

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES



ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008

INTRODUCTION

The Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families was established by County Ordinance with a mandate to report yearly on the progress made by the County Departments in improving the lives of children and families under their care. The Board of Supervisors appoints its members. While the ordinance includes a wide scope, during this fiscal year, the Commission has devoted most of its efforts to improving the well-being of children, youth and their families involved

in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and mental health systems. This report discusses the major endeavors of the Commission to increase stakeholder input to the decision making process for the Commission, and the implementation of the Commission's Blueprint Committee recommendations to more effectively carry-out its mandate, and increase our collaborative efforts with Child and Family Services, Probation, Mental Health, and Public Health.

COUNTY ORDINANCE FOR COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

The Board of Supervisors created the Los Angeles County Commission for Children and Families in 1984. The Commission's duties are as follows:

1. Review all programs administered by County departments, which provide children's services for all children at risk.
2. Receive input from appropriate community groups and individuals concerning County-administered children services programs.
3. Review and make recommendations to the Board concerning legislation dealing with children's services.
4. Make recommendations as necessary to the Board on action to be taken to improve children's services.
5. Provide an Annual Report to the Board of Supervisors.

COMMISSIONERS SERVING FROM JULY 2007 – JUNE 2008

Supervisor Gloria Molina

First District

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

Supervisor Yvonne B. Burke

Second District

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

Supervisor Zev Yaroslovsky

Third District

Carol O. Biondi
Susan Friedman
Helen A. Kleinberg

Supervisor Don Knabe

Fourth District

Ann Franzen
Tina Pedersen, LCSW
Sandra Rudnick

Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich

Fifth District

Patricia Curry
Stacey Savelle
Trula Worthy-Clayton

Commission Staff

Kimberly A. Foster, MSW
Executive Director

Cynthia Ocampo
Commission Secretary

Leora Katz
Student Professional Worker

Commission Officers

Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW, Chair
Ann Franzen, Vice Chair
Stacey Savelle, Vice Chair
Trula Worthy-Clayton, Vice Chair

Commission Committees

Child Fatality Committee	Susan Friedman, Chair Carol Biondi Helen Kleinberg Stacey Savelle Trula Worthy-Clayton
Childhood Obesity Committee	Tina Pedersen, LCSW, Chair Ann Franzen Helen Kleinberg Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW Trula Worthy-Clayton
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 Williams, Ed.D., Chair Rev. Cecil L. Murray Trula Worthy-Clayton

Commission Committees

Ad-Hoc Committee on Reviewing the New County Structure	Patricia Curry, Chair Carol Biondi Helen Kleinberg Sandra Rudnick
Blueprint Ad-Hoc Committee	Stacey Savelle, Chair Helen Kleinberg Trula Worthy-Clayton

Commission Representatives on County Bodies

Agency Court Cooperation Committee	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Children's Planning Council	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Education Coordinating Council	Adelina Sorkin, LCSW/ACSW
Family Reunification Workgroup	Helen Kleinberg
First 5 LA	Harriette F. Williams, Ed.D.
Juvenile Court Delinquency Representation Committee	Carol Biondi
Juvenile Court Psychotropic Medication Authorization Committee	Sandra Rudnick
Juvenile Court Weight Management Committee	Tina Pedersen, LCSW
Mental Health Services Act Stakeholders	Helen Kleinberg
Mental Health Services Act System Leadership Team	Patricia Curry
Policy Roundtable for Childcare	Ann Franzen
Prevention Workgroup	Sandra Rudnick
Probation Placement Redesign	Trula Worthy-Clayton
Residential Based Workgroup	Trula Worthy-Clayton
Visitation Resource Workgroup	Helen Kleinberg

COMMITTEE REPORTS

Child Fatality Committee

The Commission is concerned for the safety and well-being of all at-risk children and youth in Los Angeles County. To this end, action was taken on September 17, 2007 to petition the Juvenile Court to amend the existing Commission Blanket Order to include the review of Juvenile Probation child fatality cases. On February 20, 2008 the Presiding Judge of Juvenile Court, the Honorable Michael Nash, signed an amended blanket order allowing the Commission to review Juvenile Probation cases where a child has died. This amended order allows designated Commissioners to read cases in the Department of Children and Families Services and the Probation Department.

Prior to the granting of the amended order, the Commission was limited to reviewing only dependency child fatality cases. The amended blanket order has created an opportunity to move forward in eliminating barriers in accessing important information. During this year, the Commission has focused its

efforts on cross-over cases. The Child Fatality Committee agreed that the reading of these cases was to examine any underlying systemic practices to determine if these practices, if corrected, might have led to a different outcome for the child. The initial goal of the committee is to read the six recent deaths of crossover youth.

The Commission appreciates the support we have received from the staff assigned by DCFS and Probation to oversee the child fatality case reviews. This has been most helpful in facilitating the scheduling and the reading of the cases.

In reviewing the reported child fatalities, the Commission remains concerned with three classes of deaths. These include the number of gang shootings that represent 20% of all fatalities; infant fatalities attributed to co-sleeping; and child deaths that appear to be related to the mother ingesting illegal drugs during pregnancy.

Childhood Obesity Committee

The Commission attended the Court's New Beginnings Conference in October 2007 and learned about the impact of obesity on children in foster care. The Commission discussed childhood obesity as a health and wellness issue at its November 2007 Annual Meeting and recognized the importance of addressing this issue by forming the Childhood Obesity Committee. This was followed by presentations at the December 17, 2007 Commission Meeting by Dr. Paul Simon and Dr. Robert Gilchick from the Department of

Public Health, who indicated that the prevalence of obesity among children is a "wake-up call" for public health. The Commission also received the Department of Public Health's October 2007 publication, "Preventing childhood obesity: the need to create healthy places."

The committee has focused its efforts on gathering data for the purpose of evaluating and making recommendations to address the rise in childhood obesity. This process has

Childhood Obesity Committee [continued from page 5]

included public and community stakeholders such as the Department of Children and Family Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Public Health, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), the Department of Parks and Recreation, and the Association of Community Human Services Agencies (ACHSA). This process of inclusion served a significant role in informing the Committee.

The Committee has been working on specific goals and objectives that center around the use of data to craft its decision-making. This has been accomplished by:

- Gathering information regarding County resources that address children's nutrition, weight, and consequences of obesity such as Type II Diabetes.

- Collaborating with programs/services which serve children and children's health.
- Documenting current efforts of County and community stakeholders.

In addition, representatives from the Committee met with staff from the Probation Department and the LAC/USC Medical HUB to develop an understanding of how these issues are addressed within their systems, and to hear about their partnering efforts with other County departments and the public sector.

The Commission also attends the Juvenile Court Weight Management Committee that was convened by Presiding Judge Michael Nash in December 2007. The work of the Commission complements the Juvenile Court Committee to ensure the well-being of children under the jurisdiction of the Juvenile Court system.

Faith-Based Committee

The Commission's Faith-Based Committee was formed at the suggestion of Supervisor Don Knabe, who believes that faith-based organization can provide important supplementary resources to social workers and other county staff charged with helping children and families.

During this year, the Committee distributed surveys to the Department of Children and Family Services, Probation Department, and houses of worship. The purpose of the surveys was to identify the current level of engagement between the county and the faith community, the barriers that may occur in developing and maintaining a collaborative partnership, the potential services available,

and how the relationship could be enhanced. Some of the opportunities identified in the survey included providing venues for visitation, mentoring parents and youth, giving parents accurate child development information and counseling. These are ways in which the faith community can help support families in addition to traditional foster and adoptive home recruitment. The Committee will be analyzing the data from the surveys in 2008-2009. The Commission will then make recommendations to the Board of Supervisors and the respective county department.

In reviewing the status of collaborative efforts in the county, the Committee received information regarding the Probation

Faith-Based Committee [continued from page 6]

Department efforts in working with the faith-based community.

The Commission is pleased that prevention dollars are being utilized to fund three visitation centers in SPA 7 and SPA 8.

The challenges we are facing from budget cuts and the resulting negative impact they will have on the children and families of Los Angeles County can be mitigated by taking advantage of the positive human spirit embodied within those willing to serve within the faith-based community.

Relative Care Committee

The Commission's Relative Care Committee was created on December 23, 1999 at the request of the Board of Supervisors. The purpose of the Committee is to advocate for all relative caregivers, who represent more than 50% of all families receiving services from DCFS. The goal for the Committee during the annual report period has focused on monitoring the lines of communication between DCFS and relative caregivers. Through the involvement of support groups, formal advocacy groups and individual community stakeholders, the Committee has provided a mechanism for encouraging that DCFS responds appropriately to needs of relative caregivers through open lines of communication. In addition, the Committee has worked to include relative caregivers of children and youth receiving services through the Probation Department. To that end, the Committee convened a Relative Caregiver Meeting on October 23, 2007, and attended the DCFS Kinship Conference on June 5, 2008. These two events provided the Committee with input and feedback from the caregivers' perspective. As a standing

committee of the Commission, our efforts have continued to focus on parity for the children residing in the care of relatives; and the relatives who have willingly committed themselves to their children and youth. Adoptions and Safe Families Act (ASFA) and Kinship Guardian Assistance Payment (KinGAP Plus) remain areas of focus for this Committee. Relatives still receive funding at the basic and insufficient foster care rate and remain areas of focus for this Committee. ASFA requires that the homes of relative caregivers and non-related extended Family Members are held to the same standards as those of foster parents and KinGAP Plus and allows relative caregivers to see their children's cases closed out of the foster care system. In addition, the Commission continues to meet with DCFS staff to address concerns regarding the availability of a user-friendly Relative Caregiver "Fact Sheet". The need for such a document was brought to the attention of the Commission by grandparents whose grandchildren were removed from the care and custody of their biological parents by DCFS.

AD-HOC COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ad-Hoc Committee on Reviewing the New County Structure

The Ad-Hoc Committee was convened to review the recommendations identified by Dr. David Sanders in his report regarding the new County structure and its possible effect on child safety. The focus of the committee will be to ensure that the county structure provides the ability for County Departments to work together to provide an integration and continuum of services. The committee

will also review the report on the new structure from the Productivity Commission. The committee will also review the report on the new structure from the Quality and Productivity Commission. Recommendations will be developed and presented to the Board of Supervisors that focus on Dr. Sanders' recommendations and their relationship to outcomes for children and families.

Blueprint Ad-Hoc Committee

The Blueprint Committee, an Ad-Hoc Commission Committee, was created November 6, 2007 at the Commission Annual Retreat to develop a framework for addressing the five programmatic priorities that would underscore the Commission's attention in 2008. The primary responsibility of the Blueprint Committee was the development, for Commission approval, of a systematic process to incorporate the determined Commission priorities.

Recommendations approved at the June 2, 2008 Commission meeting, included the following:

1. To establish protocols for addressing the five selected priority issues/focal point.

2. To enhance the Commission's coordination, oversight abilities, to assure a systematic process is in place to adequately address these areas.

3. To ensure the Commission's Committee structure supports efficient and effective managing of Commission goals and responsibilities.

4. To review the Commission's mission statement to ensure that it is timely and relevant.

5. To prioritize the documentation of program outcomes in Commission's Annual Report.

The Commission's Chair and Executive Committees will coordinate the implementation of these recommendations.

COUNTY BODIES REPRESENTATION

Agency-Court Cooperation Meeting

The Commission attends this bi-monthly meeting convened by Presiding Judge Michael Nash at Edelman's Children's Court. This committee reviewed the work of several of the

court committees: Substance Abuse Protocol for Children in Dependency Court, Crossover Committee AB 129, Obesity Committee and Psychotropic Medication Committee.

Children's Planning Council

The Commission for Children and Families has been a member of the Los Angeles County Children's Planning Council since 1991. The Commission has worked collaboratively with Children's Planning Council in its efforts to develop plans and strategies to improve results for all Los Angeles County children and families. For over a decade, much of the focus of the Council's work has been centered in its geographically based Service Planning Area (SPA) Councils and the countywide American Indian Council (AIC). The SPAs and AIC were established to serve as a regional link between countywide efforts around systems reform and neighborhood and community efforts to improve the lives of children and families.

Examples of individual council projects supported by the Commission through their representation include:

- The American Indian Children's Council helped DCFS develop culturally appropriate training for workers in the American Indian community, and helped to recruit American Indian social workers.
- Parent and neighborhood action groups have addressed education issues, school and traffic safety, affordable housing, transportation, and leadership and advocacy training (particularly for special-needs children).

Education Coordinating Council

The Commission for Children and Families holds a seat on the Los Angeles County Education Coordinating Council (ECC), a collaborative body that was created by the Board of Supervisors in November 2004 to provide oversight and accountability for raising the educational attainment of foster and probation youth to equal that of other youth. The Commission has been instrumental in their support and advocacy of the ECC and its goals. The four areas of focus include: Data and Information-Sharing, Early Childhood Education, Youth Development, and

School-Based Support.

The ECC meets quarterly, and also sponsors twice-yearly opportunities for superintendents of the county's 88 school districts to meet and discuss issues with the presiding judge of the juvenile court and top staff from DCFS, Probation, and Mental Health. The Commission views the role of ECC as essential to well-being of the children and youth in Los Angeles County and look forward to continuing our partnership.

Family Reunification Workgroup

The Commission has continued to be represented at the Family Reunification Workgroup that was established in 2003 by the Board of Supervisors. The workgroup has addressed three specific areas this year: data collection, the implementation of quality family visitation, and services regarding assessments and treatment for substance abuse.

Data collection and data analysis has vastly improved in DCFS, resulting in the ability to track the number of reunifications by age, geographic area, and type of placement. Additionally, as the number of children in foster care has decreased, DCFS is able to track both the length of time it takes to reunify and the number of re-entries when reunification fails. Unfortunately, as the number of reunifications has increased significantly, the number of reunification re-entries has also increased. Of the 6,020 children who

were reunified successfully within 12 months between July 1, 2006 and June 30, 2007, 596 (9.90%) re-entered within 12 months. DCFS intends to conduct a study in the fall of 2008 that will include case reviews on about 60 failed reunifications to determine what issues exist and what other resources may be necessary.

Paramount to successful Family Reunification is quality visitation. The implementation of quality family visitation across the county remains an ongoing project. Despite the recognition of its importance for the mental health of the child and the increased likelihood of successful reunification, DCFS has yet to implement a quality visitation program. This remains a concern to the Commission as well as the Juvenile Court due to the lack of movement in implementing the Visitation Protocol developed in 2005.

First 5 Los Angeles

First 5 Los Angeles (LA) is a child advocacy organization that was created for the purpose of improving the lives of children from prenatal to age 5. The Commission views the work of First 5 LA as critical to the well-being of children prenatal through age 5 and continues to identify the 0-5 population as a primary area of focus through the Prevention Demonstration Project and other initiatives and programs. The views and concerns of

the Commission are shared and exchanged for the purpose of coordinating efforts between the Commission and First 5 LA to obtain better outcomes for children. The Commissions' partnership with First 5 played a significant role in the continued focus on fair and equal representation for foster children, and monitoring the approval for the Los Angeles Universal Pre School (LAUP) and its sustainability.

Juvenile Court Psychotropic Medication Authorization Committee

The Commission has been involved with the issue of administering psychotropic medication to children and youth for more than four years. During this reporting year, the group started to develop a protocol designed

to monitor youth on psychotropic medication. The first effort will address dependency youth and then move forward to address delinquent youth who are receiving medication.

Juvenile Court Weight Management Committee

In November 2007, the Commission was invited to participate in the newly created Juvenile Court weight Management Committee. Judge Nash has indicated that inasmuch as our system is charged with enhancing the well-being of our dependent

children, it is important that we attempt to make a concerted effort to address weight issues and health or potential health issues. The Commission will continue to work on this committee in addressing these issues.

Mental Health Services Act (MHSA)

The Commission for Children and Families has worked to ensure that the mental health needs of at-risk children and youth of the county are adequately met by advocating for increased and enhanced services. With the passage of the Mental Health Services Act (MHSA- formerly Proposition 63) the Commission has remained active in advocating for sufficient funding for children, youth and transition age youth in foster care, probation and at-risk families through its representation as stakeholders. The Commission also serves as co-chair of the MHSA Community Support and Services (CSS) Transition Age Youth (TAY) Committee. The Commission has appointed

two of its Commissioners to participate in the MHSA Stakeholder Prevention and Early Intervention (PEI) planning process and System Leadership Team (SLT). Their involvement in these two processes has resulted in the creation of the Commission's TAY MHSA CSS Implementation Oversight Committee.

The Commission was asked to serve as one of the 60 focus groups providing feedback on the Mental Health Services Act's prevention and early intervention component. This focus group took place in July 2008.

Policy Roundtable for Child Care

The Commission has been a member of the Policy Roundtable for Child Care since 2001. Its focus remains to strengthen the child care system and infrastructure in the County by providing policy recommendations to the Board of Supervisors.

Prevention Workgroup

The Commission has worked with the Department of Children and Family Services in its prevention workgroup since 2003. It was determined that prevention services take place at three separate levels: 1) Primary Prevention programs and services that support families in their communities so they can provide the best possible care, thereby preventing maltreatment from occurring; 2) Secondary Prevention that provides supportive services to families who have been identified as being at higher risk for child maltreatment. Service participation is voluntary; and 3) Tertiary Prevention services provided to children and families when abuse and neglect has occurred to prevent further maltreatment and reduce the negative emotional effects of the abuse.

This year, the Department of Family Services and Probation Department have embarked on a significant milestone in the Prevention

Initiative Demonstration Project (PIDP). The Commission will continue to work side-by-side with DCFS and Probation in the development of PIDP, and the subsequent Board of Supervisors' approval of this comprehensive strength and community-based project. The goal of PIDP is to reduce incidences of child abuse and neglect by providing community-based services while allowing children to remain safely in their homes, or in the home of their caregiver by utilizing community-based prevention networks.

The Commission views PIDP as essential to reducing the number of children being removed from their homes; and increasing timely reunification. Testimony was received by the Board of Supervisors in support of the importance of PIDP. The prevention initiative received the full support of the Board and received five million dollars in funding.

Probation Placement Restructure and Title IV-E Steering Committee _____

This year the Probation and Children and Families Services Departments entered into the implementation of the Title IV-E Demonstration Project designed to reduce the number of children entering and the length of time children remain in out of home care. Stakeholder participation was identified as a critical element of this innovative demonstration project. As an outgrowth of this endeavor, the Probation Department gathered a vast array of judicial, educational, mental health, residential care, public agency and advocacy stakeholders in the formulation of a steering committee to monitor the department's restructure of placement services and the implementation of Title IV-E, planning. The Commission recognizes that the successful restructuring of Probation's placement system requires the cooperation and thoughtful contribution of all interested stakeholders.

The committee's placement program includes three focus areas:

- The evaluation of child assessment instruments utilized by the public and provide agencies delivering services to minor's under Probation's care; with special attention devoted to cross system case assessment planning.
- The evaluation of residential based service delivery from Court order to family reunification.
- The provision of aftercare services to reunified families; with broad agreement that the service needs in this phase are identified in the initial case plan and implemented well before the termination of placement.

This committee's work is very closely associated with one of the Commission's primary concerns, the urgent need for improved methods of information sharing between departments providing multi dimensional services to individual families.

Visitation Workgroup _____

This committee brings DCFS, the Commission, lawyers, judges and other stakeholders together in an attempt to identify resources that can assist DCFS in creating resources to promote visitation between families and children. The committee is aware of the interest of the faith-based community in providing visitation space.

The discussions involve use of monitors or coaches and the desire to make visits constructive in terms of the case plan. Movement to implement a visitation plan has been slow due to lack of support from the union who is taking the position that this would expand the role of the social worker.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

The Commission for Children and Families recommends that the Board of Supervisors:

1. Direct the Chief Executive Office and County Departments to develop a continuity of care and to blend funds in order to develop a more comprehensive system of care for children and their families. This endeavor should include enhancing prevention efforts.
2. Direct the Chief Executive Office to bring together County Departments and community partners in planning and implementing programs for children and families that treat them holistically. Special attention should be paid to the role of the faith-based community in providing services.
3. Direct the Chief Executive Office and clusters to leverage available funds by developing partnerships with the community. The County should enhance prevention efforts thereby ensuring that the health and well-being of children and families. Services should be client focused with feedback from clients.
4. Direct County Departments to jointly review child fatality cases when minors have had interface with more than one department. In addition, the Board of Supervisors should hire an independent investigator to review cases and make recommendations directly to the Board of Supervisors regarding policy and practice changes to address the reduction of fatalities.
5. Direct the Department of Children and Family Services to immediately implement the Visitation Protocol between children and parents established by the Court Workgroup.
6. Ensure, through direction and oversight, that the Department of Mental Health (DMH), Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and Probation Department evaluate and provide the necessary mental health services to our children in a timely manner.
7. Direct DCFS, DMH, Probation Department and DPSS to develop information sharing, protocols, and data on "crossover" youth, while the County's information sharing system is implemented.
8. Ensure that the County develops a more integrated system to provide mental health services that includes sharing resources, information and assessment among DCFS, DMH, and Probation Department. This should include maximizing MHSA and EPSDT funding to help provide a seamless system of services for foster children, probation youth, and at-risk youth in the community.
9. Ensure 1) that the County revisit its established priority for relative caregivers; 2) directs the CEO to coordinate the development of a renewed support system for relative caregivers that involves multiple departments; 3) directs DCFS to further expand the support units across the county; and 4) directs DCFS to develop and implement a Relative Caregiver Aftercare Policy and Procedure to aid in the reduction of the number of re-entry referrals and open cases for Legal Guardianship and KinGAP.

CONCLUSION

The Commission for Children and Families strongly urges the implementation of the above recommendations to ensure that the health and safety of the Children of Los Angeles County are sufficiently met. It is the view of the Commission that failure by your Board to implement the recommendations would work to the detriment of the most vulnerable children and youth in Los Angeles County.

The challenges facing at-risk children/ youth and their families are numerous and complex. Although county government plays a major role administering health and human services programs, government alone cannot sufficiently address the problem.

The future of Los Angeles County's children and youth requires that we closely evaluate the impact of high unemployment and underemployment, the lack of sufficient health

and mental health resources, school and community violence.

We must make a more significant investment in the resources necessary to ensure the well-being of children and families.

The Commission for Children and Families supports all of the efforts of the various county departments in their quest to ensure the well-being, health, and safety of the at-risk children and youth of Los Angeles County. The Commission fully recognizes that the responsibility of addressing the multiple and complex needs of at-risk children and youth, as well as their families, cannot be successfully addressed without partnering with the court and various community stakeholders. A multi-pronged approach is required in order to adequately respond and all stakeholders must play an active and purposeful role.

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
COMMISSION FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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