

LOS ANGELES COUNTY

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



2009-2010 ANNUAL REPORT

"Safety and security don't just happen, they are the result of collective consensus and public investment. We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in our society, a life free of violence and fear."

Nelson Mandela

LOS ANGELES COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS



**Gloria Molina
First District**



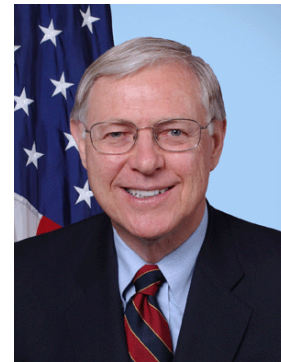
**Mark Ridley-Thomas
Second District**



**Zev Yaroslavsky
Third District**



**Don Knabe
Fourth District**



**Michael D. Antonovich
Fifth District**



**LOS ANGELES COUNTY COMMISSION
FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**
Celebrating 26 Years of Advocacy & Achievement

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Martha Trevino Powell
Dr. Harriette F. Williams

October 5, 2010

The Honorable Board of Supervisors
County of Los Angeles
Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration
500 West Temple Street
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Honorable Supervisors:

**COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES'
2009-2010 ANNUAL REPORT**

This Annual Report to your Board highlights the Commission's efforts in FY 2009/10. The report includes the Commission participation in several County and Department Committees, Workgroups as well as the Committees and Workgroups chaired by the Commission. This year the Commission utilized a roundtable discussion format at several Commission meetings which brought together representatives of County Departments, the Community, and Commissioners. This format provided an opportunity for participants to exchange information and ideas to identify solutions to the many challenges the County faces in providing services for kids. This report also contains recommendations that we feel are needed to facilitate change.

The Commission appreciates the long standing support the Board of Supervisors (Board) has provided. We look forward to continuing our advocacy to improve the lives of children and families of Los Angeles County. We thank your Board, Board Deputies, CEO, Deputy Chief Executive Officers, County Departments Directors and their staff, the community agencies, private partners as well as the families and children for their work with us. Special thanks to the Executive Office for assisting us in various ways and providing staff to help us with our work.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Pat C", written in black ink.

PATRICIA CURRY
Chair

Attachment

- c: Chief Executive Officer
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors
DCEO, Children & Families Well-Being
DCEO, Health and Mental Health Services
DCEO, Public Safety
Assistant CEO, Service Integration Branch
Chief Probation Officer
Director, Department of Children and Family Services
Director, Department of Mental Health
Children's Deputies
Health Deputies
Justice Deputies

Commissioners Serving from July 2009 – June 2010

Supervisor Gloria Molina First Supervisorial District

Steven M. Olivas, Esq.
Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Martha Trevino Powell

Supervisor Mark Ridley-Thomas Second Supervisorial District

Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Harriette F. Williams, Ed.D.

Supervisor Zev Yaroslovsky Third Supervisorial District

Carol O. Biondi
Susan Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg

Supervisor Don Knabe Fourth Supervisorial District

Ann Franzen
Sandra Rudnick
Tina Pedersen, LCSW (Resigned 12/2009)

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich Fifth Supervisorial District

Patricia Curry
Stacey Savelle
Maria A. Prieto (Resigned 08/10/10)

Commission Officers

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Susan Friedman, Vice Chair
Steven M. Olivas Esq., Vice Chair
Stacey Savelle, Vice Chair

Commission Staffed by Executive Office Commission Services

Martha Arana, Narek Artonian, Andrew Sevrin, Jimmy Prieto

Commission Committees

Childhood Wellness Committee

Tina Pedersen, LCSW, Chair
(6/09-12/09)
Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW, Chair
(1/10-Present)
Ann Franzen
Helen A. Kleinberg

Faith-Based Committee

Ann Franzen, Chair
Dr. La-Doris McClaney
Rev. Cecil L. Murray
Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Martha Trevino-Powell

Relative Care Committee

Harriette F. Williams, Ed.D, Chair
Rev. Cecil L. Murray

Transition Age Youth (TAY) Planning Committee

Patricia Curry, Co-Chair
Stacey Savelle, Co-Chair

Ad-Hoc Committees

Crossover Committee

Patricia Curry, Chair
Stacey Savelle
Helen A. Kleinberg
Carol O. Biondi

Protocol for Probation Youth Fatalities Workgroup

Susan Friedman, Chair
Helen Kleinberg
Carol O. Biondi
Stacey Savelle

Commission Representatives on County Bodies

Agency Court Cooperation Committee	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Countywide Gangs and Violence Reduction Strategy Committee	
➤ Monrovia-Duarte Workgroup	Stacey Savelle
➤ Pacoima Workgroup	Carol O. Biondi
Delinquency Representation Guidelines Committee	Carol O. Biondi
Disproportionality Workgroup	Stacey Savelle
Education Coordinating Council	Helen A. Kleinberg Martha Trevino-Powell
Family Reunification Workgroup	Helen A. Kleinberg
External Stakeholders Visitation Committee	Helen A. Kleinberg
First 5 LA	Harriette F. Williams, Ed.D.
Juvenile Court Psychotropic Medication Authorization Committee	Sandra Rudnick
Mental Health Services Act Stakeholders Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI)	Helen A. Kleinberg
Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team (SLT)	Patricia Curry
Policy Roundtable for Childcare	Ann Franzen
Prevention Workgroup (Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project)	Sandra Rudnick
Self-Sufficiency Committee	Patricia Curry

Introduction

Twenty-six (26) years ago, on May 8, 1984, your Board approved the creation of the Commission for Children and Families (Commission). The Commission was given the responsibility to monitor and evaluate the recommendations made by the Children's Services Task Force.

The Commission was given the added responsibility in its Ordinance to:

- Review all programs administered by County departments that provide programs and services for all children at risk,
- Receive input from appropriate community groups and individuals concerning County-administered children's services programs,
- Review and make recommendations to your Board concerning legislation dealing with children's services,
- Make recommendations, as necessary, to various department heads to improve children's services,
- Make recommendations, as necessary, to your Board on action to be taken to improve children's services.
- Provide an annual report to your Board concerning the status of children's services, along with recommendations for their improvement, to be utilized for broad community distribution and discussion.

Historically, and in FY 2009/10, the Commission advocated for improved coordination and collaboration of County Departments and community partners in an effort to improve outcomes for children and families in Los Angeles County. This year the Commission modeled collaboration through joint projects of three Commission Committees and also through a joint workgroup consisting of members of the Probation Commission and our Commission. In addition, the Commission made an effort to partner with the CEO's office to develop a countywide budget for Transition Age Youth (TAY).

Our goal remains the same as it has for several years, to advocate for children and families and to ensure a continuum of care that is comprehensive, coordinated and well integrated with County Departments, Clusters, Caregivers, the private sector and the community.

Commission Preamble

In 2001, the Commission adopted the following preamble to guide its work on behalf of children and families:

As members of the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families, we hold ourselves accountable to the Board of Supervisors and to the communities that they serve and from which we come. Although we are a diverse group of child advocates, we work collaboratively and are firmly united on our mission: enhancing the well being of children and families of Los Angeles County. The Commission believes that "the children can't wait," and we therefore summon a sense of urgency and dedication to our duties. This is a voluntary assignment, but we are greatly rewarded through the intrinsic and passionate nature of the ongoing effort to improve lives.

Current Climate

In 1984, the Commission began the work of advising your Board on the needs, services and programs for children and families in Los Angeles County. This past year presented many challenges to the County. The fiscal crisis at the State level impacted every County Department and affected children and families through the reduction of programs and services. While many children and youth were impacted by the reductions, youth aging out of foster care were particularly affected by the fiscal crisis when the State eliminated the Emancipation Youth Stipends (EYE). In addition, the State reduced funding for the Transitional Housing Program Plus (THP Plus) and the State and Federal governments reduced the Chafee Independent Living (ILP) funding. This resulted in some Transition Age Youth (TAY) dropping out of school because they lacked tuition, dorm fees, and money for books. In other cases, TAY were left without housing as the number of THP Plus beds were reduced. The impacts of these reductions were mitigated by Private Donors contacted by Commissioners who covered some of the education expenses; THP Plus providers raised funds to cover the cost of keeping some of the housing slots open; and DCFS redirected funds to assist the youth with education expenses and to relocate youth who lost housing. However, the impact on TAY was significant.

The fiscal cuts to the County included every aspect of service to children, and were not limited to DCFS. Other child centered programs and services saw reductions such as the Juvenile Courts and Court-Appointed Special Advocates Program (CASA). These reductions also impacted the Commission with the elimination of the fulltime staff dedicated to the Commission. In addition, the Interagency Operation Group was disbanded, the Inter-Agency Council on Child Abuse and Neglect (ICAN) received reductions in budget and staff and the Children's Council was eliminated. Prior to its elimination, the Children's Council provided a central place for public-private planning and coordination of services and resources for 18 years. First 5 LA was faced with Proposition 10 which would have, if passed, diverted funds to the state.

Fiscal problems were not the only challenges faced by the County Departments. Concerns about child safety resulted in an increased focus and review by DCFS on the Emergency Response (ER) policies and the implementation of new procedures to increase child safety. Continued concerns about the Probation Department by the California Department of Justice (DOJ) prompted the new Department Chief to launch a review of all programs and services which is currently underway.

On the positive side, Los Angeles County experienced significant success with the Title IV-E Waiver. This provided an opportunity for Probation and DCFS to use the Title IV-E Waiver Reinvestment money on programs such as Prevention, Family Preservation, Permanency and Wraparound.

As we enter Fiscal Year 2010/11, many challenges remain, including the fiscal crisis which continues to threaten more programs and services for children.

COMMITTEE/AD-HOC COMMITTEE REPORTS

Childhood Wellness Committee

At the beginning of this reporting period, the Childhood Wellness Committee established three goals to address the following: Nutrition and Physical Activity, Asthma, and Mental Health. Building on its participation in its work on the Los Angeles Dependency Court Plan to address weight issues for dependent children, the Committee continued to address childhood obesity. The Committee also worked with DCFS in the development of a policy promoting children's physical well being and health.

Following the passage of Supervisor Don Knabe's April 14, 2009, Board Motion - Convening of a Childhood Wellness Workgroup to develop a Childhood Wellness Policy for Los Angeles County - the Committee worked with the Chief Executive Office on the Child Wellness Workgroup. This Workgroup included the Departments of Public Health, Children and Family Services, Probation, Health Services, Mental Health, and Parks and Recreation, as well as the Los Angeles County Office of Education, the Commission for Children and Family Services, the Education Coordinating Council, First 5 LA, the Child Care Policy Roundtable, the Commission on Nutrition, the Children's Council of Los Angeles County, and the Association of Community Human Policy for Los Angeles County. The Workgroup developed the Child Wellness Policy (Policy) that was presented to your Board in November 2009. The Committee's involvement on this Workgroup encouraged the development of the Healthy Lifestyle Trainings for relative caregivers.

The Policy includes information on psychotropic medication, a training component, preventative measures for fighting obesity, as well as recommendations by the Commission that were included in its letter to the Board, approved by your Board on December 1, 2009.

In addition, the Commission also supported Supervisors Mark Ridley-Thomas and Michael D. Antonovich's joint Motion – a Leadership Agenda to Support Policies Related to Nutrition, Physical Activity, Obesity Prevention and Smoking Prevention and Cessation. These efforts provide Los Angeles County with the opportunity to enhance prevention efforts as well as strengthen its core public health mission.

In April 2010, the Commission sent a letter to First Lady Michelle Obama regarding the Commission's efforts in addressing the issue of childhood obesity by means of the Community Wellness and Healthy Lifestyle Trainings for relative caregivers. The Commission also expressed support on the new national "Let's Move Initiative."

Faith-Based Committee

For more than five years, the Faith-Based Committee has advocated using faith-based facilities as community partners. We are pleased that houses of worship opened their doors for the Healthy Lifestyle Trainings. In addition, faith-based facilities provided a place where family visitation can take place in a supportive environment. Congregations have also taken time to assist parents to become sober and a part of their family's lives. The Long Beach South County Faith-Based Counsel is one example of faith-based resources for families who may need to start over. Their warehouse makes sofas, beds, refrigerators, stoves, and other household items available for these families. The Faith-Based Community has proven they are available and willing to help families serviced by DCFS.

Relative Care Committee

The Commission remains committed to relative caregivers and the significant services they continue to provide to children and youth in the child welfare and justice systems. A concern for this population continues to represent one of the Commission's major priorities.

The Relative Care Committee was created at the request of your Board. The Committee's primary purpose is to advocate for relative caregivers who represent approximately 50% of all families receiving services from DCFS. Through the continued involvement of support groups, formal advocacy groups and individual community stakeholders, the Relative Care Committee is intent on providing a mechanism for DCFS to appropriately respond to the various needs of relative caregivers.

On October 5, 2009, the Committee submitted a report to the Commission which identified the following issues, some of which continue to need further advocacy:

1. The need for additional Kinship Support Centers. We now have two, with a goal of one within each Service Planning Area (SPA);
2. The need to re-focus and re-instate appropriate training materials within the Training Academy for newly hired Children's Social Workers (CSWs);
3. The need for CSWs to embrace the philosophy of "support" for all caregivers, so that they might be more effective for the children and youth in their care;
4. A recommendation that the Commissioners receive Kin GAP training in order to evaluate the process, which was subsequently provided by DCFS at the March 1, 2010 Commission meeting;
5. A need to continue to monitor a new advocacy group --- Kinship Advisory and Advocacy Network (KAAN) in order to determine if this group can effectively replace the Kinship Roundtable which was disbanded in March 2007.

Modeling Collaboration Healthy Lifestyle Trainings for Relative Caregivers a joint effort of the Commission's Childhood Wellness Committee, Faith-Based Committee and Relative Care Committee

This year the Childhood Wellness, Faith-Based, and Relative Care Committees collaborated with DCFS, the City of Pasadena Public Health Department, First 5 LA, and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health in presenting Healthy Lifestyle Trainings for relative caregivers. These trainings focused on the importance of eating healthy food, eating smaller amounts and being physically active every day. Each relative caregiver participant received measuring cups, recipe books, material on eating more fruits and vegetables, how to prepare economical and healthy meals and how a family can exercise and play with their children. Approximately 100 relative caregivers representing about 50 children in care attended these interactive trainings.

The Healthy Lifestyle Trainings were held in six of the eight Service Planning Areas (SPAs). The following sites used for the trainings were campuses of six different and diverse Faith-Based facilities.

- St. Andrews Catholic Church – Pasadena (SPA 3)
- Calvary Baptist Church – Bellflower (SPA 7)
- Van Nuys Seventh-Day Adventist Church – Van Nuys (SPA 2)
- Trinity Baptist Church – South Los Angeles (SPA 6)
- Temple Knesset Israel – Los Angeles (SPA 4)
- Grace Chapel – Lancaster (SPA 1)

Working collaboratively with DCFS, Public Health Departments of Los Angeles and Pasadena, First 5 LA, and Faith-Based organizations proved to be very successful and established a model to promote the development of healthy lifestyles for children, which was duplicated by DCFS in the SPA 8.

During the trainings, relative caregivers stated their need for assistance and support from DCFS. In addition, they are seeking information and ideas on how they can better care for children who have been placed in their care. One of the most significant challenges facing our relative caregivers is that most are on fixed or limited incomes, and information and ideas on how to prepare economical, healthy and nutritious meals is of extreme benefit to these families.

Crossover Ad-Hoc Committee

The Commission formed an Ad-Hoc Committee to look at various issues related to youth crossing over from foster care to the probation system. After several discussions the Ad-Hoc Committee decided to focus on how the Probation Department and DCFS can work together to identify youth who are at risk of crossing over and jointly provide services to these youth.

The Committee determined that by focusing on this prevention aspect, they would be able to benefit the youth and create a continuum of service. In addition, the Committee worked to ensure these prevention efforts would not duplicate Judge Nash's efforts as he works with Departments' programs focusing on youth who have already moved to the Probation system or are in the 241.1 assessment process.

The Committee is analyzing information and reports from school and traffic court which could be "red flags" regarding a youth's behavior. Members are also reviewing and attempting to identify what existing programs are already in place that could be used to divert the at risk youth prior to the youth committing a crime which would result in a foster youth entering the probation system.

Modeling Partnerships Protocol for Probation Fatalities Ad-Hoc Workgroup

In Fiscal Year 2008/09, the Child Fatality Committee focused most of its attention on crossover cases in which a youth begins as a dependent and at some point moves to delinquency status. In follow-up to these efforts, and at the request of the Children's Deputies, during the current reporting period the Commission established a joint workgroup with members of the Probation Department and for the first time in partnership with the Probation Commission. The workgroup developed a protocol for reporting youth fatalities within the Probation Department to your Board. To accomplish this, the workgroup reviewed procedures currently being used by the Probation Department, as well as a draft protocol prepared by the Probation Department staff, and compared these with the protocol being used for reporting child fatalities by DCFS.

Currently, the workgroup is in the process of finalizing their recommendations for consideration by our Commission and the Probation Commission. Once the recommendations are adopted by each Commission, they will be forwarded to your Board for consideration.

COUNTY BODIES REPRESENTATION

Countywide Gangs and Violence Reductions (Monrovia-Duarte & Pacoima Workgroups)

Four countywide projects were created to recommend prevention, high risk/re-entry, and suppression strategies to help reduce gang violence in the identified communities/demonstration sites.

The Commission had representation on two of the four groups along with a diverse group of public and private stakeholders.

The findings and recommendations were submitted to your Board and approved in April, 2010. Recommended strategies included:

- Developing park-based youth and family programming focused on extended hours and weekends;
- Developing youth and family programming centered on greater awareness and use of libraries;
- Aligning community assets, including school-based services and those identified in the Auditor-Controller's Report, to better coordinate the delivery of prevention services;
- Increasing access to Earned Income Tax Credit refunds for low-moderate income individuals, families, and those transitioning back into the community after being incarcerated;
- Ensuring that local truancy/dropout efforts are coordinated among school, community, and governmental agencies;
- Increasing access to health services, particularly mental health services, by assessing existing resources and developing partnerships with community-based providers in and outside of each demonstration site;
- Developing employment opportunities for high-risk youth and adults;
- Exploring promising practices for successful engagement with multi-generational gang involved families; and,
- Developing protocols for community outreach/support, including collaboration with community leaders, gang violence interrupters workers, and human relations specialist where appropriate.

Disproportionality Workgroup

The Los Angeles Policy Workgroup on Disproportionality and Disparity in Child Welfare is approaching its second anniversary and is at a crossroads, moving into the next phase of work with a shift in facilitation and membership expansion to include other stakeholders.

The workgroup's focus is to reduce disproportionality through small tests of change which include data driven, multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches. Progress has been realized in the following areas: application of learning to other settings; stronger parental voices; DCFS Executive Team and Judicial support to champion the cause; becoming informed through a variety of methods and training opportunities; community engagement; acquiring knowledge and making personal transitions; measureable decreases in disproportionate representation of African-American children/families in test offices; and intense facilitation by Casey Family Programs and involvement of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The important work of this group and the implementation of tests of change will be presented to the full Commission on July 19, 2010.

External Stakeholders Visitation Committee

The Commission continues to be an active member of this Committee since visitation was nationally identified as a key building block for successful family reunification. This year DCFS made enormous strides in moving to improve visits between families and their children. The progress includes extensive training of the entire staff on the importance of visitation to maintain family connectedness, child well being, and in addressing the issues that caused the detention in the first place. Regional Administrators are now reviewing court reports for documentation of visits and there is a visitation checklist so that the review seeks quality. The Commission is glad to see that punitive attitudes towards families are also beginning to change and replaced by attitudes with a more positive support approach through assistive programs like mentoring and coaching for families to provide skill development.

The quality of visitations was greatly increased by the efforts of the faith based communities. There are now two very successful programs that are run by churches and their volunteers in conjunction with the regional offices. The committee was very impressed by the presentations, especially by the amount of cooperation that existed and by the sensitivity to the needs of all of the family members. While the churches, regional offices, DCFS staff, and the committee members deserve much credit, the success also involves the efforts of Commissioners who have served on the Visitation Committee, the Faith Based Committee, and the Prevention Committee (some prevention dollars are used in this project). This again illustrates the importance of partnership and collaboration among County Departments and the community.

Family Reunification Committee and Permanency Committee

The Family Reunification Committee began as a joint effort between DCFS and the Commission to oversee the Department's implementation of the Reunification Plan which was adopted by the Board of Supervisors in February 2004. The Commission representative serves as a co-chair of the Committee. Since the Commission was instrumental in creating the original reunification recommendations, the Commission representative is able to provide continuity, keep the group focused on important changes, and ask questions that others might be reluctant to voice. The Committee has been involved in ensuring that reunification remains an important outcome for families and children, and that resources, especially those involving assessment and treatment for substance abuse, visitation, and support for families after reunification, are made accessible and available. This year the Committee devoted much of its time to the studies conducted by DCFS to ascertain the quality of reunification services.

The Committee meets every other month and includes DCFS, Department of Mental Health (DMH), Association of Children's Health & Services Agencies (ACHSA), Children's Law Center (CLC), and representatives from the Commission. Several members also participate on the External Stakeholders Visitation Committee which meets separately and is chaired by DCFS. The Committee is kept aware of the progress and challenges facing DCFS in the effort to enhance and improve visitation for children and families. These efforts are critical to improving the quality of visits, the opportunities to keep families together, and the possibilities for coaching parents so that they can learn to address the issues that brought about the initial detention of the children.

The most important work of the Committee has been to assist DCFS in creating and overseeing the two reunification studies: last year's study of 30 cases in which reunification efforts failed and children re-entered the foster care system, and this year's 30 cases where reunification was successful. These studies were the result of discussions between DCFS and the Commission three years ago when there was an increasing rate of children re-entering foster care after reunification. The Committee participated in the design of the studies and in the specific questions that were included, as well as reviewed the results of the studies and the recommendations.

The results of the studies identified that while there are pockets of excellence in the Department, more timely specific services are necessary to improve reunification. Most families required multiple services (at least six) to address the safety and nurturing factors. These services need to be relevant to the problem, accessible and available during the reunification process, and immediately upon the return of the child to the home. Additional recommendations were developed, shared with the Committee and the DCFS Executive Team, and presented in each of the DCFS offices to the staff. The Association of Community Human Service Agencies (ACHSA) also provided valuable input as did the Children's Law Center of Los Angeles, and both shared the recommendations from the studies with their respective organizations.

As an outgrowth of the reunification study, the Committee worked to create a list of best practices for social workers in promoting reunification. The Committee utilized the recommendations from the two reunification studies, the expertise of the Committee members, and valuable input from invited guests that included educators, providers, parent representatives and advocates, mental health staff, and the legal community. This list of best social work practices was shared with the training section of DCFS, the DCFS Permanency Committee, and DCFS staff who is working on DCFS' new strategic plan.

The Commission's representative on the Committee was asked by DCFS to also participate on a Permanency Committee for the Department in order to share the work of the Committee on reunification and assist them in developing a list of best practices. Despite the fact that many of the DCFS staff on the Permanency Committee is attached to specific DCFS initiatives, their identification of best social work practices that promote permanency were similar to the list created by the Reunification Committee. This demonstrated common values within DCFS and showed that despite the numerous initiatives, everyone has common basic values and methodologies for how the work should be accomplished. The list of best practices was passed on for incorporation into the DCFS strategic plan.

An additional concern of the Committee is the degree to which substance abuse affects families, causes the initial detention, affects the quality and quantity of visits, and impacts the possibility for reunification. Since the original Reunification Study there continues to be great concern about the role substance abuse plays in child abuse and neglect. The Commission was instrumental in obtaining funding from the federal program "Promoting Safe and Stable Families (93.556)" for a three year pilot project to promote reunification for families who have problems with drug and alcohol abuse. This pilot which is currently being evaluated utilized the Community Assessment Service Centers (CASC) system for assessment and referral for treatment established to assist the Department of Public Social Services. The Committee continues to be apprised of the issues DCFS is facing in making changes in its approach to substance abuse. Dr. Charles Sophy, Medical Director of DCFS, has been working with the Department of Public Health to shift the allocation of funding to provide greater resources for treatment in an attempt to provide better outcomes and have greater emphasis on treatment versus testing. Representatives from the Department of Public Health's Alcohol and Drug Program Administration provided helpful information to the Committee.

First 5 Los Angeles

The Commission has a long-standing commitment to the well-being of young children, ages 0-5. Following the passage of Proposition 10 in 1998, the Commission played a leadership role in establishing the First 5 LA Commission. The Commission holds an ex-officio position with First 5 LA. Our mutual goal is to achieve better outcomes for young children.

This year, the Commission for Children and Families viewed its relationship as especially significant as First 5 LA continued to work diligently to develop its Strategic Plan for 2010-2015 and to set its priorities in the following areas: to assure children are born healthy, maintain a healthy weight, are safe from abuse and neglect and enter kindergarten ready to learn.

The plan, which was adopted on June 10, 2010, embraced a place-based funding strategy for 14 designated communities. It was designed to provide a more comprehensive approach to helping children and strengthening families by targeting and coordinating services in communities of high need throughout the county and maximizing their benefits to the most vulnerable children.

Under the new plan that will guide First 5 LA investments, young children and families in the designated communities will receive an extensive range of support for expectant and new mothers, parent education classes, family counseling and case management for high-risk children and their families.

Through its representative, the Commission works with First 5 LA staff to implement the strategic plan and to explore additional opportunities to improve the lives of young children in neighborhoods of high need. The First 5 LA Commission and staff seek to generate permanent, positive change at both the community and countywide level.

Efforts to protect First 5 LA funding were another critical concern. During the 2009 State Budget process, First 5 Commissions throughout the state were targeted by a ballot measure (Proposition 1 D) that would have diverted most of their funding stream to the state general fund to balance the state budget. The Commission advocated maintaining First 5 funding to meet local needs through a letter to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors recommending that they oppose Proposition 1D. This issue continues to be monitored by California First 5 and all local county Commissions as the state continues to struggle to balance its budget

Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) Stakeholders Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) and Systems Leadership Team (SLT)

The Commission has taken its role on the MHSA committees to advocate for children and families very seriously. This role has been particularly important as 65% of the MHSA dollars allocated in the PEI Funding are designated for children and families. We believe that these dollars could assist in preventing child abuse and neglect problems which the County must address. While we were pleased that 65% was allocated for children there was no percentage put aside specifically for Transition Age Youth (TAY). Since the needs of children are quite different depending on the age of the child, combining TAY with other children makes it difficult to meet the diverse needs. The Commission's presence has been important since the PEI planning process takes so long (half day and some all day meetings) many stakeholders advocating for children find it difficult to attend. The entire planning process was very difficult because of the large number of stakeholders included and because the majority of the stakeholders represent providers who have a stake in receiving a contract to provide services. There are also advocates for minority representation and for elder adults all competing for the same funds as those representatives advocating for children. This competition for funds makes the advocacy for children much more difficult.

The Commission is concerned with the implementation of the PEI funding. The public voted for these funds as additional money to address areas that were not receiving adequate attention. Our hope was that new ways of reaching clients and dealing with their issues in an early stage would be developed and that the providers would be people committed to a new way of providing services. After years of planning, the PEI dollars are being given out to providers without a bidding process owing to the shortfall in mental health funding. We are concerned that this could lead to contracts being awarded to providers who are not adequately trained or committed to the new evidenced

based strategies, but rather are providers in need of a funding stream for other priorities. While DMH has committed that 30% of the contracts will eventually go to new providers as originally promised, this has been a disappointing start to what is a promising program.

The Commission is also represented as a member on the DMH System Leadership Team (SLT). The Commission was hopeful that the SLT might provide an opportunity for oversight of the Community Support and Service (CSS) implementation plan. While the SLT provided presentations and draft documents from DMH, it is difficult to determine how the funds are spent versus the original plan for spending MHSA funds for children and TAY. The Commission still believes it is important to have a membership on the SLT to continue to obtain information and reports and have input into the CSS and PEI process. However, in terms of oversight, the Commission has decided to form a Committee so we can better track and explore services for foster children, TAY and Probation youth.

The Commission continues to be concerned about the Mental Health needs of TAY. In 2010, the Commission sent a letter to your Board with a copy of an independent report by the University of San Diego which gave Los Angeles County a grade of "F" for use of MHSA funds for TAY. The report was particularly critical of the small amount of funding for TAY compared to other groups. Despite meetings with representatives of DMH and a presentation to the Commission, it is very difficult to determine whether all of the CSS TAY funding and services under MHSA are being used to support the TAY plan and what additional services and programs are needed for TAY. A single outcome report which tracks the same elements of the original plan is not available, making oversight almost impossible. However, it appears from the DMH reports that the Full Service Partnerships (FSP) are successful in providing good outcomes and that the Emergency Drop in Centers are being used by TAY, but how the housing money is spent and the effectiveness of the Systems Navigators are not clear.

Prevention Workgroup (Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project)

On October 2002, the Commission submitted recommended actions from a Committee chaired by DCFS and the Commission to your Board. In response to those recommendations, your Board directed multiple County departments and community based organizations to develop a plan to prevent children from entering the foster care system.

On June 30, 2010 the Prevention Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP) will finish its second year. PIDP is funded primarily with IV-E Reinvestment funding is a joint project of DCFS, First 5 LA, and Community-Based Organizations. The lead agencies in each SPA and the smaller Community Based Organizations (CBOs) they recruited all focused on the recommendations of the first year evaluation by the Casey Family Program. The recommendations included: 1) Relationships and social networking for residents and DCFS caregivers; 2) Integrated services and supports for residents and DCFS caregivers; and 3) Economic well being strategies including Earned Income Tax Credit for residents and DCFS caregivers. In addition, the lead agencies were also asked to develop additional visitation centers working with local faith communities as partners. The PIDP is being evaluated by Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey, John Milner Professor of Child Welfare University of Southern California and Dr. Peter J. Pecora, Casey Family Programs University of Washington.

The evaluation of the first year was quite positive although anecdotal. The program recently was well received by residents, staff, and the community as a whole. The second year has just ended and the evaluation will be a data outcome driven evaluation due to be completed by November 2010. The conclusion of the first year evaluation reads, "Los Angeles has made tremendous strides in increasing access to family supports and decreasing the use of foster care by over 50%. During these challenging economic times, the PIDP networks, in collaboration with local DCFS offices, helped to maintain some of these gains. Given this foundation, the County of Los Angeles has an

opportunity to help solidify these networks and build on this progress to create one of the most innovative multi- faceted child abuse prevention systems in the country."

Transition Age Youth

In October 2009, the Commission became concerned about the elimination of the Emancipation Youth Services (EYS) program from the State Budget. The impact was a loss of \$1.4 million to Los Angeles County, primarily for emancipated youth for school related expenses such as tuition, books, and dorm fees. In addition to eliminating EYS, there were significant State cuts to funding for the THP Plus Program and the Chafee Fund for TAY. These funding reductions meant some youth were forced to drop out of school and some youth lost housing. While DCFS made every effort to find housing for those youth who were facing homelessness because of the States reductions, in some cases the youth had to be relocated a great distance from their schools or job location. DCFS redirected some funds to assist youth however because of the impact of the State's actions the Commission advocated that additional funds be redirected, which DCFS agreed to do.

In March, 2010, the CEO established a Committee in response to a Board Motion initiated by Supervisor Michael Antonovich. The motion required DCFS and Probation to create a fourth goal for youth, Self Sufficiency. Commissioners have participated in the Committee. The Board Motion includes many of the same Departments who participated in the 2009 efforts to develop an overarching TAY plan. Unlike the previous effort the Board Motion provides leadership from the Board and CEO increasing the opportunity for success. Commissioners also participated in the Youth Development Services (YDS) redesign Committee led by the CEO's office. The State cuts continue to present a fiscal challenge for TAY. It is still unclear whether the THP Plus Program and Chafee Funding will be cut further in 2010/11.

While DCFS has done a good job in initiating programs aimed at providing Reunification, Adoption and Permanency, there needs to be an increase focus in this area for TAY. The Commission supports use of the Title IV-E Waiver Reinvestment dollars for the expansion of the Permanency Units for older youth. The Commission has always advocated for successful emancipation for older youth, recent studies show, however, that a successful emancipation is tied to Permanency.

The Commission also continues to advocate for TAY as one of the priority populations for Prevention services. Without appropriate assistance in job training and resources for affordable housing, mental health services and education TAY will be starting the next generation of at-risk families without the necessary support they need.

COMMISSION AND CEO COLLABORATIONS

In the second quarter of 2009, DCEO Miguel Santana challenged the Commission to identify five key areas that the Commission and CEO could collaborate on. The Commission identified the following areas:

- Crossover Youth
- Transition Age Youth
- Prevention
- Relative Care
- Wellness

The TAY Committee was formed; however, before DCEO Santana could appoint CEO Co-Chairs for the other Committees, he announced his departure to the City of Los Angeles and the other Committees were never formed.

The TAY Committee was not able to get the fiscal information to complete their mission and the Committee disbanded.

CEO STRUCTURE

On August 4, 2008, the Commission sent recommendations regarding the CEO structure and child safety. The recommendations were developed by the Commission Ad Hoc Committee and from a report by Dr. David Sanders, Executive Vice President of Systems Improvements for Casey Family Programs which was presented to your Board. In its letter to the Board, the Commission highlighted the following sentence in the summary of Dr. Sanders report, "Assuming child safety remains on the Board of Supervisor's top priorities, the new Chief Executive Officer's structure falls short in providing a foundation for improving child safety."

While there have been efforts by individual DCEO's in the last two years to blend funds and integrate services as recommended in both reports, the current CEO structure still falls short on facilitating the integration of services that Dr. Sanders suggests for improving child safety. The Commission respectfully requests that the Board and CEO review the Commission's recommendations from the Commission's letter to the Board dated, August 4, 2008 and the report by Dr. Sanders to identify which recommendations could be implemented to provide integration of services and to improve outcomes and safety for children.

COMMISSION MEETINGS

Using a round table forum, the Commissioners discussed the IV-E Waiver (Waiver) Budget and Reinvestment Dollars with Patricia Ploehn, Director, DCFS, members of her staff, representatives of the Department of Probation, community stakeholders, and researchers.

The Waiver presentations were conducted by Susan Kerr and Lisa Parrish, DCFS, and Dave Mitchell, Probation. In addition, there was a presentation of the Georgetown Practice Model by Maryam Fatemi, DCFS and Sharon Harada, Probation. Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey participated in both presentations and also presented a concept paper, titled, *“Crossover Youth: Effective and Cost-Effective Approach: Based on experience and Research,”* co-authored by Dr. Sharon Watson and Dr. McCroskey. Dr. Denise Herz, CSULA, presented a document titled, *“AB 129 Multi-Disciplinary Team Pilot Program: A Summary of Evaluations and Next Steps.”* Bonnie Armstrong, Casey Family Programs, participated in both the Waiver and Georgetown Presentations.

The roundtable discussion followed with emphasis on how the IV-E Reinvestment savings could be spent to reduce the number of Crossover Youth moving from the Foster Care System to the Probation System, which could benefit youth and also create additional savings for Reinvestment.

Based on the discussions at these meetings the Commission for Children and Families respectfully submits the following recommendations to your Board:

A. Chief Executive Office (CEO)

- Develop a strategic plan for Transitional Age Youth (TAY) across Departments and Clusters which would include blending funds and integrating services.
- Develop joint MAPP Goals for Department Directors on issues related to goals shared across Departments and Clusters, with particular focus on youth development, education and employment for TAY population served by County Departments.
- Increase the number of jobs for youth in communities not served by the County’s Workforce Investment Board (WIB) through partnerships with the network of WIBs and other potential employers. Identify and contact private companies and request that they set aside jobs for youth exiting the foster care and Probation youth in the community.
- County planning and implementation should focus on prevention strategies. Prevention should also consist of services and funds from all County Agencies.
- Build collaborative working relationship between Departments and Community Partners.

B. PROBATION AND DCFS

- Develop a structured connection between the Elite Family Unit, the Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDT), and Community-Based Program that includes regular reporting on outcomes for participating youth.
- Elicit youth input and create Department policies based on their recommendations.
- Establish Permanency as a priority and make greater use of programs such as Family Finding and the Youth Permanency Units. Build on lessons learned from pilot projects to enhance success and measure outcomes for youth.

- Examine and/or research successful service deliver models nationwide.
- Establish a better rapport with the Court system.
- Engage in information and data sharing.
- Develop and provide aftercare services.
- Focus on education and other prevention-based programs.
- Provide simultaneous planning for youth instead of segmental planning in Probation and Foster Care.
- Identify and develop staff expertise to expand the number of DCFS and Probation Staff at all levels who are crossover experts. Based on initial identification of staff with this expertise, develop cross-departmental teams in several pilot regions to assist in resolving problems and developing better pathways for affected youth.
- Train social workers on youth development strategies, expertise on issues affecting crossover youth, and provide a financial incentive to retain experts in an organization.
- Reduce caseloads for social workers and probation officers to allow for improved treatment of youth.
- Increase stability in caseload management by reducing turnover of staff and changes in personnel.
- Utilize community based organization.
- Direct Probation to engage the community more. For example, working with faith-based organizations.
- Develop more mentoring programs and develop an adult “Connection” for youth exiting Probation or foster care.

C. Funding

- Implement outcomes/goal tracking and direct funds to successful program.
- Achieve savings by Multi-Department Projects where staff work together and share responsibility.
- Probation should reduce the administrative overhead in the IV-E funding to provide a savings which would result in additional Reinvestment funds.

CORRESPONDENCE SUBMITTED TO YOUR BOARD DURING FY 2009/10

- **August 4, 2008**
Re: COMMISSION REPORT IN RESPONSE TO DR. SANDERS' REPORT TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER REGARDING ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND CHILD SAFETY
- **September 14, 2009**
Re: PERMANENCY FOR FOSTER YOUTH IN LOS ANGELES COUNTY TASK FORCE MOTION
- **October 7, 2009**
Re: SECURING OF BIRTH CERTIFICATES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH SUPERVISED BY DCFS AND PROBATION
- **November 16, 2009**
Re: SUPPORT OF PROPOSED LOS ANGELES COUNTY CHILD WELLNESS POLICY
- **February 23, 2010**
Re: LOS ANGELES COUNTY PROBATION OMBUDSMAN PERSON
- **February 23, 2010**
Re: REPORT BY THE CHILDREN'S ADVOCACY INSTITUTE

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The Commission for Children and Families respectfully submits the following recommendations to your Board:

1. The Board to make funding for at-risk children and families a County priority.
2. CEO and the Board review the [Commission's August 4, 2008](#) report and [Dr. David Sander's report regarding the CEO Structure](#) and determine what changes could be made to integrate services and blend funding across clusters to improve child safety and provide better outcomes for children and families.
3. County Departments need to continue a focus on improving the healthy lifestyles of children.
4. DCFS continue to focus on working with DMH, DHS, and Public Health to identify problems and find solutions that will improve Emergency Response (ER) and prevent child fatalities.
5. DCFS, DMH, and Probation implement support services for relative care providers including additional kinship support centers, appropriate training for Children's Social Workers, Probations Officers, and Mental Health workers on the needs of relative care providers. In addition the Departments should develop a mechanism to respond to the various needs of relative caregivers.
6. The Chief Information Office (CIO), CEO, DCFS, DMS, DHS, Department of Public Health, and Probation develop an overarching County plan for an integrated approach to sharing data. In particular review CSW/CMS, MHUB, PHN Portal, EMPI, PCMS, and determine how the multiple systems could better interface to avoid duplicate entries on each system that increase staff costs. The current systems each have partial pieces of information but none are comprehensive.
7. The Board instruct the Children's Special Investigation Unit (CPIU) to investigate Probation fatality cases and report system issues and recommendations for change to the Board and Chief of Probation.
8. CEO, DCFS, and Probation identify a permanent source of funding for TAY who have emancipated to replace the stipend funds which were eliminated by the State in July 2009.