

Child Welfare Continuum of Care Reform in Ventura County

Summer 2016 Update

California legislation (AB 403) signed into law in October 2015 mandates Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) for the child welfare system.

CCR calls for improvements to ensure that more children who have been abused or neglected receive care in family settings, rather than shelter or group settings, until they can reunite with their parents.

Major tenets of CCR include:

- Prioritizing home-based delivery of services
- Redefining the purpose of group care to short-term residential treatment
- Teaming service providers with children and families in a manner that ensures that families' voices are heard
- Ensuring children's early access to specialized mental health services irrespective of their placement setting

To establish and operationalize CCR policy and practice locally, Ventura County has convened an Executive Committee and a Steering Committee, as well as multiple topical working groups, regularly since early 2016.

These cross-agency efforts have laid the foundation for CCR.

Accomplishments to date include:

- **Family Preservation:** Developed a child welfare family preservation model that keeps children safe with their families of origin instead of entering foster care whenever possible
- **Family Team Meetings:** Determined the function and design of Family Team Meetings, multi-disciplinary forums that will take place at least every 90 days for each child to ensure that progress is made on plans that benefit the child and family, and that critical decisions are made with input from all who will be affected; Family Team Meeting participants will include child welfare social workers, behavioral health clinicians, public health nurses, the child's family of origin and safety network, and other service providers as needed

- **Mental Health Screenings & Services:** Agreed to conduct mental health screenings for all children who enter child welfare, and to begin federally-funded mental health services for children shortly after entry, as needed based on assessment
- **Family Finding:** Improved child welfare processes for contacting relatives early on after children's removal from their homes to help ensure that children are placed with relatives when possible and that safety networks are established to support children and their families



- **Training for Resource Families:** Expanded training for foster parents, relative caregivers, and adoptive parents to help these resource families parent and co-parent through a trauma-informed lens and support relationships with birth families that enhance reunification efforts

"I really appreciated the high standards you set for foster parents and I learned more compassion for birth parents. The training is a lot of work, but worth every moment. I feel prepared by my new trauma lens and the amount of resources you offered."

– Resource Family Training participant

- **Services Targeted to Children's Needs:** Estimated the numbers of children who will fall into each of the six levels of care established by the state, and analyzed the mental health treatment services and child welfare contacts that will be required; children with characteristics that place them in higher levels of care will receive more frequent, intensive, in-person services and contacts
- **Group Home Transition:** Met with group home representatives to review local and state certification and accreditation procedures for transitioning to Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs), which have stricter criteria for initial placement, increased standards of care, and shorter durations of stay



Continuum of Care Reform Next Steps

Critical next steps for successful Continuum of Care Reform implementation include:

- Expanding planning groups to include more stakeholders and partners, now that many aspects of internal county infrastructure are in place
- Implementing a streamlined assessment tool that facilitates the provision of mental health services to children early on
- Revising memoranda of understanding among county partners to reflect new expectations and practices, and renegotiating contracts with service providers to ensure the delivery of needed services to children and their families
- Assisting group homes in transitioning to Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTPs), and requesting state extensions for group homes that are in the process of converting to STRTPs but will not complete the process by January 2017
- Developing child-specific plans to transition children currently residing in congregate care to family settings whenever possible
- Training child welfare social workers to take on more prominent roles as facilitators of Family Team Meetings
- Engaging and training more relatives and foster families to co-parent successfully and support relationships with birth families
- Assessing and maximizing federal, state and local funding streams to ensure that CCR implementation is properly resourced

Interested in Learning More?

Attend the Ventura County Board of Supervisors Meeting on September 27, 2016 to hear an update on CCR.

The presentation is tentatively scheduled for 1:30 p.m. To confirm the presentation time, check the meeting agenda posted shortly before 9/27 at:

www.ventura.org/board-of-supervisors

Please stay tuned for the **CCR Winter 2017 Update**, and contact Leticia Morales, HSA Manager, at (805) 477-5349 for additional information.

Spotlight on Family Team Meetings



The purpose of Family Team Meetings (FTMs) is to keep children safe, promote children's well-being, and support families. FTMs will be held to foster a shared understanding between child welfare, behavioral health and public health staff, families, friends, neighbors, schools, community members, caregivers, and other helping agencies. Child welfare social workers will

help identify family members and supporters to expand the family's safety network, and will facilitate most FTMs.

FTM participants will work together to learn what the family hopes to accomplish, set realistic and important goals, recognize and encourage the family strengths, identify what the family needs, find solutions that build on the family's strengths and lead to necessary changes, make a plan for who will do what and when will it be done, and agree on next steps.

It is the responsibility of the child welfare social worker to ensure that all ideas presented at FTMs – whether originating from professionals or concerned family members or supporters – are considered fairly.

FTMs will be held at least every 90 days or as frequently as needed to address emerging issues, ensure integrated and coordinated interventions, and refine the plan.

Our Values:

Safe at Home: *We believe families can keep their children safe with support.*

Caregiving: *We believe children should be cared for in a familiar, nurturing, and safe environment.*

Child's Experience: *We believe every child is entitled to thrive through stability, family connections, quality treatment, and a voice in planning.*

Parental Support for Reunification: *We believe, through partnership and support, parents can grow and change in order to safely parent their children.*

Permanency: *We believe all children deserve a sense of belonging, and permanent and unconditional commitment in a lifelong family.*