

**COMMISSION
FOR CHILDREN
AND FAMILIES**

**Annual
Report**

**Fiscal Year
2015-2016**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| Commission for Children and Families Commissioners by Supervisorial District | 1 |
| Commission for Children and Families Background Information | 2 |
| Key Issues Impacting At-Risk Children and Families | 3 |
| Commission for Children and Families Strategic Partnerships | 6 |
| Commission for Children and Families Strategic Priorities | 9 |
| Commission for Children and Families Activities | 10 |
| Priority Area: Placement Resources | 10 |
| Priority Area: Special Populations with High Level Needs | 13 |
| Priority Area: Prevention of Maltreatment | 17 |
| Priority Area: Legislative Advocacy | 20 |
| Commission for Children and Families Meetings | 22 |
| Commission for Children and Families Committee and Workgroup Appointments | 23 |
| Commission for Children and Families Representation on County Bodies | 23 |
| Appendix A: Fiscal Year 2016 – 17 Recommendations | 24 |
| Appendix B: Chronicle of Social Change Article | 26 |

**COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
COMMISSIONERS BY SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
JULY 2015 – JUNE 2016**

**FIRST SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS**

John Kim
Maria Brenes
Wendy Garen

**SECOND SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
SUPERVISOR MARK RIDLEY-THOMAS**

Adrienne Konigar-Macklin
(Served until November 2015)
Candace Cooper
Sydney Kamlager

**THIRD SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
SUPERVISOR SHEILA KUEHL**

Carol O. Biondi
Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey
Dr. Wendy B. Smith

**FOURTH SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
SUPERVISOR DON KNABE**

Ann E. Franzen
(Served until December 2015)
Janet Teague
Dr. Sunny Kang

**FIFTH SUPERVISORIAL DISTRICT
SUPERVISOR MICHAEL D. ANTONOVICH**

Liz Seipel
Genevra Berger
Patricia Curry

COMMISSION OFFICERS

Dr. Sunny Kang, Chair
Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey, Vice Chair
Dr. Wendy B. Smith, Vice Chair

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Tamara N. Hunter, MSW

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Created by the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors (Board) on May 8, 1984, the Commission for Children and Families (Commission) is charged by its ordinance to:

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

The Commission has served as a staunch advocate for vulnerable children, youth and families for over 30 years. In doing so, the Commission has been committed to strengthening and supporting a system of integrated service delivery, inclusive of both public and private partners, to provide a comprehensive continuum of care for children and their families in Los Angeles County.

KEY ISSUES IMPACTING AT-RISK CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Continuum of Care Reform

The year 2015 marked the onset of a new wave of child welfare reform with the signing of Assembly Bill 403, *Continuum of Care Reform* (CCR), into State law. CCR is an effort to comprehensively reform California's foster care system by bringing together a host of new and existing systemic reforms intended to support children, youth and families across placement types. CCR is rooted in the fundamental belief that all children deserve to grow up in families and develop a sense of community; a child's first placement should be the best placement to meet their needs; and children and their caregivers should receive the services and supports they need regardless of placement type. Further, CCR is shaped by the knowledge that extended and unnecessary stays in congregate care yield negative consequences for children.

The Commission has worked to familiarize itself with the provisions of CCR in order to offer suggestions and guidance to DCFS and partner agencies regarding the changes required by implementation and their potential impact. Commissioners have also been working with Southern California Grantmakers' Child Welfare Funders group, the Center for Strategic Public Private Partnerships within the Office of Child Protection and the LA Partnership for Early Childhood Investment, to leverage the potential for philanthropic support for CCR-related challenges and opportunities. The Commission also participates in the Los Angeles County CCR Steering Committee, led by Alliance for Children's Rights, Children's Law Center and Public Counsel.

Key Elements of Reform

CCR will impact every aspect of California's foster care system. Reform elements will be implemented on a staggered timeline, with some components going into effect on January 1, 2017. While implementation begins in January, the California Department of Social Services recognizes the complexity of needed changes so counties and their private sector partners will have two years to complete full implementation.

Major components of CCR include: implementation of a standardized approval process for relative, county and foster family agency (FFA) approved resource families; increased reliance on home-based family care; time limited utilization of congregate care; elimination of “group homes” and establishment of Short Term Residential Therapeutic Programs (STRTP); statewide implementation of the Core Practice Model; standardized foster care rates for all children and youth; and, new requirements that FFAs and STRTPs provide trauma informed core supportive services to children and youth.

Challenges and Opportunity

Implementation of CCR has the potential to serve as a tipping point for Los Angeles County by possibly further reducing the already insufficient number of home-based placement resources while at the same time, creating a need for an increased number of such homes. By all accounts, it is expected that with implementation of CCR, some existing group homes and FFAs, will be unable to meet the new requirements and will close; thereby, exacerbating the County’s already critical shortage of placement resources. Further, CCR’s primary goal of reducing the use of congregate care will require children and youth to “step down” from existing STRTPs to an already inadequate pool of home-based resource families. The Commission has serious concerns about this shifting balance of need and available resources. An additional concern is that, in the absence of significant support to relative caregivers, those numbers could also shrink under the new requirements of RFA.

Despite these challenges, CCR also presents a tremendous opportunity for Los Angeles County to design and implement a truly child-and-family centered foster care system, in which all children and all caregivers receive the support they need. To achieve these ends, Los Angeles County must commit to dedicating the resources necessary to employ robust, evidence-informed recruitment, retention, and support strategies that serve the best interests of vulnerable children and their families. Enhanced partnerships with STRTPs, FFAs, community and faith based organizations, and other County departments will be necessary to support the work, and philanthropic partners will be needed to seed, jump start and help assess accomplishments. The Commission commits

to its ongoing work in priority areas strategically identified to support CCR implementation.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS

The Commission maintains a critical and distinct role in Los Angeles County. As advisors to the Board, and advocates for the most vulnerable children and families, the Commission often serves as a bridge between the County and its pivotal partners, including the courts, philanthropy, the non-profit sector, and the community. The Commission's experience, expertise and steadfast commitment to at-risk children and families has contributed to the forging of strong partnerships with some of the most important entities shaping public policy in Los Angeles County.

Office of Child Protection

During this period of review, Los Angeles County's newly established Office of Child Protection (OCP) welcomed its permanent director, and has continued to chart its course as a leader in the development of improved systems of communication, collaboration and accountability across County departments that impact at-risk children and families. The vast and complex scope of this charge has led to the establishment of an effective partnership between the OCP and the Commission. With its history of hands-on experience, institutional knowledge, and firmly rooted partnerships, the Commission has effectively worked in tandem with OCP on a number of initiatives detailed in this report.

First 5 LA Board of Commissioners

The Commission holds a seat on the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners. The First 5 LA Commission, led by the chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, is comprised of Board appointed leaders in education, mental health, public health, and child welfare. Having invested more than \$1.2 billion¹ in efforts aimed at improving outcomes for children from prenatal to age five (5) and their families, First 5 LA is

¹ Information obtained from First5LA.org

dedicated to systems change and serves as one of the County's most pivotal partners. The Commission's collaborative work with First 5 LA involving child maltreatment prevention and services for expectant and parenting systems involved youth is detailed in this report.

Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development

The Commission holds a seat on the Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development (Roundtable). The Roundtable, comprised of Board appointed leaders, representatives of key early care and education (ECE) organizations and County departments, builds and strengthens ECE systems, services and supports by providing recommendations to the Board of Supervisors on policy, systems, and infrastructure improvement. The Commission's work as part of the Roundtable includes efforts to bridge the gap between the child welfare and ECE sectors, and is discussed in this report.

Education Coordinating Council

The Commission holds a seat on the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council (ECC). The ECC brings together key leaders, decision makers and stakeholders from diverse sectors to develop and implement strategies and initiatives designed to close the tremendous achievement gap among children and youth involved with the public child welfare and delinquency systems. The Commission's collaborative work as part of the ECC intersects with other initiatives detailed in this report.

Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team

The Commission is represented on the Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team (SLT). As a component of the 2004 Mental Health Services Act (MHSA), the SLT was established to serve as a quick-response advisory and monitoring body on issues concerning the MHSA plan and the County's broader public mental health system. As part of the SLT, the Commission advocates for comprehensive service provision and

equitable distribution of resources to systems-involved children and youth with mental health needs.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Recognizing the challenges and opportunities associated with CCR, and the importance of a proactive partnership with OCP, the Commission focused its efforts during FY 2015-16 in four priority areas: placement resources, special populations with high level needs, prevention of maltreatment, and legislative advocacy.

- Placement Resources - Improving the County's capacity to recruit, retain, and support placement resources is critical to ensuring a high quality foster care system appropriate to meet the needs of all children in care.
- Special Populations with High Level Needs - Enhancing services and support for special populations of children and youth with high level needs who require intensive and specialized services is vital to improving outcomes for these vulnerable groups. These children and youth often present with significant mental health and/or behavioral problems; are involved with the juvenile justice system; are transitioning from systems of care to self-sufficiency; or have children of their own.
- Prevention of Maltreatment - Developing a comprehensive and integrated community-based prevention system is a requisite for ensuring child health, safety and well-being. A strengthened multi-dimensional countywide safety net will also help to reduce burdens to public systems.
- Legislative Advocacy - The Commission has a responsibility to stay abreast of legislation that impacts at-risk children and families, to advise the Board, and work to inform public policy to effect improved outcomes for vulnerable children and families.

Each of these areas includes issues that are complex and multi-faceted; sustainable solutions require leveraging resources to support the implementation of effective strategies, informed by the multi-disciplinary and cross-sector collaborative work to which the Commission is committed.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES ACTIVITIES

Priority Area: Placement Resources

Improving Los Angeles County's foster care system has long been a priority of the Commission. CCR underscores the sense of urgency highlighted in the Commission's 2015 [Ad Hoc Committee Welcome Centers Final Report](#), which included among its recommendations closure of the Welcome Centers as temporary placements facilities, multi-disciplinary teaming, approaches to supporting children as they undergo difficult transitions and specific strategies to improve recruitment, retention and support of resource families.

During this period of review, Commission representatives continued to meet with DCFS and other stakeholders regarding implementation of report recommendations and strategies designed to ameliorate the County's placement resources crisis, particularly with regard to infants, young children and those with severe mental health or behavioral problems. Meetings have focused on addressing barriers to recruitment and retention of foster parents, such as family visitation and childcare. Commissioners have also discussed with DCFS ideas for changes in the operations and structure of the Resource Family Recruitment section; approaches to working with FFAs and strategies for increasing the effectiveness, function, and user friendly aspects of the County recruitment website.

Transitional Shelter Care (TSC)

Following closure of the Children's Welcome Center and the Youth Welcome Center in March 2016, the director of the OCP convened a multi-agency, multi-disciplinary workgroup, including Commission representatives, to focus on transitional and emergency shelter care facilities and processes, with particular attention to the youth with high needs who cycle in and out of shelters and placements. The workgroup has developed a pilot project focused on difficult-to-place youth with serious mental health needs, including substance abuse problems. Rapid, intensive multidisciplinary services are provided to the youth in the pilot project utilizing the DCFS Accelerated Placement

Team, the Department of Mental Health (DMH), regional centers, and the Department of Public Health (DPH). The intent is to develop scalable protocols and best practices for moving youth into permanency by helping both youth and caregiver prepare for placement, and supporting them during the early critical weeks. The TSC workgroup meets frequently to support and analyze the work in process, leading to a learning-focused rollout based on the lessons from the pilot project. Deployment of a multi-disciplinary team very early in the placement process (soon after entry into the shelter) was a key recommendation of the 2015 Commission report, which served as a catalyst for current efforts to reform the County's shelter care system. **See Appendix B: Chronicle of Social Change Article.**

Commission representatives have visited one of the TSC sites and plan to visit others. They have engaged with emergency shelter care providers to learn about their experience, resources and needs, and contribute to information sharing to improve services to children in care.

Relative Caregivers

Children achieve better outcomes when placed in the care of relatives, and with more than 50% of the County's children in care placed with kin, relative caregivers are the backbone of Los Angeles County's out-of-home care system. In recognition of these facts, the Commission's Welcome Centers Final Report also provided recommendations for increased and improved family finding efforts, including allocating dedicated resources for early family finding activities and use of effective family finding technology.

During this period of review, the Commission established a Relative Caregiver Committee to guide its work on supporting relatives and the children in their care.

In May 2016, the Commission dedicated two consecutive meetings to learning more about issues impacting relative caregivers. Community-based "kinship organizations", Community Coalition, Grandparents as Parents (GAP) and Raising Our Children's Kids (ROCK) discussed a range of issues, including significant concerns regarding how CCR's Resource Family Approval (RFA) program will impact relative caregivers. Additional

Relative Caregiver Committee activities have included a follow-up meeting with DCFS' ASFA and Kinship Care Division Chief to understand DCFS' priorities and how to best strengthen the partnership in this area.

Specialized Care Increment - "D-Rate" Program

During this review period, the Commission convened stakeholders to begin the process of updating and enhancing the County's training curriculum for the Specialized Care Increment (SCI) "D-Rate" program, which had not received a thorough review or revision in many years. The SCI "D-Rate" is a higher foster care rate paid to resource families for the care of children and youth with significant behavioral and mental health needs. Given the CCR goal of reduced use of congregate care, children and youth with very high needs will need to step down to home-based care, presumably with resource families receiving the SCI "D-Rate". The Commission took action to help ensure that caregivers receive appropriate training informed by recent advances in understanding of brain development, trauma informed care, and widely recognized best practices. The Commission's partners in this work include the California Community Colleges Foster and Kinship Care Education Program, DCFS, Probation, DMH, and kinship caregiver advocates.

Core Practice Model

The State of California's Departments of Health Care Services and Social Services have mandated use of the Core Practice Model (CPM), an approach to more effective service to children and families in the child welfare and mental health systems. Implementation in Los Angeles County has been underway since 2014, but the CPM implementation is receiving a more focused effort currently. The Commission seeks to understand the barriers to a more rapid and systematic implementation process, and, with the support of the DCFS administration, has attended meetings of the CPM Implementation Team as an informed observer who might be able to offer suggestions or ideas.

The Commission's prioritization of efforts to improve and strengthen the County's foster care system will continue through FY 2016 – 17, and the Commission will provide the Board with updates as needed.

Recommendation:

1. The Board should direct relevant County departments to report on the implementation of evidence informed resource family recruitment, retention and support strategies. Strategies should include targeted recruitment to meet the needs of children between the ages of birth to five (5), and children and youth with high level mental health and behavioral needs.

Priority Area: Special Populations with High Level Needs

Juvenile Justice

LA Model - Camp Vernon Kilpatrick Replacement Project

During this period of review, the Commission continued to work closely with philanthropic partners and consultants from the National Council on Crime and Delinquency (NCDD) and Casey Family Programs, as part of the "Team of 12" leading the implementation of the LA Model of juvenile justice. The LA Model is rooted in establishment of a supportive and collaborative learning environment for youth and staff alike. A partnership of key stakeholders, including two Commissioners, has played a significant role in developing the LA Model and advising on construction of the new facility, which has been designed as an environment in which a culture of healing is forged, focusing on positive community reintegration through safe and open partnerships with staff, families and communities. The new five-dormitory campus located at the former site of Camp Kilpatrick is scheduled to open in spring of 2017.

Commission representatives co-chaired, two LA Model subcommittees, along with senior Probation staff. The Research, Evaluation, Data, and Quality Assurance Subcommittee, which focused on development of a core set of key indicators and processes to be used to guide quality improvement and track progress in implementing the LA Model, transitioned its leadership to the NCDD in spring of 2016. The

Commission's representative continues to participate in regular progress briefings. The Staff/Training/Recruitment Reentry Sub-Committee, focused on developing comprehensive recommendations for staff recruitment and a framework for ongoing training, support and professional development, continues to meet regularly.

Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study Interagency Workgroup

On September 15, 2015, the Board approved a motion directing the establishment of the Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study Interagency Workgroup, and inclusion of representatives from the Commission. This interagency workgroup, led by Dr. Denise Herz, has focused on supporting the County's ongoing work to improve its approach to rehabilitation and treatment of youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

The Commission's representatives serve on an Interagency workgroup ad hoc task force that is working to design a referral system for youth needing additional services from other County departments and community based service programs.

Transitional Age Youth (TAY)

Independent Living Program (ILP) Budget and Resources Workgroup

During FY 2015-16 the Commission continued its leadership of the ILP Budget and Resources Workgroup, which provides oversight of the ILP budget and works to increase awareness and coordination of resources for TAY. The ILP Budget and Resource Workgroup, co-chaired by DCFS, Probation and the Commission, is a strong alliance of key stakeholders and TAY advocates including First Place for Youth, Alliance for Children's Rights, California Youth Connection, United Friends of the Children, All Saints Foster Care Project, and Public Counsel.

Countywide TAY Self-Sufficiency Plan

On June 28, 2016, the Board approved a motion directing the OCP to lead the effort to update the County's interagency plan and goals for youth self-sufficiency. The Commission was invited to participate in the development of the updated self-sufficiency plan in light of its experience in convening multi-departmental, cross sector collaborative teams to address unique issues impacting TAY.

Notably, the Commission advocated for inclusion of the Recreation Employment and Achieving Career Happiness (REAACH) Program in the TAY Self-Sufficiency plan, and by extension countywide expansion of the program. The REAACH Program was initiated by the Department of Parks and Recreation and is currently operational only in the Fifth Supervisorial District. The program offers foster and Probation youth paid career readiness training, work experience, and a pathway to permanent employment with the Department of Parks and Recreation.

The Commission has been able to use its work with TAY service providers and advocates to help inform the TAY Self-Sufficiency Plan with meaningful insight into the issues facing TAY, including inadequate career readiness, insufficient knowledge of and access to TAY specific services available in the community, and the increasing number of expectant and parenting TAY, who have the additional and often overwhelming responsibility of caring for a child.

Expectant and Parenting Foster Youth

Expectant and parenting foster youth and their children constitute an extremely vulnerable population. During FY 2015-16 the Commission continued to advocate for enhanced services and support, including work with philanthropic partners interested in the well-being of these youth. The Commission worked to strengthen collaboration between First 5 LA and DCFS to increase foster youth participation in Welcome Baby, First 5 LA's intensive home-based perinatal support program. The Commission continued to work in support of the County's home visitation program, Nurse Family Partnership, as well as other expectant and parenting youth targeted initiatives led by various community and philanthropic partners.

Mental Health

Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team

Many children and youth in the special populations category have the need for comprehensive mental health treatment. Inadequate mental health care is often an impediment to placement stability, educational achievement, and overall health,

safety and well-being. The Commission's representation on the MHSA SLT affords the opportunity for strong advocacy for the adequate allocation of resources to systems involved youth. The Commission looks forward to continuing this advocacy through participation in the development of the MHSA 2017-2020 Three Year Program and Expenditure Plan in early FY 2016-17.

Psychotropic Medication

The new director of the OCP reconvened the Psychotropic Medication Workgroup (originally developed in response to Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection recommendations) during the final quarter of FY 2015-16. The expertise of the Commission's representative was cited as the workgroup began anew the discussion of how psychotropic medications are administered to children in the care of the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

The group's focus includes issues such as credentials of prescribing physicians, quality of assessments preceding prescribing of psychotropic medication, engagement of children, youth and caregivers in the process, and policies and protocols governing the use of psychotropic medication at the state, local and departmental levels. The overarching goal of this work is to ensure that children in the care of Los Angeles County are prescribed psychotropic medications only when determined to be necessary in the context of proper assessment by highly qualified providers and in combination with psychosocial interventions, and that regular and appropriate monitoring of effects and effectiveness of such medications is ongoing.

The Commission's efforts to enhance services and support for special populations of children and youth with significant and specialized needs will continue through FY 2016 – 17, and the Commission will provide the Board with updates as needed.

Recommendations:

2. The Board should direct DMH to allocate MHSA funding to housing and support services for youth transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency.
3. The Board should schedule a report from DCFS, Probation, DHS, Department of Public Social Services, DPH, and DMH on the feasibility and development of joint protocols governing the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, counseling and supports to TAY. The protocol should include provisions for ensuring that all staff from the above departments providing direct services to TAY, including Children's Social Workers, Deputy Probation Officers and Youth Development Services Transition Coordinators, receive joint training on sexual and reproductive health, as well as specific services and supports available to expectant and parenting youth.
4. The Board should prioritize prevention and early intervention services for expectant and parenting systems involved youth, as detailed in the 2013 report [California's Most Vulnerable Parents: When Maltreated Children Have Children](#), and direct relevant County departments to report to the Board a plan to ensure that expectant and parenting systems involved youth are referred to a comprehensive home visitation program, such as Nurse Family Partnership or Welcome Baby, which include a supportive services component.

Priority Area: Prevention of Maltreatment

Countywide Prevention Initiative

During FY 2015-16, the Commission continued to serve as champion for comprehensive, community based and family centered child abuse and neglect prevention services in Los Angeles County. Commission representatives have worked closely with the OCP in leading the development of a strategic plan for a countywide Child Maltreatment Prevention Initiative. Three Commissioners participated in the Prevention Workgroup chaired by the OCP's Director, and have met with key partners, including County departments, First 5 LA and DCFS's Prevention and Aftercare Services community based

contractors, to assure that the plan builds on the successful efforts underway throughout the county.

First 5 LA Board of Commissioners

Through its representation on the First 5 LA Board of Commissioners, the Commission continues to advocate for improved service integration and leveraging of existing resources between the agency and various County departments responsible for child safety and well-being. As noted in other sections, the Commission's representative worked to support DCFS's utilization of First 5 LA led initiatives such as Welcome Baby and Parent Child Interactive Therapy.

During this period of review, the Commission's representation on the First 5 LA Commission allowed for greater leveraging of resources and support of First 5 LA's role as a lead in the Child Maltreatment Prevention Initiative.

Young Children

Children between the ages of birth to four (4) comprise 33% of all children placed in the County's foster care system. One (1) in five (5) are infants under age one (1)². These numbers continue to increase each year; meaningful efforts to prevent maltreatment must include substantial focus on addressing the unique needs of young children and their caregivers.

Through its representative, the Commission worked closely with the Third Supervisorial District to support development of the Emergency Child Care Bridge Proposal, as the lack of access to child care is a top barrier to recruitment, retention and support of resource families. Further, high-quality early care has been shown to stabilize young children impacted by the trauma and disrupted attachment associated with child abuse, neglect and placement in foster care. The child care bridge model includes

² Data provided by DCFS' Young Children in Care Workgroup (2016)

training on trauma informed care for child care service providers and child care navigation services to guide resource families and assure that families meet the eligibility criteria required by different funding streams that support subsidized child care.

Commission representatives have also partnered with the Child Care Resource Center, DCFS, First 5 LA, and philanthropic partners to develop and implement a pilot project testing the child care bridge model. This project includes an evaluation component designed to inform best practices and policy decisions concerning these critically needed services.

The Commission's representation on the Los Angeles County Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development enabled the promotion of discussion and relationship building between the child welfare and early education sectors in Los Angeles County. This Commissioner's role as a researcher has also informed data and research support available to the effort.

The Commission has also worked with DCFS's Young Children in Care (YCIC) committee to build understanding of the special needs of very young children, develop specialized training for CSWs, and learn from the efforts of YCIC teams in pilot regional offices.

Education

During FY 2015-16, the Commission worked to improve educational outcomes for systems involved youth as part of the Education Coordinating Council (ECC). Under the leadership of a new executive director, ECC activities during this review period centered around development of its 2016 – 2021 strategic plan. The ECC strategic plan includes goals and objectives in the priority areas of: enrollment in early childhood education; achievement for school-aged youth; job/college access for transition-aged youth (TAY); electronic information sharing; and research and evaluation. A Commission recommendation regarding the critical need for improved data and information sharing between DCFS and the early care and education sector was included in the strategic plan, which was adopted on July 27, 2016.

The Commission's work to improve systems, services and supports in effort to prevent child maltreatment will continue through FY 2016 – 17. The Commission will provide the Board with updates as needed.

Recommendations:

5. The Board should direct DMH to allocate MHPA Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) funding to support implementation of the Countywide Prevention Initiative.

6. The Board should direct relevant departments, and partner agencies such as First 5 LA, to report on factors contributing to increasing rates of children ages birth to five (5) entering foster care and identify targeted prevention interventions. The report should include a plan to prioritize and fund trauma informed initiatives, increase access to early care and education, and enhance partnerships with community and faith-based organizations that provide support for young children and their families.

Priority Area: Legislative Advocacy

During this period of review, the Commission re-established a Legislative Committee to guide its efforts in legislative advocacy. Initial activities included a series of meetings with the CEO's Intergovernmental and External Affairs (IGEA) section to understand the County's legislative processes, better understand existing efforts, and discuss how the Commission could add value in this area.

During its first year, the Legislative Committee led the Commission in support of three key pieces of legislation, the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program, Senate Bill (SB) 1143, Room Confinement in Juvenile Facilities and SB 2442, Density Bonus for At-Risk Populations.

On March 9, 2016, [letters](#) in support of Budget Committee recommendations on the Emergency Child Care Bridge Program were submitted to Senate and Assembly Budget and Fiscal Committees, the Los Angeles County Delegation and California Legislative Women's Caucus.

On April 20, 2016, the Commission submitted a [letter](#) to the Board recommending support of SB 1143, *Room Confinement in Juvenile Facilities*. With passage, this legislation will set nationally recognized best standards into law regarding limited use of room confinement in juvenile facilities. On April 26, 2015, the Board took immediate action and unanimously passed a motion to end the use of juvenile solitary confinement in Los Angeles County.

On June 24, 2016, the Legislative Committee submitted a [letter](#) in support of AB 2442, Density Bonus for At-Risk Populations, to the Senate Committee on Transportation and Housing. AB 2442, signed by the Governor on September 28, 2016, will incentivize developers to allocate low income housing for vulnerable groups, including transitional age foster youth and the formerly homeless.

The Legislative Committee also reached out to and met with key community partners active in the policy arena to explore continuing partnerships that support joint action on issues of particular concern in Los Angeles County. These discussions with First 5 LA, the California Child Advocates for Change and other stakeholders were designed to inform development of a set of guidelines and procedures for the ongoing work of the Legislative Committee. These guidelines will be brought to the Commission for discussion and adoption in the fall of FY 2016-17.

The Commission's legislative advocacy on behalf of at-risk children and families will continue through FY 2016 – 17, and the Commission will provide the Board with updates as needed.

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES MEETINGS

Commission meetings are the primary vehicle through which information regarding issues, programs and services impacting children and families is exchanged.

Commission meetings serve as an important venue in which Commissioners, partners and stakeholders are informed about child welfare related issues in Los Angeles County. Another important function of Commission meetings is to support communication of community and public concerns regarding services affecting children and families.

During this period of review, the Commission experienced an influx of systems involved parents and relative caregivers taking advantage of the opportunity to bring concerns to the attention of the Commission, and in many cases to the DCFS Director, during the public comments segment of Commission meetings. Holding sacred its responsibility as advocates for vulnerable children and families, the Commission welcomed this interaction and took appropriate action to address grievances brought to its attention.

During FY 2015-16, the Commission held 17 regular meetings in which reports and presentations from County departments, advocates and stakeholders on child welfare related issues, services and programs were provided.

Fiscal Year 2015-16 meeting topics included:

- AB 403, Continuum of Care Reform
- Addressing the Educational Needs of Foster, Probation and Homeless Youth
- Advocacy and Support for Relative Caregivers
- Cross Over Youth and the 241.1 Process
- DCFS and Probation Youth Development Services Division
- DCFS Efforts to Recruit, Retrain and Support Placement Resources
- DCFS Training Program
- LA County Prevention and Aftercare Needs and Services
- Legislation Impacting At-Risk Children, Youth & Families
- MHSA Funded Services for Children and TAY
- Opportunity Youth Collaborative
- Psychotropic Medication for Children in the Foster Care and Probation Systems
- Resource Family Approval Program
- Youth on the Move Program

**COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES COMMITTEE
& WORKGROUP APPOINTMENTS FISCAL YEAR 2015-16**

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Legislative Committee | Wendy Garen, <i>Co-Chair</i> Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey, <i>Co-Chair</i> Candace Cooper |
| Relative Caregiver Committee | Genevra Berger, <i>Chair</i> Janet Teague Dr. Sunny Kang |
| Special Populations Committee | Carol O. Biondi, <i>Co-Chair</i> Dr. Wendy B. Smith, <i>Co-Chair</i> Liz Seipel Maria Brenes |

COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES REPRESENTATION ON COUNTY BODIES FISCAL YEAR 2015-16

| | |
|--|---|
| Education Coordinating Council | Maria Brenes |
| First 5 LA Commission | Patricia Curry |
| Juvenile Probation Outcomes Study Interagency Workgroup | Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey Carol O. Biondi |
| LA Model Research, Evaluation, Data, and Quality Assurance Committee | Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey |
| LA Model Staff, Training, Recruitment, & Reentry Subcommittee (STRR) | Carol O. Biondi |
| LA County CCR Steering Committee | Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey Patricia Curry |
| Mental Health Services Act (MHSA) System Leadership Team (SLT) | Liz Seipel |
| Office of Child Protection Prevention Workgroup | Patricia Curry John Kim Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey |
| Office of Child Protection Psychotropic Medication Workgroup | Dr. Wendy B. Smith |
| Office of Child Protection Transitional Shelter Care Workgroup | Patricia Curry Dr. Wendy B. Smith |
| Policy RoundTable for Child Care and Development | Dr. Jacquelyn McCroskey |

APPENDIX A: LIST OF FISCAL YEAR 2016 – 2017 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission respectfully recommends that the Board:

1. Direct relevant County departments to report on the implementation of evidence informed resource family recruitment, retention and support strategies. Strategies should include targeted recruitment to meet the needs of children between the ages of birth to five (5), and children and youth with high level mental health and behavioral needs.
2. Direct DMH to allocate MHSA funding to housing and support services for youth transitioning from foster care to self-sufficiency.
3. Schedule a report from DCFS, Probation, DHS, Department of Public Social Services, DPH, and DMH on the feasibility and development of joint protocols governing the provision of sexual and reproductive health services, counseling and supports to TAY. The protocol should include provisions for ensuring that all staff from the above departments providing direct services to TAY, including Children's Social Workers, Deputy Probation Officers and Youth Development Services Transition Coordinators, receive joint training on sexual and reproductive health, as well as specific services and supports available to expectant and parenting youth.
4. Prioritize prevention and early intervention services for expectant and parenting systems involved youth, as detailed in the 2013 report California's Most Vulnerable Parents: When Maltreated Children Have Children, and direct relevant County departments to report to the Board a plan to ensure that expectant and parenting systems involved youth are referred to a comprehensive home visitation program, such as Nurse Family Partnership or Welcome Baby, which include a supportive services component.
5. Direct DMH to allocate MHSA Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) funding to support implementation of the Countywide Prevention Initiative.

6. Direct relevant departments, and partner agencies such as First 5 LA, to report on factors contributing to increasing rates of children ages birth to five (5) entering foster care and identify targeted prevention interventions, The report should include a plan to prioritize and fund trauma informed initiatives, increase access to early care and education, and enhance partnerships with community and faith-based organizations that provide support for young children and their families.

In Wake of Shelter Shakeup, Pilot Program Helps Older Foster Youth Find Stability

chronicleofsocialchange.org/news-2/wake-shelter-shakeup-pilot-program-helps-older-foster-youth-find-stability/22128

By Christie Renick

10/17/2016

A fledgling pilot program aimed at helping older youth in foster care find and remain in stable homes is showing promise, according to the Los Angeles County Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS).

In a presentation to the Commission for Children and Families today in downtown Los Angeles, Michael Ross, an administrator for transitional shelter care at DCFS, explained how the pilot's case coordinators work closely with the Department of Mental Health to deliver services to older foster youth who experience frequent placement changes because of mental health or behavioral issues.

The pilot program was created under the direction of the Office of Child Protection and its leader, Michael Nash, and was informed by [recommendations](#) from Commission for Children and Families released in September of 2015.

Four transitional shelter care agencies began taking children and youth after they are first detained by the county when two "welcome centers" were shuttered earlier this year.

Back in February, [Nash questioned](#) how effective these new shelters would be.

"Are they equipped to give these kids any services and counseling in the interim? What kind of process are they setting up to get them out in a reasonable amount of time, and in a meaningful way?" he asked.

The pilot project may be the county's answer to that question. Case coordinators stay with a youth for six months to year, Ross said, and they use some of that time to study what issues can trigger a youth and what interventions are most helpful – information that can be vital to a caregiver.

If a caregiver calls, wanting a teenager to be removed from their care or just needing help managing a situation, case coordinators are highly "responsive, available by phone immediately or on site within 24 hours to try to save that placement," Ross said.

So far the pilot program has served 15 teens in foster care, some of whom have been victims of sex trafficking. The team is in the process of adding three more youth to its roster.

Transitional shelter care facilities are intended to provide 72 hours of care for children and youth, and prior to the launch of the pilot program in May, Ross said, the 15 participating youth were spending a combined 7,193 hours in transitional shelter care. But now that number is down to 2,014, with the majority of those hours attributed to two youth in particular.

One of the program's strengths is its ability to be both flexible and reflective.

For example, Ross and the rest of the pilot team did not expect caregivers to just call in one day and say, "come get this kid," without a case coordinator being alerted that something was wrong along the way. But sometimes they do, he said, so now the teams proactively reach out to caregivers on a daily basis to see how the youth is doing, which allows them to intervene early, before the caregiver is ready to throw up their hands.

Peyanka Armstrong, a social worker on DCFS' accelerated placement team, shared a story about a 17-year-old in the program. The youth, whose name was not revealed, has been in foster care since 2011 and has been placed in every group home or foster home that was eligible to take her, including a relative and a family friend. She has been hospitalized 10 times, and now resides at one of the transitional shelter care facilities.