

# County of Santa Cruz

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June 31, 2012

Attached Please find the annual SIP update for Santa Cruz County Family & Children's Services and Probation. An electronic copy of this report was also submitted to [childserv@dss.ca.gov](mailto:childserv@dss.ca.gov).

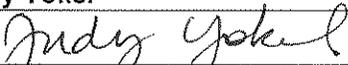
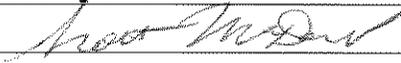
Thank you,

Kelli Kopeck  
Senior Analyst

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SIP Cover Sheet

## California's Child and Family Services Review System Improvement Plan

<b>County:</b>	Santa Cruz
<b>Responsible County Child Welfare Agency:</b>	Family & Children's Services
<b>Period of Plan:</b>	February 2011 – January 2012
<b>Period of Outcomes Data:</b>	(1) Q4 2011
<b>Date Submitted:</b>	(2) June 30, 2012
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<b>Submitted by:</b>	<b>County Chief Probation Officer</b>
<b>Name:</b>	Scott MacDonald 
<b>Signature:</b>	

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***SANTA CRUZ COUNTY***  
***SYSTEM IMPROVEMENT PLAN***  
***PROGRESS REPORT***  
***YEAR ONE***

Santa Cruz County  
Family and Children's Services  
June 27, 2012

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## **A. Introduction**

The Santa Cruz County Human Services Department's Family and Children's Services (FCS) Division is pleased to present the following report on the first year of implementation of the County's 2011 system improvement plan. In the last year, FCS and its partners have made significant progress, which is detailed in the pages that follow. A broad-based System Improvement Plan (SIP) Steering Committee, appointed in December 2006 and chaired by County Supervisor Mark W. Stone, continues to oversee the implementation of the plan. This committee meets quarterly to review the overall progress of implementation, identify ways to mitigate challenges and collectively discuss cross system issues. In addition, numerous work groups have been formed to coordinate implementation of the various strategies, and where appropriate, stakeholders have been consulted to solicit input.

## **B. Progress on Goals and Strategies**

### **GOAL AREA: CHILDREN ARE, FIRST AND FOREMOST, PROTECTED FROM ABUSE AND NEGLECT.**

#### **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 1: ENGAGE MOTHERS AND FATHERS IN THEIR CASE PLAN IN ORDER TO PROMOTE SAFETY, PERMANENCY AND WELL BEING.**

**Strategy 1: Implement best practices to better engage mothers and fathers in case planning.**

***Milestone 1.1.1: Assess perceptions, practices and capacity for engaging mothers and fathers in case planning.***

In October 2011 FCS and Papàs finalized their choice for the appropriate tool for self assessment of the extent of father involvement within FCS services. In November FCS Division managers participated in the survey, and in December all remaining FCS staff participated in the survey. Papàs compiled and assessed the data and returned in March 2012 to review the survey findings with the FCS management team and to make recommendations for training needs. FCS will be working on strategies to address the needs highlighted in the assessment.

***Milestone 1.1.2: Establish best practices and document practices in protocols to engage both mothers and fathers in case planning.***

FCS has identified best practices in mother and father engagement through Signs of Safety, an engagement strategy that promotes using clear, behaviorally based language to identify risk and safety issues and to articulate, in plain language, the steps each person must take to achieve safety in the family.

***Milestone 1.1.3: Train workers on protocols and implement practices.***

Most managers have now participated in training related to Signs of Safety. In January 2012, social work staff participated in investigations training that incorporated Signs of Safety tools. As part of a Division wide reorganization scheduled to take place in fall of 2012, additional training on Safety

Organized Practice will be provided to all FCS staff in the fall. Once our reorganization plan is implemented, Ongoing social workers will be identified and assigned to work with families prior to the development of the initial case plan in order to engage and work more in depth with the family on case plan design, while the Investigation social worker concentrates on the investigations of the safety and risk concerns regarding the family. The two social workers will collaborate to engage family members in the discussion of safety concerns and case plan activities.

**GOAL AREA: CHILDREN HAVE PERMANENCY AND STABILITY IN THEIR LIVING SITUATIONS WITHOUT INCREASING RE-ENTRY TO FOSTER CARE.**

**IMPROVEMENT GOAL 2: INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CHILDREN WHO EXIT CWS WITH A PERMANENT HOME OR WHO REUNIFY AND DO NOT RETURN TO OUT OF HOME CARE.**

Strategy 2.1: Develop and support concurrent plans for children.

*Milestone 2.1.1: Utilize screening tool to determine if a child has a likelihood of staying in care more than 6 months.*

In early 2011 a screening tool was developed and implemented to determine if a child has a likelihood of staying in care more than 6 months. This tool is based on research conducted by Children's Research Center, who studied the characteristics of cases in Santa Cruz County that did not have an early return, and then conducted validity and reliability tests on the common factors found among those cases. The tool is completed by the Dependency Investigations social worker within the first month of placement. It provides a total score based on six factors related to early return that allows the social worker to classify the case as not likely to reunify within six months and therefore in need of intensive concurrent planning efforts.

*Milestone 2.1.2 Refer children who demonstrate factors that suggest a likelihood of not returning home within six months, to an adoptions worker.*

Children identified as not likely to return home within six months are referred to an adoptions social worker in the Forever Families unit. The Forever Families social worker is assigned as secondary on the case, and works collaboratively with the case carrying social worker to finalize a concurrent plan. This plan involves locating a potential concurrent home which may include relatives, NREFMs, and/or foster families seeking to adopt a child. While the primary social worker continues to provide primary case management with the goal of reunification, the Forever Families social worker assesses the concurrent family's interest in providing a permanent home for the child if reunification fails, assists them in understanding permanency options and provides preliminary information about the needs of the child. If possible, this is done at a collaborative meeting with both the reunification social worker and the Forever Families social worker.

***Milestone 2.1.3 Document a plan and support all parties in understanding the child's alternative permanent plan.***

Once the child has been referred to a Forever Families social worker, a plan is developed to support all parties in understanding the child's alternative plan if reunification is not successful. The child is included in permanency discussions and decisions, depending on the child's age and developmental status. The alternative permanent plan is documented in the Court report and all parties to the case are provided this report. The court report is updated every six months with any new information regarding the child's alternative permanent plan.

**Strategy 2.2: Hold a team decision making meeting at reunification and (after staff and work flow reconfiguration) at removal.**

***Milestone 2.2.1: At consideration of reunification for all families, facilitate Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings with family, service providers and community or family supports.***

TDM meetings prior to reunification were implemented in early 2011. They are currently being held for all children as part of the reunification decision making process. The referral for a TDM is made by the case carrying social worker prior to the time that overnight visits are implemented as a transition to returning the child home. Potential safety concerns are identified and discussed at the TDM. Family members, service providers and community or family supports all participate in the development of the safety/transition plan for the child.

Santa Cruz County has been working diligently to lower the percentage of children who re-enter foster care within 12 months after reunification. The federal standard for this outcome measure is 9.9%. With the implementation of TDM meetings prior to reunification, Santa Cruz has improved from a re-entry rate of 17.1% in 2008 to a rate of 9.3% in 2010, which is slightly better than the federal standard.

***Milestone 2.2.2: Identify target groups for TDM meetings prior to initial removal of child.***

Potential target groups for TDM meetings prior to initial removal of a child include families with children under five and children who are at risk of re-entering foster care after having received family reunification services from FCS in the past.

***Milestone 2.2.3: At consideration of initial removal, conduct TDMs for children in the selected target group.***

TDM for specific target groups at the time of removal will be implemented in 2013, after the Division reorganization that is being implemented in the fall of 2012.

**Strategy 2.3: Provide safety plans and assistance for families prior to case closure.**

***Milestone 2.3.1: Create and implement protocol for discharge and safety plans for all cases that are closing.***

This strategy has been incorporated into a broader effort to link services across Divisions within the Human Services Department. To ensure safe, stable exits from child welfare services, the Family and

Children's Services (FCS) Division and Employment and Benefit Services Division (EBSD) are engaged in a multifaceted approach to provide staff the training and tools to work with clients more holistically. In July 2011 FCS social workers participated in a series of workshops with EBSD staff designed to create better case coordination, sharing of services and identification of services that will continue to be available to the client upon exit from FCS. More mandated training regarding this subject will be provided to FCS staff before the end of 2012. Additionally, as part of the work plan for this project, QA tools will be put into place to ensure social workers are linking properly.

Providing this more robust service coordination while the client is still working with FCS is the foundation upon which the formal exit plans will ultimately be based. In October 2011 FCS staff further explored the link between safety and poverty by participating in training with expert Kathy Estes, called "Bridges Out of Poverty". The next step will be further training on concrete ways child welfare clients can be effectively linked to EBSD throughout the Dependency and with the goal of maintaining that link after the close of the case. Additionally, the Division's work with Signs of Safety techniques will allow for better identification of specific behaviors the family needs to promote or avoid, and that will lead to enhanced exit planning.

***Milestone 2.3.2: Provide financial supports (using PSSF funds) to mitigate any financial barriers to reunification.***

FCS uses PSSF funds to provide a flex fund for families who are receiving family reunification services. The flex fund provides concrete support to families in need of goods and/or services to aid in the reunification process. Examples of goods and services provided to families include bunk beds for children who were returning home and rental and utility deposits for families to obtain or maintain adequate housing as children are being transitioned home.

**Strategy 2.4: Provide child-specific recruitment for children who cannot return home and have been in care for at least 18 months.**

***Milestone 2.4.1: Identify children in CWS/CMS who are not returning home and do not have a viable permanent plan.***

In March 2011, as part of a five year grant project named Roots and Wings, FCS began collaborating with Planning and Evaluation to identify children who are age 11 or older and in care for 18 months or longer. Data is extracted quarterly from CWS/CMS and forwarded to the Permanency Specialist for follow up with the youth's social worker and resource family.

***Milestone 2.4.2: Establish a permanent option for these children through family data mining, child photo-listing and/or family support.***

Family and Children's Services added a position for a ½ time Permanency Partner in September 2010. The Permanency Partner focuses on finding permanent homes for older youth who have been in care for 18 months or longer. The Specialist uses family data mining, child photo-listing and/or provision of family support to establish a permanent option for these children.

***Milestone 2.4.3: Review progress of establishing homes for these youth in monthly permanency meetings and identify strategies to resolve barriers.***

Long term goals of the Roots and Wings project include increased exits to permanency and decreased time to permanency for older youth. In order to achieve this, Family and Children's Services, in collaboration with Planning and Evaluation track short and long term outcomes. One short-term goal is to increase community and agency support of resource families. Short term outcome data conducted as part of the Roots and Wings grant project indicate an increase in the percentage of caregivers reporting they were connected to certain community resources during the past year. Referrals to all resource types increased, with the largest increase in referrals to support groups. The data also indicated an overall increase of perceived agency support, and greater satisfaction expressed by resource families.

An intermediate goal of the Roots and Wings program is to increase the number of resource homes willing to care for older youth. Data collected at the end of 2011 indicate that while finding homes for teens is very difficult, there has been a slight improvement in the Department's ability to find homes for this population. In addition, the number of approved homes willing to provide concurrent planning has increased. This includes resource families who have considered becoming a forever family for the child currently placed with them, as well as the number of caregivers indicating intent or willingness to adopt.

Initial assessment of long term outcomes indicate that the percentage of children ages 13 and older and in care 24 or more months that have attained a permanent home within 12 months has increased from 4.5% in 2009 to 16.3% in 2010 and 17.6% percent in March of 2011. These findings point to the initial effectiveness of child-specific recruitment activities aimed at fostering a lifelong connection for older youth.

## **GOAL AREA: CHILDREN RECEIVE SERVICES APPROPRIATE TO THEIR DEVELOPMENTAL AND/OR EDUCATIONAL NEEDS.**

### **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 3: INCREASE THE PROVISION OF SCREENING, ASSESSMENTS, REFERRALS AND SUPPORT OF THE DEVELOPMENT AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN.**

**Strategy 3.1: Provide developmental screening, assessment, and support for young children impacted by substance abuse in order to promote well being and also to increase safety and permanency.**

***Milestone 3.1.1: Provide developmental screening and assessment for children of parents involved in Family Preservation Court (FPC).***

Through a federal grant, the Leaps and Bounds Project in Santa Cruz County was developed in the fall of 2010. It provides developmental screening and assessment for children of parents involved in Family Preservation Court. In 2012, the program was expanded to include the newly established Dominican Interdisciplinary Child Development Program (DICDP), an extension of the longstanding and well respected Dominican Hospital Pediatrics Department. The DICDP is a collaboration between the Dominican Hospital Foundation and Pediatrics Department, Stanford University Department of Pediatrics, First 5 Santa Cruz County, Children's Mental Health, and Family and

Children's Services. This collaborative is focused on meeting a key service gap in Santa Cruz County; screening, assessment, and the development of treatment plans for children ages 0-3 involved in the Child Welfare System.

Each child referred to the DICDP is assessed by a developmental psychologist, a developmental pediatrician, a social worker, and a Children's Mental Health therapist. The team then produces a report outlining recommended activities and services for the child. This report is made available to the child's larger team including parents, caregivers, social workers, and service providers. To date, Family & Children's Services has referred more than 100 children to this special clinic. The reports received from the DICDP assessment team are extremely helpful and informative, and are proving highly valuable in determining the appropriate services for young children in our system.

***Milestone 3.1.2: Link children with appropriate supports to promote positive development and provide in home visits to educate caregivers on supporting development of young children.***

In the Leaps & Bounds program, two full time Children's Services Coordinators were hired in the fall of 2010 to work directly with families. They provide Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), home visiting, case management, and support. Structured, educational home visits provide parents with an opportunity to learn new parenting techniques, engage in activities with their children, and develop a further understanding of their child's developmental needs. These visits are especially valued by those families whose children are in out-of-home care, as they provide additional time beyond the typical court ordered visits. Parents are able to engage with their children in their homes, or out in the community. They have the opportunity to practice their new parenting skills in a natural setting. The Children's Services Coordinators use this time to complete developmental assessments, provide information and resources, and support parents as they strengthen their relationships with their children; highlighting, encouraging, and building on those aspects of the parent/child relationship that are working well. A flex fund also allows parents to purchase educational books and toys, child safety supplies such as car seats and cabinet latches, and pay for activities for parent and child to enjoy together such as swimming lessons or a visit to the aquarium. To date, 40 families have received these services.

***Milestone 3.1.3: Provide Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT), an intensive evidence based parent education model, to parents of young children in FPC.***

FCS has contracted with Parents Center, a local non-profit community based organization, to provide Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) for families in the Family Preservation Court system. PCIT is an evidence-based parent-child treatment program that assists parents of children with behavioral problems. Originally developed by Dr. Sheila Eyberg, PCIT is a unique treatment program that incorporates both the parent and child in treatment sessions, promoting positive parent-child relationships and interactions while teaching effective child management skills. Families began receiving PCIT services August 1, 2011.

**Strategy 3.2: Ensure that school age children in out of home care are appropriately assessed for educational needs and linked with supports.**

***Milestone 3.2.1: Review assessment resources within school districts and the community, and decide upon an assessment strategy that will best meet foster youth needs.***

In fall of 2011, FCS, CASA, COE and the Juvenile Dependency Court began collaborating with the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) to implement a new project, FosterEd Santa Cruz County. The goal of the program is to identify and train educational champions for each child in the system, and ensure that each champion (normally the holder of educational rights) receives training and support to learn behaviors that have been shown to contribute to long term educational success. Other goals include assessing each child for unmet educational needs and ensuring educational support and services. Work groups for FosterEd Santa Cruz County have been formed and implementation planning meetings began in early 2012 to address resources, foster focus database, educational champions and evaluation. A resource matrix is currently under development.

***Milestone 3.2.2: In collaboration with school districts, develop and implement a procedure for identifying youth in need of assessment other than IEP (examine criteria such as current grade level performance, subject matter performance, past test results, school attendance) and conduct educational assessments.***

The Foster Ed Workgroup continues to revise procedures and is near finalizing them. A grant application to Annie E. Casey Foundation for program evaluation has been awarded in the amount of \$250,000. FosterEd has begun to secure an evaluator. Survey and assessment tools to be used by the FosterEd program will be designed by the evaluator. FCS was approved by the State to draw down Title IV-E funds which will match existing Foster Youth Services funding for the purpose of hiring staff in support of this effort. In addition, a grant of \$50,000 was awarded by USA funds in support of this effort. The FosterEd Workgroup is considering the best way to utilize the USA funds, including staff that might provide direct service and support of assessment efforts.

***Milestone 3.2.3: Educate and support caregivers to provide educational support, advocacy and guidance to the children in their care.***

FCS contracts with The Cabrillo College Foster Care and Kinship Education Program to provide Educational Advocacy training to caregivers. In addition, the County Office of Education (COE) provides information to caregivers as needed. The COE has also implemented contracts with tutoring services in four locations throughout Santa Cruz County to provide tutoring services to foster youth.

***Milestone 3.2.4: County Office of Education to provide as needed consultation with caregivers on navigating the educational system.***

Early in 2011, the COE began providing education consultation for resource parents who request it.

***Milestone 3.2.5: When authorized by the State, implement transportation stipends for caregivers to ensure that children may remain in their school of origin to promote stability and continuity.***

In April 2012 FCS implemented a procedure for providing transportation stipends to caregivers in order to ensure that children in their care remain in their school or origin or school of stability, in accordance with All County Letter (ACL) 11-51. The procedure included allowances for eligible caregivers to receive retroactive payments to September 23, 2011.

## **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 4: INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR CHILDREN WHO EMANCIPATE FROM CHILD WELFARE WITHOUT A PERMANENT HOME.**

**Strategy 4.1: Create formalized written procedures for supporting youth through the transition to adulthood.**

***Milestone 4.1.1: Assess current procedures and practices that support transition to adulthood.***

As new ACL's become available from the state, FCS is reviewing and updating current procedures and practices that support transition to adulthood. This includes new AB12 legislation, which allows foster youth to remain in care until their 20<sup>th</sup> (21 if funding allocated) birthday. Key staff members have participated in permanency training as well as AB12 workshops offered by the state, and have formed workgroups to address the issues of eligibility, placement and case management related to transition to adulthood.

***Milestone 4.1.2: Revise procedures as needed and train staff on any new protocols.***

AB12 implementation workgroups began meeting in fall 2011 to develop written procedures addressing transition, housing options, case management, and legal issues for NMD youth. AB12 instruction guides for social workers and youth have been developed and deployed, which outline the steps and requirements for transitioning youth to Non-Minor Dependent (NMD) status. These guidelines form the basis of an AB12 Transition Procedure that is under development. A written procedure allowing for NMD youth to re-enter foster care has been completed. The AB12 workgroup is currently developing a procedure and social work practice guidelines for youth wishing to be placed in a Supervised Independent Living Placement.

***Milestone 4.1.3: Implement protocols.***

Protocols are in development to establish procedures for evaluating these emerging adults' needs for placement and transitional support. In support of this needs assessment, a SILP Readiness Assessment Tool has been adopted and implemented. A social worker in the FCS Teen unit has been identified as the AB12 specialist and has received training on AB12 legislation and procedures. Youth in placement who are approaching their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday have been and are continuing to be transitioned to her caseload. To date, 8 youth have transitioned to NMD status, 2 have opted out, and it is anticipated that another 14 will transition to NMD status before the end of the calendar year.

**Strategy 4.2: Facilitate housing options for emancipated youth.**

***Milestone 4.2.1: Identify housing options for emancipated youth.***

AB12 was implemented in January of 2012, and is providing new housing and support options for emancipated youth. FCS is in the process of recruiting foster homes that will provide extended foster care for youth who are eligible for NMD status. FCS is also working with a community based organization to explore the option of implementing THP Plus foster care in Santa Cruz County.

***Milestone 4.2.2: Facilitate dedication of housing to emancipating foster youth.***

The outlook for opportunities to access affordable housing units for former foster youth is uncertain due to state budget changes. The Human Services Department (HSD) submitted a required County Plan for implementing housing options for emancipated foster youth, namely THP Plus (which we have offered and continue to offer), and THP Plus Foster Care. We are currently waiting for licensing guidelines to come from the state in order to move forward with implementation of THP Plus Foster Care. Other AB12 enabled placement options for foster youth are traditional foster placement (relative/non-relative extended family member, foster homes) and supervised independent living placements. We are working diligently to recruit extended foster care providers for emancipating youth.

***Milestone 4.2.3: Maintain dedication of funding.***

FCS continues to use our THP Plus allocation to provide transitional housing for up to 16 former foster youth. In addition, FCS has submitted a plan to the State to implement THP Plus Foster Care. Once licensing guidelines have been established, a contract will be developed with a community based organization to provide this placement option in Santa Cruz County.

**GOAL AREA: CASE PLANNING**

**IMPROVEMENT GOAL 5: INCREASE THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE DIVISION'S UNIT STRUCTURE AND CASEWORK FLOW WHILE ENHANCING UP-FRONT FAMILY ENGAGEMENT AND SAFELY PREVENTING CHILD REMOVALS WHERE POSSIBLE.**

**Strategy 5.1: Reorganize Family and Children's Services unit structure and casework flow in order to more efficiently perform casework with reduced staffing, and in order to better serve children and families.**

***Milestone 5.1.1: Research and evaluate organizational structure and workflow in other counties with similar demographics and staffing levels.***

The FCS management team reviewed organizational structures and workflow in other counties with similar demographics in late 2011. The management team then developed a proposal with two options for front-end organization. These options were presented to supervisors and social workers in January 2012. Feedback from staff was reviewed, and a plan was selected in February 2012. FCS has gathered detailed information from other counties that have implemented a similar plan, and sent a team to visit Riverside County to observe and ask questions in May 2012. The team returned with significant information which is being used to help develop policies and protocols for our re-organized workflow.

***Milestone: 5.1.2: Assess other counties' procedures and staffing for Team Decision Making meetings prior to the removal of children.***

FCS plans to conduct an assessment of other counties' procedures for staffing Team Decision Making meetings in the fall of 2012.

***Milestone: 5.1.3: Develop a plan for reorganizing Santa Cruz County's child welfare operations, including potential changes to unit structure and/or workflow, and including as a component front-end TDM's with the goal of safely preventing removals where possible.***

Unit structure and workflow will be altered so that an Investigations social worker will carry the case from initial referral through the Jurisdiction/Dispositional court process. An Ongoing social worker will be identified and assigned at Detention to engage the family, provide case management services and participate in development of the case plan. Under this plan, Santa Cruz County will eliminate its separate Dependency Investigations unit and reduce by one the number of social workers that a family works with while in the child welfare system.

***Milestone: 5.1.4: Launch the reorganized workflow and organizational structure.***

Training needs are currently being identified and curriculum is under development. Training to the new workflow is scheduled for July and August of 2012, with full implementation of the new workflow scheduled for September 1, 2012.

## **GOAL AREA: COLLABORATION**

### **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 6: BETTER COMMUNICATE CASE CONSULTATION PROTOCOLS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS WHO ACTIVELY SERVE FAMILIES WITH OPEN CHILD WELFARE CASES.**

***Strategy 6.1: Create and distribute case consultation protocols with service providers.***

Not yet started. Plan to start in the fall of 2012.

***Milestone 6.1.1: Document protocols on timing and methods of case consultation with service providers.***

Not yet started. Plan to start in the fall of 2012.

***Milestone 6.1.2: Distribute and implement case consultation protocols annually.***

Not yet started. Plan to start in the fall of 2012.

***Milestone 6.1.3: Annually review case consultation protocols and consider whether updates are needed.***

Not yet started. Plan to start in the fall of 2012.

## **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 7: INCREASE COLLABORATION WITH ADULT PROBATION ON FAMILIES CONCURRENTLY OPEN TO SERVICES IN ADULT PROBATION AND CHILD WELFARE**

**Strategy 7.1: Share Information on families concurrently open to services in Adult Probation and Child Welfare.**

***Milestone: 7.1.1 Work with the Juvenile Court to establish a legal standing order that stipulates that CWS and Adult Probation may exchange pertinent information on dually open cases.***

Establishment of a standing order that stipulates that CWS and Adult Probation may exchange information on dually open cases is delayed. The order has been drafted by County Counsel, but concerns about confidentiality remain to be resolved. FCS and Probation will work on these issues once a Dual Status protocol is established.

***Milestone: 7.1.2 Develop and train staff on information-sharing protocols.***

Not yet started, plan to start once a Dual Status protocol is established.

***Milestone 7.1.3: Exchange information as appropriate.***

Not yet started, plan to start once a Dual Status protocol is established.

## **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 8: INCREASE DEPARTMENT AND COMMUNITY DIALOGUE ON VALUES AND PRICIPLES IN CHILD WELFARE.**

**Strategy 8.1 Continue to provide information to both staff and stakeholders on the local CWS values outlined in the Santa Cruz County CWS Foundational Assumptions, created in 2007.**

***Milestone 8.1.1 Hold community dialogues with interested stakeholders such as parents and youth formerly in CWS and resource parents to promote a shared understanding of child welfare practice and principles.***

As a result of a community stakeholder meeting held in October 2010, FCS program managers now meet quarterly with Foster Family Agencies to better coordinate the provision of FFA services. Additional community dialogues with stakeholders are on hold pending the FCS reorganization, but will again be considered in 2013.

***Milestone 8.1.2: Integrate values outlined in the Santa Cruz County CWS Foundational Assumptions into practice by using it as a primary reference in all trainings, practice guides, and policies and procedures.***

Beginning in 2011, values were integrated into practice at FCS through use as a primary reference in training, practice guides and policies and procedures. The Foundational Assumptions document, which communicates these core values, is now a key element of new social worker training.

***Milestone 8.1.3: Conduct annual trainings and consultations with staff and community partners on the value and importance of permanency practices.***

Training with staff and community partners on the value and importance of permanency practices were initiated in 2011, and are ongoing.

***Milestone 8.1.4: Share information among SIP and CAPC on integration efforts by presenting at steering meetings of these bodies.***

A summary of the activities is provided to the SIP Steering Committee and the CAPC annually. In April of 2012, the SIP liaison to the CAPC provided a presentation on the purpose and activities of the CAPC to the SIP Steering Committee, including an overview of the activities planned for Child Abuse Awareness Month.

## **GOAL AREA: RECRUITMENT AND SUPPORT OF RESOURCE FAMILIES (FOSTER, KIN AND ADOPTIVE)**

### **IMPROVEMENT GOAL 9: INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR RESOURCE PARENTS.**

**Strategy 9.1: Provide in home support to resource families.**

***Milestone 9.1.1: Maintain contracts with Family Resource Centers to provide community based support to local resource families.***

Through our Roots & Wings program, both La Manzana and Live Oak FRCs are providing community based support to local resource families. Two full time Resource Family Liaisons are stationed at resource centers in Live Oak and Watsonville, two areas of Santa Cruz County that are associated with relatively high removal rates. The Liaisons make monthly contact with each resource family to offer support and assistance. They also provide welcome baskets to new resource families at the time of initial placement, and conduct a standardized needs assessment for the family. As families identify specific needs for children in their care, Liaisons identify resources to provide appropriate assistance to the families. The Resource Centers also provide one-on-one parenting education and support.

***Milestone: 9.1.2 Monitor FRC staff performance to ensure appropriate provision of in home support and linkage to services for resource families.***

Monitoring of FRC staff performance to ensure appropriate provision of in-home support and linkage to services for resource families is ongoing. The Roots & Wings program manager meets with the FRC staff regularly to discuss customer service and how values regarding permanency relate to improved customer services for resource families.

***Milestone: 9.1.3 Conduct and analyze resource parent survey to assess satisfaction with and efficacy of services.***

A resource parent survey to assess satisfaction with and efficacy of services was conducted in the fall of 2011. 86 % of resource parents surveyed indicated they were treated with respect by their social worker. Overall, 85% of resource parents reported that they felt supported by agency staff in caring for the child most recently placed with them and 86% of resource parents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with their role as a caregiver. Meetings were held with social work staff to discuss the survey findings and to brainstorm ways to improve customer service for resource families. A Guide to Working with Resource Families was developed and provided to staff.

**Strategy 9.2: Provide adoption support to pre- and post-adoptive families.**

***Milestone 9.2.1: Maintain and monitor contract for adoption promotion and support***

A new contract was put in place for FY 2011-12, to provide adoption promotion and support counseling services. The service provider, Meridian Psychotherapy Group, is a group of therapists who provide countywide, bilingual pre- and post-adoption counseling services to individuals, couples, families and groups.

***Milestone 9.2.2: Refer pre- and post-adoptive families to Meridian Psychotherapy Group for counseling.***

Referrals are being made to the new service provider, Meridian Psychotherapy Group. The group provides bilingual counseling services county-wide to pre- and post-adoptive families.

***Milestone 9.2.3: As required by OCAP, monitor the number of families receiving services.***

During FY 2011-12 a total of 18 families received services. An annual report will be submitted to OCAP in the fall of 2012.

**GOAL AREA: QUALITY ASSURANCE**

**IMPROVEMENT GOAL 10: IMPROVE MONITORING OF KEY PROCEDURES IN CHILD WELFARE TO ENSURE COMPLIANCE WITH STANDARDS.**

**Strategy 10.1: Conduct streamlined compliance reviews.**

***Milestone 10.1.1: Develop and maintain a monthly dashboard of counts and mandated processes.***

A monthly dashboard of counts and mandated processes has been developed and implemented by the FCS management team in collaboration with Planning and Evaluation. The dashboard is reviewed monthly by the Department Director, the Division Director and Division Managers.

***Milestone 10.1.2: Review social worker compliance with referral data entry and closure, SDM tools, case plans, and visits on monthly dashboard.***

Social worker compliance regarding referral data entry and closures, SDM tools, case plans and visits is reviewed by the Management Team monthly.

***Milestone 10.1.3: Review compliance tools that were previously developed and implemented for supervisors and managers, and streamline and re-introduce these tools to strengthen quality assurance.***

Compliance tools that were previously developed and implemented for supervisors and managers were reviewed in early 2012. A new set of guidelines is being developed for supervisors to use in their weekly case consultations with social workers, to assist them in tracking compliance in several mandated areas. The new guidelines will be presented to supervisors in fall of 2012.

**Strategy 10.2: Identify trends among children returning to out of home care after reunification.**

***Milestone 10.2.1: Review demographic and case factors for children returning to foster care after reunification.***

The research study on demographic and case factors for children returning to foster care after reunification is delayed due to competing priorities for the Planning & Evaluation Unit. However, the re-entry debrief workgroup was implemented following the PQCR in January 2010. The workgroup meets quarterly to review any re-entry cases and discuss any systemic factors that may have contributed to the re-entry.

***Milestone 10.2.2: Review literature of published re-entry studies.***

The Re-entry work group conducted a literature review of published re-entry studies in early 2011. The Planning and Evaluation unit used the literature review to develop a checklist for gathering preliminary data to identify demographic and case factors for children returning to foster care after reunification. Re-entry cases are identified and reviewed quarterly, and the checklist is completed for each case in order to track systemic trends for the cases in our county.

***Milestone 10.2.3: Present information to stakeholders and facilitate discussion of recommendations for practice improvements.***

Re-entry data was presented to the SIP Steering Committee in January 2012. Since the re-entry workgroup was instituted and began tracking re-entry cases in 2010, Santa Cruz County has significantly reduced its re-entry rate from a high of 17.1 % in 2008 to 9.3% at the end of 2010. We are now below the federal standard of 9.9 % for this outcome measure

**PROBATION NARRATIVE**

The development of the 2011 CWS/Probation System Improvement Plan was guided by a committee consisting of foster and adoptive parents, service providers, and court representatives. Despite

declining resources the plan that has been developed is ambitious and reflects the county's commitment to system improvement.

In alignment with California's Program Improvement Plan (PIP), Santa Cruz has chosen to work on engagement of parents with a particular emphasis on ensuring fathers are involved in case planning and services. This decision was based on survey data regarding case plan engagement and the state's emphasis on this area. Strategies in the systemic factor of collaboration will support these efforts, as it is planned that Adult Probation and CWS will have stronger collaboration due to enhanced ability to collaborate on dually open cases. It is hoped that all these efforts will improve both safety and permanency for children. In light of the Public Safety Realignment Act 2011, these efforts shall continue into 2012 extending to newly realigned populations being supervision by the probation department. As probation adopts a risk and needs assessment, case plan development may directly involve child welfare goals, resulting in stronger coordination of services, avoiding duplication.

An overall focus of this SIP is permanency, as performance measures discussed above point to a need to concentrate efforts on improving this outcome for local children. Similar to California's PIP, Santa Cruz has outlined a plan to work on consistency of concurrent planning. Santa Cruz looks forwards to any assistance that the state can provide in improving these areas. A performance measure of concern is re-entry into foster care after reunification. The primary strategy working to ameliorate this outcome is conducting team decision making meetings at the point of consideration of reunification. In addition, supports will be maximized to ensure parents who have reunified have access to a strong foundation of support. In order to enhance permanency for children who have lingered in care, child specific recruitment will be implemented in effort to secure forever homes for these children. A systemic factor that is addressed in the PIP and in Santa Cruz's 2011 SIP, is the diligent recruitment of foster homes. Santa Cruz is working to recruit homes that can care for older youth and siblings as there is a dearth of these homes in the county, particularly relating to new demands brought by extended foster care options for youth aging out in foster care (Assembly Bill 12). The probation department will continue their coordination and collaboration in this effort as internal protocols and court processes are developed.

### **C. CWSOIP Narrative**

Santa Cruz County's current CWSOIP allocation for Child Welfare Services is \$532,022. We utilize these funds to carry out several activities that are designed to increase safety, permanency, and well-being for children.

Of the total allocation, \$200,000 is used to pay for substance abuse assessments, treatment (outpatient or residential) and sober living facilities for parents with open child welfare cases. We will continue to use the funds for this purpose, as substance abuse treatment is one of the most critical needs for parents in our system. Prior to the availability of CWSIOP funds, there was no dedicated funding source for CWS parents to access substance abuse treatment. Instead, CWS parents had to compete with the general population for treatment slots, and often experience lengthy waiting times before a slot became available. Since the advent of CWSOIP funds a number of years ago, we have consistently dedicated \$200,000 per year for this purpose, and this has greatly improved the accessibility of substance abuse treatment for our clients.

The remainder of Santa Cruz County's CWSOIP funding is used to fund a portion of our social work staff that provides a liaison function between the Department and Families Together, Santa Cruz

County's differential response program. Activities include tracking referrals, making initial contact with families, sending outreach letters, and case consultations. Families Together works with families to address their problems while the children remain in their parents' care, in an effort to avoid child removal and to ensure safety, permanency and well-being for the children.

The County's allocation for Probation CWSOIP funds is \$10,000. The Probation Department will use these funds to pay travel expenses to enable parents to have regular visits with their children who are placed out-of-county. Facilitating regular visitation is a key part of the Department's efforts to work towards successful family reunification and permanency. Family participation in program activities with their youth in out of home care often leads to improved sustainable outcomes.

#### **D. CAPIT/CBCAP/PSSF Annual Report**

As required by OCAP, Santa Cruz County submits an annual report for CAPIT/CBCAP/and PSSF funds. A report covering the first six months of our SIP cycle (January through June of 2011) was submitted to OCAP in November 2011. The annual report for FY 2011-12 will be submitted in fall 2012.

Santa Cruz County Child Welfare- Community System Improvement Plan – Progress Report		April 2012
Strategy	Lead	Progress
<p><b>Outcome/Systemic Factor – Safety: Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.</b>  <i>Improvement Goal: Engage mothers and fathers more in their case plan in order to promote safety, permanency and well-being.</i></p>		
<p><b>Strategy 1:</b> Implement best practices to better engage mothers and fathers in case planning.</p>	<p>FCS Asst. Division Director</p>	<p>FCS and PAPAs met in March to review the findings of the FCS self-assessment regarding father involvement in services. FCS will be working on strategies to address the needs highlighted in the assessment. In addition to this work, the Division has begun work in identifying best practices through Signs of Safety (an engagement strategy that promotes using clear, behaviorally based language to identify risk and safety issues and to articulate, in plain language, the steps each person must take to achieve safety in the family.) Most managers have participated in training related to Signs of Safety and social work staff participated in an Investigations training on January 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> that incorporated Signs of Safety tools. Finally as part of the Division Reorganization Ongoing social workers will be identified prior to the development of the initial case plan so they can work more in depth with the family on case plan design, while the Investigations worker concentrates on the investigation of the concerns regarding the family.</p>
<p><b>Outcome/Systemic Factor – Permanency: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations without increasing re-entry into foster care.</b>  <i>Improvement Goal: Increase the number of children who exit CWS with a permanent home or who reunify and do not return to out-of-home care.</i></p>		
<p><b>Strategy 2:</b> Develop and support concurrent plans for children.</p>	<p>FCS Asst. Division Director, Dependency Investigations, Adoptions and FM/FR Supervisors.</p>	<p>A screening tool to determine if a child has a likelihood of staying in care more than 6 months was developed and implemented. Children identified as not likely to return home within six months are referred to an adoptions worker. Plans are developed to support all parties in understanding the child's alternative plan if reunification is not successful.</p>
		70%
		100%

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<p><b>Strategy 3:</b> Provide safety plans and assistance for families prior to case closure.</p>	<p>FCS Asst. Division Director, FR/FM and ER Supervisors.</p>	<p>This strategy has been incorporated into a broader "Linking Services" effort within HSD. To ensure safe, stable exits from child welfare services, the Family and Children's Services and Employment and Benefit Services (EBSD) Divisions are engaged in a multifaceted approach to provide staff the training and tools to work with clients more holistically. In July 2011 social workers participated in a series of workshops with EBSD staff designed to create better case coordination, sharing of services and identifying of what services will continue to be available to the client upon exit from FCS. More mandated trainings regarding this subject will be provided to FCS staff in the next six months. Additionally, as part of the work plan for this project, QA tools will be put into place to ensure social workers are linking properly. Providing this more robust service coordination while the client is still working with FCS is the foundation upon which the formal exit plans will ultimately be based. In October staff further explored the link between safety and poverty by participating in training with expert, Kathy Estes, called "Bridges Out of Poverty". The next step will be further training on concrete ways child welfare clients can be effectively linked to EBSD throughout the Dependency and with the goal of maintaining that link after the close of the case. Additionally, the Division's work with Signs of Safety techniques will allow for better identification of specific behaviors the family needs to promote or avoid and that will lead to enhanced exit planning.</p>	<p>50%</p>
<p><b>Strategy 4:</b> Hold a team decision making meeting at reunification and (after staff reconfiguration) at removal. <b>Strategy 5:</b> Provide child-specific recruitment for children who cannot return home and have been in care at least 18 months.</p>	<p>FR Program Managers, TDM Facilitator, FCS Division Director, Asst. Division Director Planning and Evaluation Analyst, Roots &amp; wings Permanency Partner, Roots &amp; Wings Program Manager</p>	<p>TDM meetings are being held for all children at consideration of reunification. TDM for target groups at time of removal will begin after staff re-organization. Children who are 11 or older and in care for 18 months or longer have been identified in CWS/CMS. Permanency specialist is using family data mining, child photo listing and/or family support to establish a permanent option for these children. Outcome data</p>	<p>60% 100%</p>

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		are being developed and will be provided at a future SIP meeting.	
<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor – Well Being: Children receive services appropriate to their development and/or educational needs.</b>			
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase the provision of screening, assessments, referrals and support of the development and education of children.</i>			
<b>Strategy 6:</b> Provide developmental screening, assessment and support for young children impacted by substance abuse in order to promote well-being and also to increase safety and permanency.	Program Mgr. of FPC, Parents Center	Through the Leaps & Bounds project, developmental screening and assessment for children of parents involved in FPC has been implemented. Children are being linked with appropriate supports to promote positive development and provide in-home visits to educate caregivers on supporting development of young children. Parents Center staff are engaged in training on Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT). Families began receiving PCIT services August 1, 2011.	100%
<b>Strategy 7:</b> Ensure that school age children in out of home care are appropriately assessed for educational needs and linked with supports	FCS Program Mgr., County Office of Education.	FCS, COE and the Court are collaborating with the National Center for Youth Law (NCYL) to implement "Foster Ed. Learning Lab" in Santa Cruz County to identify and train educational champions for each child, assess each child for unmet educational needs and ensure educational support and services. Implementation planning meetings have begun and work groups have been formed (and have met) to address Resources, Foster Focus Database, Educational Champions and Evaluation. A resource matrix is being developed. A first draft of procedures has been written and is under review. An additional evaluation grant has been submitted as well as a grant for additional funds to hire staff who can provide direct service in support of the educational champions. FCS has applied to the State to draw down Title IV-E funds which will match existing Foster Youth Services funding for the purpose of hiring staff in support of this effort. COE has set up contracts with Tutoring Club in Scotts Valley, Santa Cruz, Capitola and Watsonville. The Tutoring Club is assessing each student as they enter services. COE is providing education consultation for resource parents on an as-needed	60%

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		basis. Educational Advocacy training is being provided by Cabrillo Foster and Kin Care Education Program. Implementation of Foster Focus database is in process, with assistance from NCYL.	
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase supports for children who emancipate from child welfare without a permanent home.</i>			
<b>Strategy 8:</b> Create formalized written procedures for supporting youth through the transition to adulthood.	FCS Program Mgr., Staff Development, Permanency (Teen Unit) Supervisor	Currently reviewing current procedures and practices that support transition to adulthood, including new AB12 legislation which will allow foster youth to remain in care until their 20 <sup>th</sup> (21 <sup>st</sup> if funding allocated) birthday. AB12 implementation workgroups have been formed and written procedures are under development to address transition, housing options, case management and legal issues. AB12 Instruction guides for Social Workers and Youth have been developed and deployed, which outline the steps and requirements for transitioning to Non-minor Dependent status.	70%
<b>Strategy 9:</b> Facilitate housing options for emancipated youth	HSD Department Director, County Housing Mgr.	AB 12, has been implemented as of January 1 2012, and is providing new housing and support options for emancipated youth. Regarding opportunities to access affordable housing units for former foster youth, the outlook for availability of housing funds is uncertain due to state budget changes. The Department submitted a required County Plan for implementing housing options for emancipated foster youth, namely THP + (which we have offered and will continue to offer), and a new option. THP+ Foster care is a new placement option available through AB12. Other AB12 enabled placement options for foster youth are traditional foster placement (relative/non-relative extended family member, foster homes) and Supervised Independent Living Placements.	0%

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<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor: Case Planning</b>		
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the Division's unit structure and casework flow while enhancing up-front family engagement and safely preventing child removals where possible.</i>		
<b>Strategy 10:</b> Reorganize Family & Children's Services unit structure and casework flow in order to more efficiently perform casework with reduced staffing, and in order to better serve children and families.	FCS Division Director and Asst. Division Director	Model for the reorganization has been selected, in which Investigations worker will carry the case through disposition, but Ongoing worker will be identified early to engage the family and participate in development of case plan. FCS is currently gathering detailed information from two to three other counties and may visit one or more of these counties in May. Plan to develop and deliver necessary training and implement the reorganization in the summer of 2012.
		60%
<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor: Collaboration</b>		
<i>Improvement Goal: Better communicate case consultation protocols with service providers who actively serve families with open child welfare cases.</i>		
<b>Strategy 11:</b> Create and distribute case consultation protocols with service providers.	FCS Asst. Division Director	Not yet started. Plan to start in Fall of 2012.
		0%
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase collaboration with Adult Probation on families concurrently open to services in Adult Probation and Child Welfare.</i>		
<b>Strategy 12:</b> Share information on families concurrently open to services in Adult Probation and Child Welfare.	Program Mgr. and Adult Probation Director	Establishment of a standing order that stipulates that CWS and Adult Probation may exchange pertinent information on dually open cases is delayed. The order has been drafted by County Counsel, but concerns about confidentiality remain to be resolved. FCS and probation will work on these issues once a Dual Status protocol is established.
		40%
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase department and community dialogue on values and principles in child welfare.</i>		
<b>Strategy 13:</b> Continue to provide information to both staff and stakeholders on the local CWS values outlined in the Santa Cruz County CWS Foundation Assumptions, created in 2007.	FCS Division Director, SIP Steering Committee, FCS Management Team, CAPC	Values have been integrated into practice at FCS through use as a primary reference in trainings, practice guides and policies and procedures. The Foundational Assumptions are now a key element of new social worker training. Trainings with staff and community partners on the value and importance of permanency practices were conducted and are ongoing. FCS program managers continue to meet
		90%

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		quarterly with Foster Family Agencies to better coordinate the provision of FFA foster care services. Additional community dialogues are on hold pending the FCS reorganization, but will again be considered in the fall of 2012.	
<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor: Recruitment and Support of Resource Families (Foster, Kin, Adoptive)</b>			
<i>Improvement Goal: Increase supports for resource parents</i>			
<b>Strategy 14:</b> Provide in home support to resource families.	Roots & Wings Program Mgr., Planning & Evaluation Analyst	Through our Roots & Wings program, La Manzana and Live Oak FRC's are provide community based support to local resource families. Monitoring of FRC staff performance to ensure appropriate provision of in home support and linkage to services for resource families is ongoing. Resource parent survey to assess satisfaction with and efficacy of services is scheduled for fall of 2011.	100%
<b>Strategy 15:</b> Provide adoption support to pre- and post-adoptive families.	FCS Division Analyst, Adoptions Supervisor	New contract in place for FY 2011-12 to provide adoption promotion and support counseling services. Referrals are being forwarded to new provider: Meridian Therapy Group. Division Analyst monitors data regarding families receiving services.	100%
<b>Outcome/Systemic Factor: Quality Assurance</b>			
<i>Improvement Goal: Improve monitoring of key procedures in child welfare to ensure compliance with standards.</i>			
<b>Strategy 16:</b> Conduct streamlined compliance reviews.	Planning and Evaluation, FCS Division Director, Asst. Division Director, and Management Team.	Monthly dashboard of counts and mandated process has been developed. Review of social worker compliance with referral data entry and closure, SDM tools, case plans, and visits is ongoing.	100%
<b>Strategy 17:</b> Monitor trends for disproportional ethnic representation at all points in child welfare system.	Planning & Evaluation	Research study is delayed due to competing priorities for the Planning & Evaluation unit.	0%
<b>Strategy 18:</b> Identify trends among children returning to out of home care after reunification.	Planning & Evaluation	Research study is delayed due to competing priorities for the Planning & Evaluation unit. However, Re-Entry Debrief Group is using a checklist developed by Planning & Evaluation to gather preliminary data to identify demographic and case factors for children returning to foster care after reunification. Literature review of published re-entry studies has also been conducted by re-entry workgroup.	10%