborations with the Tribes, the Department has adopted the assistance of Key Advisors and Coaches. These groups are helping the Department with the restructuring of the agency and evaluation of practices. All Key Advisors and Coaches are experts with years of child welfare experience.

Key Advisors are community leaders that serve as an advisory body to the Director of Social Services. The Key Advisors are a diverse group of individuals with years of experience in a variety of fields related to child welfare. Advisors provide feedback on various aspects of child welfare, ranging from practice, to the development of policies and procedures, to the recent selection and interview process for the new Deputy Director.

Coaches serve as outside experts providing the Department with suggestions and strategies on how to improve services in various areas such as training, teaming, data analysis, engagement, and preventative services. Coaches work with Program Managers and Supervisors by providing them with data and feedback on better implementation methods for family-centered practices.

The Putting Pride into Practice Project (P-4)

The Putting Pride into Practice Project (P-4) was created to provide California counties the support, resources and technical assistance necessary to implement the recommendations of the Best Practice Guidelines for serving LGBTQ Youth in Out-of-Home Care as stipulated in California's Foster Care Nondiscrimination Act. The Putting Pride into Practice Project has selected four culturally and geographically diverse counties in which to pilot the project — Fresno being one of these sites. The ultimate goal of the project is to expand to all 58 counties throughout the state so that all child welfare professionals are equipped with the information and resources they need to best support LGBTQ youth in care. In addition to the four pilot counties, the project also works with California's Community Care Licensing (CCL) to ensure a high level of LGBTQ-competency within the state's licensing infrastructure. In Fresno County, the work of the P-4 program has been successfully integrated into cultural competence trainings offered to staff. DSS has held events to raise awareness in staff and provide much needed resources to the youth.

LGBTQ youth in foster care often live under intolerable conditions as they cope with more than the turmoil associated with America's child welfare system. LGBTQ youth often experience neglect, discrimination and even abuse due to the anti-gay sentiment and ignorance of the child welfare system. This maltreatment is perpetrated not only by youth peers, but also by group home staff, foster parents, case workers or others who are charged with the care of foster children but lack the knowledge of this group. The project focuses on:

1. Developing policies, implementing best practices and promoting training and organizational culture change at the county level;
2. Building long-term capacity and support for this effort at the state level;
3. Developing best practices for the collection of data in LGBTQ youth in out of home care; and
4. Dissemination of existing and development of new resources to support LGBTQ youth in out of home care.



The Department has begun to offer trainings and event to staff in which they have hosted guest speakers that present their struggles and experiences as LGBTQ youth in care. Our Department has also made efforts to educate our community on the needs of this population through radio appearances. Social events for youth to find support in one another have also been set in place. Our Department continues to work to raise awareness, and create a culture of acceptance for this vulnerable group of youth.



Education Equals Program

Fresno County, in collaboration with the Stuart Foundation, is implementing the Education Equals Program. Education has become a critical piece for child welfare given the low academic achievement rates of youth in foster care. Historically there has been a lack of focused and integrated attention by the child welfare and educational systems to the educational needs and potential of foster youth. The results of the fragmented approach are sadly consistent across the country. Compared with other children, foster children are more likely to:

- Have academic and behavioral problems in school
- Have higher rates of absenteeism and disciplinary referrals
- Perform below grade level and have been held back in school
- Do not complete high school
- Fail to go on to a 4-year college
- Be placed in special education

Education Equals, a program launched in three California counties in 2008 under the name Ready to Succeed, is a bold, comprehensive and multi-component initiative designed to improve education outcomes for California's foster children and youth. Primary efforts have focused on creating impact and measuring results in Fresno County and two others. As the program evolves, collaborators are looking to expand the advocacy for foster care children's education. Education Equals supports the following activities:

- Direct service (Educational Liaisons)
- Data and accountability systems
- Technical assistance
- Informing public policy
- Community engagement

In its current incarnation, Education Equals is a three phase program: Tier 1: Pre-School (ages 3-5), Tier 2: K-12, and Tier 3: College and Career. The program will focus on three key practice areas: education-informed home placement, systematic information gathering, and customized case management and networking. All of these services will be trauma-informed, meaning they will be based on the understanding of the triggers and vulnerability of trauma survivors.



The ultimate goal of this program is to create stability and permanency in the lives of children and youth in foster care, create school environments that are consistently accommodating and welcoming to foster youth, and create higher expectations of outcomes for foster youth.



Appendix A – Crosswalk: 2010 Institutional Analysis Findings & System Improvement Strategies

Institutional Analysis Findings	System Improvement Strategies
<p>There is a gap between the County’s intent to move African American children out of foster care to their biological families or other permanent options and the actual outcomes that the families experience.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframing Social Worker Roles to be advocates and to elevate system barriers • Restructuring the Organization to promote a more uniform approach to reunification services • Racial Sobriety Training & Coaching • Systems Thinking and Race Training • Quality Supervision & Coaching for Supervisors in order to better guide staff to produce optimal outcomes • Data Informed Practice- a practice in which key advisors and staff evaluate the effectiveness of practices and create more efficient resources for families • Key Advisors – provide guidance and advice to the Director from the perspective of the community with a focus on improving outcomes
<p>Fresno County DSS, through policies and practice, did not act with a sense of urgency to safely return African American children to their families or to find other safe, permanent and loving options.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Finding, a program dedicated to rebuilding relationships and reconnecting youth to their extended family members • CAPP Practice Model - an integrated approach to assessing safety in the context of building a long term network of support for the family • Kinship Resource Center – planning efforts have begun for the development of a center that will provide support and resources to relative caregivers • Permanency Teaming, a practice that focuses on building a circle of support that will stay with the family beyond their involvement with the child welfare system
<p>The Department did not understand the unique strengths and problems faced by African American families.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Racial Sobriety training and coaching - focused on educating staff on making racially conscious decisions based on the best interest of the family • Cultural Brokers partner with the social worker and the family to increase understanding of the family’s culture • Joint Community Response, a strategy in which Cultural Brokers help frontline staff engage with families in order to provide more accurate assessments • CAPP Practice Model - an integrated approach to assessing safety in the context of building a long term network of support for the family



<p>Fresno County DSS intervened with a family through universal, rather than individualized assessments and service plans.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural Brokers provided bridge to understanding the unique needs of the family and participated in the development of a coordinated case plan • Joint Community Response- enabled staff to utilize Cultural Brokers to break the communication barriers that often come with initial contact with the Department thus creating better service plans for families • CAPP Practice Model requires staff to assess each family’s needs in an individualized manner and requires the system to identify services and resources to meet those needs
<p>Services tended to be centrally located in Fresno, rather than in the communities where African American parents lived. The operating hours were inconvenient for working parents.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved access to services such as visitation - hours expanded and additional locations in community • African American and Native American culturally specific service providers approved through court (parenting, domestic violence and anger management services) • The development of a Community Resource Specialist whose role is to identify resources in the community for families • PSSF/CAPIT prevention contracts – modified proposal to prioritize smaller grassroots organizations, providers in the communities that families lived, and those with flexible service delivery hours
<p>There is minimal evidence that Fresno County DSS helped support parents in achieving economic stability by linking them with other available services.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linkages - improved access to services through coordinated case planning with CalWORKS. • Differential response- a practice in which preventative services are offered to families • Joint Community Response through the use of Cultural Brokers
<p>The Department does not direct workers to proactively and consistently find permanent families for older youth.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family Finding • Integrated Case management divisions (Reorganization of Agency) • Building Circles of Support/Permanency Teaming Meetings • CAPP Practice Model • Quality Supervision and Coaching