DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES
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November 26, 2013

Children's Services Outcomes & Accountability Bureau
Attn. Bureau Chief
Children and Family Services Division
California Department of Social Services
744 P Street, MS 8-12-91
Sacramento, CA 95814

To Whom It May Concern:

Enclosed, please find Amador County's System Improvement Plan Progress Report with the required original signatures. An electronic copy was sent to your office on this date. Thank you so much for all of your assistance. If you require anything further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Anne Watts

Anne Watts, Program Manager
Amador County Dept. of Social Services

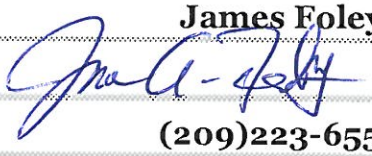
California Child and Family Services Review

Annual SIP Progress Report

2011-2014

CDSS
CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIAL SERVICES

California – Child and Family Services Review Signature Sheet

County	Amador
CSA Period Dates	November 17, 2007 – November 17, 2010
SIP Period Plan Dates	March 18, 2011 – June 30, 2014
Outcome Data Period	Q1 2013
County Child Welfare Agency Director	
Name	**James Foley**
Signature*	
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County Chief Probation Officer	
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Signature*	
Phone Number	**(209)223-6387**
Mailing Address	**675 New York Ranch Road** **Jackson, CA 95642**
Board of Supervisors (BOS) Signature	
BOS Approval Date	
Name	
Signature*	

*Signatures must be in blue ink

Mail the original Signature Sheet to:	**Outcomes and Accountability Bureau** **Children and Family Services Division** **California Department of Social Services** **744 P Street, MS 8-12-91** **Sacramento, CA 95814**

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Table of Contents

SIP PROGRESS NARRATIVE	PAGE 3
INTRODUCTION	PAGE 3
STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION	PAGE 4
CURRENT PERFORMANCE TOWARD SIP IMPROVEMENT GOALS	PAGE 5
STRATEGIES STATUS	PAGE 11
BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION	PAGE 15
OTHER SUCCESSES AND PROMISING PRACTICES	PAGE 15
OUTCOME MEASURES NOT MEETING STATE/NATIONAL STANDARDS	PAGE 16
OTHER OUTCOME MEASURES MEETING STATE/NATIONAL STANDARDS	PAGE 20
STATE AND FEDERALLY MANDATED CHILD WELFARE/PROBATION INITIATIVES	PAGE 20
FIVE-YEAR SIP CHART	PAGE 22

SIP Progress Narrative

INTRODUCTION

Amador County's 3-year System Improvement Plan (SIP) was approved by the County's Board of Supervisors on March 8, 2011. Child Protective Services (CPS) and Juvenile Probation, along with community partners, have been working together to improve the county's child welfare outcomes. The SIP specifically focused on increasing placement stability, decreasing the number of children who reenter foster care, and increasing the use of relatives as out of home placement caregivers. There has been success in several areas, but there have also been some barriers requiring changes to timeframes and shifts in strategies.

As discussed in the county's 2012 update, the economic climate has had a significant impact on child welfare services in Amador County. Staff reductions occurred in both Social Services and Probation. Employees were furloughed with the workweek reduced from 40 to 36 hours resulting in office closure on Fridays. These reductions stretched the remaining staff, making improvements in compliance difficult to sustain and limiting the ability to implement strategies. Community partners were also impacted by this economic climate, resulting in the reduction of services available to families.

Furloughs ended in mid-2012. Social Worker positions previously left vacant have begun to be filled. However, over the last six to nine months, multiple CPS staff members were on medical leaves, leaving the remaining social workers once again struggling and requiring new, inexperienced staff to take on caseload responsibilities at a rapid pace. The unit continues to be without a Social Worker Supervisor with the Program Manager filling the role of both positions. At this time, Juvenile Probation is fully staffed.

Also noted in the 2012 update were the significant leadership changes that occurred since 2010 in Social Services. The current Social Services Director, James Foley, has been in his position since February 2012. On-going stability in leadership is anticipated. Mr. Foley's role has expanded to Director of Health and Human Services. This creates an opportunity for greater understanding, collaboration, and cooperation between agencies.

STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

Implementation and monitoring of Amador County's System Improvement Plan (SIP) has been carried out through the collaboration of numerous partners, including periodic oversight and input from the Children's Services Outcomes and Accountability Bureau. The efforts guided by the SIP have clearly expanded community partner understanding of the outcomes Amador County Child Welfare Services is striving to achieve. It has become evident that this understanding and knowledge was critical for the development of a collaborative approach and future success.

Staff from Child Protective Services and Juvenile Probation have worked closely with partners from Amador County Mental Health, Amador County Alcohol and Drug Services, Amador County Public Health, the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency, and the school district. Representatives from these agencies have taken the lead in monitoring outcomes, strategies, and action steps through a multi-disciplinary team approach.

In addition, placement stability and the reduction of reentry into foster care have become topics of discussion in several of the existing collaborative efforts in Amador County. For example:

- Foster Family Agency staff, foster parents, and the Foster/Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program staff continue to work toward improved placement stability and recruitment of local foster parents with annual reviews of the ongoing training and support offered to foster parents and relative caregivers. Recently, First 5 Amador, the Amador County Child Abuse Prevention Council, and The Resource Connection have joined these efforts.

- During Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS) and Intensive Rehabilitation Services team meetings, mental health professionals, youth, parents, foster parents, and Social Workers work together to stabilize placements and to assist families through the transition to lower levels of care and permanent returns home.

- Positive and supportive youth activities have expanded significantly in Amador County, particularly through the work of the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency, Operation Care, and the Amador County Recreation Agency. Efforts are being made to keep service agencies informed of these opportunities in order to link at risk youth, their parents, and their foster parents with positive opportunities and mentors. Presentations have been made to the multi-disciplinary team to keep members informed of the activities. When the team identifies a youth at risk of placement change or reentry into foster care, a referral to one of these agencies is considered.

- Tribal involvement is sought as needed. Members of the Kenu Me-Wu agency and Tribal TANF participate in the county's Domestic Violence Prevention Council alongside staff from Child Protective Services and Probation.

- Parent and youth involvement remains an area needing improvement. Progress, however, is being made in this area in regards to the county's Mental Health Services Act funded programs and monitoring. Also, parents and caregivers have been invited to participate in multi-disciplinary team meetings for the purposes of prevention, stabilization of placements, removal of barriers to access to services, and establishment of a permanent return home. It is anticipated that the implementation of the requirements resulting from the *Katie A.* lawsuit will further expand input from families and children.

- The Amador County Child Abuse Prevention Council and First 5 Amador take an active role in prevention services, education in the community, and advocacy for improved practices. They remain active in many collaborative efforts.

- Membership in the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Commission includes Child Protective Services, Probation, various community agencies, community members, and the Court. The local Foster Family Agencies have given a presentation to the Commission regarding placement challenges and foster parent recruitment.

Throughout the time remaining in this plan, it is anticipated that these entities will continue to monitor and to support Amador County's child welfare services and the efforts being made to improve outcomes.

CURRENT PERFORMANCE TOWARDS SIP IMPROVEMENT GOALS

Amador County's System Improvement Plan focuses on improvement in three areas:

1. Reducing reentry into foster care after reunification
2. Increasing placement stability
3. Increasing the use of relatives as caregivers for children in out of home placements

Below is an analysis of progress made to this point in each of these areas including data from the Center for Social Services Research (CSSR). The analysis identifies obstacles, systemic issues, and environmental conditions that may be contributing to outcome improvement or decline as well as a look at how effective strategies have been at achieving progress.

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: C1.4 Reentry Following Reunification:

Child Protective Services

Of the children exiting foster care to reunification during the selected 12 month period, what percent re-entered foster care less than 12 months from the date of discharge?

Amador County's System Improvement Plan states that for Q2 2010, 20% (or 4 out of 20 children) of children had reentered foster care.

National Standard: 9.9%

Current Performance: 13.6% or three out of 22 children (8 days or more)
(CSSR UC Berkeley Data Report, Q1 2013, April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012)

Target Improvement Goal: The goal is to meet the national standard.

Current performance shows improvement, although the target goal was not met during the selected time period.

The three children who reentered during this timeframe included a sibling group of two. These children were initially placed when their parents were arrested, and the relatives the parents selected to care for the children in their absence were not yet available to assume responsibility of the children. The parents' arrest did not involve child abuse or neglect. CPS placed the children in foster care as a voluntary placement for five days until the relatives became available. No case was opened and no petition was filed with the court. The children were subsequently detained approximately eight months later following substantiated allegations of abuse.

The other reentry involved a minor who was returned to her parents November 10, 2011 after court ordered family reunification and family maintenance services were provided. On November 7, 2012, just shy of one year later, law enforcement detained her again. CPS felt there was not an adequate basis to keep the minor in out of home placement. No petition was filed, and the minor was returned to her parents within two days.

Both of these cases involved situations in which there was no basis for juvenile court intervention. Also, both involved placements that were brief (2-5 days).

While the goal was not obtained during the selected time period, the County did reach the goal since the implementation of this system improvement plan for Q 2 (0 children reentered), Q3 (0 children reentered), and Q4 (3% or one child reentered) of 2012. Due to the small population of Amador County, in order to meet the national standard, typically no more than two children can experience reentry into foster care each quarter.

It is felt that the family reunification transition meetings implemented over the course of the improvement plan have played a significant role in reducing reentry. These meetings engage the family members and the Social Workers in a focused conversation

while creating the family maintenance case plan in advance of actual reunification. This is an opportunity for the Social Worker and the parents to have an honest discussion about the risk of reentry and its impact on the family so that they can work together to decrease that risk.

Timely utilization of the Structured Decision Making tools has improved, although some improvement is still needed. When the tool is completed timely, it is felt that the subsequent focus on critical safety and risk factors strengthens the Social Workers' recommendations to the Court and that returns home have become more gradual with a concise focus on the areas of concern that remain. It is hoped that with increased staffing, Social Workers will be able to complete these assessments in a timelier manner.

As a result of the SIP, the parenting education services provided by the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency (ATCAA) now utilize the Nurturing Parenting Program, an evidence based practice. This includes parenting instruction in the classroom setting as well as the home visitor/parent aide program. Most recently, the agency has expanded into supervised coaching, often utilized during family visits throughout the reunification process. This approach has given parents an opportunity to practice parenting techniques with their children while the trained coach is present to guide and to support.

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: C4.1 Placement Stability (8 days to 12 months in care):

Child Protective Services

Of all children in foster care during the selected 12 month period who were in care for at least 8 days but less than 12 months, what percent had two of fewer placements?

Amador County's System Improvement Plan states that for Q2 2010, 78.1% (or 25 out of 32 children) of children in care had two or fewer placements. Seven children experienced more than 2 placements.

National Standard: 86%

Current Performance: 81.3% or 26 out of 32 children (6 children experienced more than two placements)
(CSSR UC Berkeley Data Report, Q1 2013, April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013)

Target Improvement Goal: The goal is to meet the national standard.

Current performance shows an improvement in this area, although the target goal was not met during this reporting period.

Assessments of the Foster/Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program offerings have continued with annual meetings including FKCE staff, Child Protective Services and Juvenile Probation staff, Foster Family Agency Social Workers, foster parents, and relative caregivers. First 5 Amador, the Amador Child Abuse Prevention Council, and the Resource Connection (which provides, among other services, support groups for grandparents raising their grandchildren) have joined these meetings. As a result, the organizations are collaborating and pulling resources to bring workshops and trainings to the community to address parenting needs found relevant to foster parents and relative caregivers as well as all parents in the county. Attendance at the provided workshops has not been as high has hoped. Meeting times and locations have been modified in an effort to expand attendance. Reducing workshops to quarterly instead of monthly is also being considered.

The Amador County Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT), with the use of weekly meetings, continues to improve its efforts to identify possible placement disruptions and to access support and services to maintain placements. The team has decided to narrow its approach to the most at risk children to ensure that service needs are identified and accessed timely. Follow-up meetings are held to hold agencies and others involved accountable. Foster parents and Foster Family Agency Social Workers are invited to these meetings on a case by case basis to help the team better understand the placement needs. In September 2013, an individual from Sierra Children and Family Services was added to the team. This agency contracts with Amador County Mental Health to provide intensive therapeutic services to foster children and at risk children, including Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS).

Amador County primarily utilizes foster family agency certified homes. Amador County does not have a licensing unit. The communication between the CPS Social Workers, the Foster Family Agency Social Workers, and the foster parents can at times be complex and challenging. For instance, there have been situations in which foster parents are expressing to the Foster Family Agency Social Worker that they are struggling while providing care for a foster child, but the CPS Social Worker is unaware of the severity of the problem until 7 day notice is given to move the child, and it appears too late to salvage the placement. While it is believed that the Foster Family Agency staff is making concerted efforts to support the foster family, other resources which could be useful may be underutilized.

In response to this concern, the CPS Program Manager has once again provided the local Foster Family Agency Social Workers with a literature review that addresses

placement stability. In addition, the CPS Program Manager has shared this perspective with the Foster Family Agency Social Workers and has encouraged these Social Workers to maintain prompt contact with the CPS Social Workers should they observe that the foster family is struggling. The Foster Family Agency Social Workers have been reminded that they can request that foster children be discussed at a multi-disciplinary team meeting and that they and the foster parents can be invited so that timely services and support can be put in place.

The local Foster Family Agencies were recently asked to provide their input for this update. Staff from both agencies did not cite the problem identified above. Rather, they discussed delays in obtaining mental health services for foster youth and a lack of information about children's needs at the time of initial placement. While foster parent training needs were addressed throughout the course of the current improvement plan, this was cited by one of the agencies as an area still requiring improvement. One of the agencies discussed their efforts to actively recruit foster homes within the county in order to reduce the number of children placed in each home.

Issues related to communication between County and Foster Family Agency Social Workers and increasing information provided to foster parents at the time of placement are areas requiring further exploration. It is anticipated that the county's efforts to comply with the requirements of the *Katie A.* lawsuit will result in improvement to the quality and timeliness of mental health services for foster youth. In terms of the agencies feeling that foster parent training still needs to improve, efforts will be made at this time to engage the agencies and more foster parents in the training assessment process. Although invited, neither foster family agency was present at the most recent meeting.

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: 4B Least Restrictive Placement (Point in Time: Relative):

Child Protective Services

In Q2 2010 (April 1, 2010), Amador County Child Protective Services had 31.7% of children (13 out of 41 children) in out of home placement placed with a relative. The state performance for Q2 2010 was 32.6%.

Current Performance: 13.9% (5 out of 36 children) were placed with relatives.
(CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports, Q1, April 1, 2013)

Target Improvement Goal: The goal for Child Protective Services is to increase relative placements to 35%.

The target goal has not been met for Child Protective Services during the selected timeframe.

Increasing family finding efforts has been a challenge for CPS in large part due to the loss of staff. Family finding is a time consuming task. Families are asked to provide information regarding relatives prior to the Dispositional Hearing, and the relatives identified are located and contacted. It appears, though, that staff has been unable to explore much beyond the information initially provided by the family. An area of success includes that staff has been utilizing the program Accurint (Lexis Nexis) to locate family members, including absent parents.

There have been some challenges identified with the use of relatives as caregivers. For instance, Amador County is located in the rural foothills and often the identified extended family members live at a significant distance from the parents. The distance may not be considered conducive to the reunification process. It becomes a significant challenge, for example, to transport the children from the relative placement to family visits and family therapeutic services. Therefore, placement is often not made for this reason.

Secondly, Child Protective Services has had several relative placements fail over the last couple of years. A repeated issue is the relative not being protective of the child(ren) and allowing the parent ongoing access to the child(ren) in violation of the court's orders. These situations have led to placement changes for these children. Experiences such as these appear to cause the Social Workers and others involved to feel weary about relative placements.

Juvenile Probation

In Q2 2010 (April 1, 2010), Amador County Juvenile Probation had 0% of children (0 out of 5) in out of home placement placed with relatives.

Current Performance:
In Q1 2013, 1 out of 7 children (14%) who were wards of the Court was placed with a relative.

Target Improvement Goal:
The goal for Juvenile Probation is to increase relative placements by 25%.

The target goal has not been met by Juvenile Probation during the selected timeframe.

Placing children in foster care or group homes has been very rare in the last few years for Amador County Juvenile Probation. Juvenile Probation has been successful in increasing family finding efforts and has been able to acquire detailed family information early in their cases. Juvenile Probation Officers have been informally placing children with relatives with parental consent to avoid the need for formal out of home placement. The staff utilizes preventive resources and exhausts all alternatives before having to place a child in a foster or group home. The youth who are in foster or group homes are youth who did not have an appropriate relative available to them and/or required a higher level of care.

STRATEGIES STATUS

Strategy 1: Increase family engagement efforts.

The Social Workers and the CPS Program Manager have participated in Motivational Interviewing training. In addition, the staff has participated in multiple follow-up webinars. One-on-one coaching has not been implemented. Due to loss of staff, it has been a challenge for the Social Workers to invest time into the coaching process. CPS has hired new staff who will be participating in Motivational Interviewing training within their first two years of employment. Once this is completed, one-on-one coaching will be reconsidered for all staff.

The Social Workers have been holding reunification transition meetings with parents and children, when appropriate, prior to the children's return to the home. Sometimes, service providers are included in these discussions as well. During the meetings, the participants discuss needs and strengths and develop family maintenance case plans. The risk of reentry is discussed with the parents along with an explanation of the purpose of the case plan to reduce that risk.

For every status review hearing, the Social Workers are now documenting in their court reports how the case plans are developed, including the level of involvement by the family members.

Documentation of Family Engagement Efforts (FEE) in CWS/CMS (meaning the Social Workers properly code their contacts as "FEE") requires improvement. Safe Measures shows that for calendar year 2013, FEEs were documented in approximately 11.8% of the cases each month. An increase in staff should allow for more thorough and timely documentation in CWS/CMS. Staff will be retrained regarding this by December 31, 2013.

Strategy 2: Complete Structured Decision Making (SDM) reunification tools more than 65 days prior to recommending reunification of a family to the Court.

According to Safe Measures, the timely completion of the risk reassessment tool increased from May 2011 to December 2011. In May, 25% of the tools were completed timely. In December, 46% were completed timely. Calendar year 2013 has shown a significant drop in timeliness, averaging at about 12%. It is suspected that this is directly attributed to the loss of staff from September 2012 through July of this year. It appears that the tools are being utilized, but not consistently during the required timeframe. It should be noted that with the recent increase in staff, for the month of September 2013, 32.3% of the tools were completely timely. Re-training of staff regarding timely completion of this tool will occur by December 31, 2013.

Advanced SDM training was provided to the Social Workers and the Program Manager by the Northern Training Academy in May, June, and August 2012. New staff completed SDM training in October 2013.

Usage of Safe Measures by the Social Workers to monitor compliance has fluctuated during this report period. This is an area in which improvement could be beneficial. The Program Manager continues to utilize this tool.

Strategy 3: Identify, assess, and expand the use of home visitor services.

The plan included the use of a survey of community agencies to assess the availability of home visitor programs. The survey was completed in September 2010 by First 5 Amador along with the collaboration of multiple community partners.

A resource guide of home visitor services available in Amador County was completed and distributed in April 2011. Multiple community partners assisted with the creation of this guide. It was learned that referral processes for some of the programs needed clarification. The referral processes for the various home visitor programs were evaluated and modified as needed. Referral forms are included in the guide. First 5 Amador will be responsible for updating the guide.

It was learned that there are limited in-home services in this community. Most of the existing programs focus on child health and education needs. Very few focus on parenting/life/homemaking skills. Discussions have followed about how the various agencies can support one another and avoid duplication of services so as to better utilize funding sources.

The resource guide was distributed to the CPS Social Workers in April 2011. Some services were being underutilized, such as those provided by the Public Health Department and Head Start, but there now appears to be an increase in the use of these services. Staff and family members refer to the guide to determine if a home visiting program is appropriate and should be included in the case plan.

As previously state, the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency has recently expanded its home visitor program into supervised coaching, often utilized during family visits during the reunification process. This approach has given parents an opportunity to practice techniques learned in the classroom with their children while the trained coach is present to guide and to support.

Strategy 4: Recruit, train, support foster parents, relative caregivers, and non-related extended family members (NREFM) to minimize placement disruptions and to maintain children in their own community.

The goal to recruit, train, and certify four foster family agency homes within Amador County through target advertising and other outreach efforts has been met and exceeded. The efforts to certify homes within Amador County will continue. Many new foster parents are recruited by foster parents already certified. To increase recruitment, one local foster family agency will be doing presentations at local churches. The agencies also set up informational booths at various community events.

Foster parents in the community identified the need for a community resource list. An existing resource guide to provide to foster parents and relative/NREFM caregivers was located and is now being utilized by Foster Family Agencies, CPS Social Workers, and Juvenile Probation Officers at the time of placement.

Efforts have continued to assess current Foster-Kinship Care Education (FKCE) course offerings and continuing education opportunities provided by Foster Family Agencies. To lead into this process, the CPS Program Manager provided the Foster Family Agencies and the FKCE staff with the literature review compiled by the Northern Training Academy titled: "Placement Stability in Child Welfare Services: Issues, Concerns, Outcomes, and Future Direction" for their review. Initial meetings were subsequently held in April, May, and June 2011 to assess and to discuss the FKCE program and the continuing education opportunities provided by the Foster Family Agencies in Amador County. Meetings included the CPS Program Manager, the Juvenile Probation Supervisor, Foster Family Agency Social Workers, foster parents, relative/NREFM caregivers, and FKCE staff. The first meeting included an overview of Amador County's SIP and its focus on placement stability. Attendees were given an explanation about how their involvement in this process would be pivotal to improving Amador County's outcomes in this area.

Results of the meetings included: mandatory orientation for relative/NREFM caregivers now being provided by the FKCE program which developed the curriculum, implementation of an annual focus group of caregivers to assess training needs, implementation of bi-monthly support groups for caregivers, development of a list of trainings to cover over the course of the year, consideration of website resources for local foster parents, and improved communication between FKCE and foster family agencies.

Course offerings are modified based on the outcomes of the focus group meetings. This includes more advanced training addressing how to handle challenging child behaviors and emotional needs. For instance, a training was offered on November 30, 2011 titled "Dealing with Difficult Behaviors: The Effects of Early Trauma and Attachment Disruptions." The training was Teri Gelgood, LMFT who has close to 20 years of related experience.

The most recent annual meeting was held on July 15, 2013. Foster parents attended, but, unfortunately, there were no representatives from either local Foster Family Agency present. In light of their recent mention of concern regarding training for foster parents, efforts will be made to reengage agency staff. The literature review has been re-

circulated to the interested parties, including the foster family agencies. It is hoped that this served as a reminder that placement stability needs to remain a focus.

At the July meeting, workshop ideas were shared and the concept of foster parent mentors was discussed. A collaboration between FKCE, First 5 Amador, and The Resource Connection was formed to pull resources to expand the availability and increase the quality of trainings. Attendance at trainings offered by FKCE has remained smaller than desired. Different times and locations have been tried and staff has even offered to come to foster homes personally. It is hoped that the collaboration between these agencies will increase attendance.

Strategy 5: Implement family finding and other "diligent search" activities

The family finding strategies being utilized by other counties were explored. The Juvenile Unit Probation Supervisor had conversations with staff from surrounding counties to gather information about how they are improving their efforts. Information gathered included the utilization of an internet search program and sending letters to relatives identified during interviews with parents and children.

Family finding procedures have been developed and distributed to front line staff. Procedures include methods to obtain information about extended family members and what steps must be completed once family members have been identified and located. Methods include utilization of a questionnaire given to parents and other identified relatives as well as the utilization of the Lexis Nexis' search program called Accurint. Accurint has proven to be a useful tool to locate family members as well as to discover family members not already identified. Child welfare staff, including newly hired staff, has been trained on the family finding procedures, and the procedures have been implemented.

Family finding efforts are consistently being documented in Dispositional Hearing court reports. Documentation in CWS/CMS requires improvement. Re-training for staff will be provided by December 31, 2013.

Strategy 6: Utilize Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to identify possible placement disruptions and to access support and services to maintain placements.

In April 2011, the Multi-Disciplinary Team discussed membership. It was decided at that time not to expand the membership to include a foster parent representative and/or a foster family agency representative. It was agreed that these individuals would be invited on a case by case basis. This has been occurring as deemed appropriate by the team, particularly when there appears to be a risk of placement disruption. This allows the caregiver to express directly to the team and service providers how the child is doing and what he/she identifies as the foster family's needs to maintain the placement. Additional supports and services are identified and implemented. Follow-up meetings can be held to assure the caregivers that this support remains available to them and to assess the effectiveness of what has been put into place.

In April 2011, the team also discussed adding additional service providers. At that time, it was decided not to add any new members but it was agreed that the issue could be revisited in the future. That being said, other service providers are being invited on a case by case basis.

While Amador County Mental Health and Amador County Alcohol and Drug Services have consistently participated in these team meetings, recently the Mental Health Program Manager and the Alcohol and Drug Services Supervisor have begun to attend. Their contributions have been significant as they are in the position to approve services and to influence their Departments' program implementation.

In September 2013, a representative from Sierra Children and Family Services was added to the team. This agency contracts with Amador County Mental Health to provide therapeutic services to foster children, including Therapeutic Behavioral Services.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

The majority of the strategies have been implemented. A barrier to implementation, however, has been the trying economic atmosphere experienced over the last few years. As stated previously, when the SIP went into effect, the county was experiencing furloughs with office closures every Friday for three years. In addition, multiple positions were lost in CPS and are only now slowly being filled. The workload for the current staff is tremendous, and this makes timely completion of work a daily struggle. The community partners were also impacted, making it difficult for them to sustain and to expand programs. The economic climate appears to be improving, and it is anticipated that the county will be able to implement each strategy.

OTHER SUCCESSES/PROMISING PRACTICES

During this SIP process, several successes have been encountered, including the following:

One of the greatest successes during this past year has been the multi-disciplinary team's participation in the Multi-Disciplinary Collaborative Leadership Institute facilitated by the Northern California Training Academy. This activity has supported and enhanced dialogue between agencies regarding outcomes and strategies during the weekly multi-disciplinary team meetings. Specifically, there has been an increased focus on placement stability, reducing reentry into foster care, and child abuse and delinquency prevention. Also, critical leaders have been added to the team. Procedures followed during the meetings are also improving to keep the participants focused on the meetings' purpose. The use of data as a tool for the team to assess the system's needs and progress is growing.

Secondly, Juvenile Probation has established a truancy prevention program with the school district in order to address truancy issues more aggressively. Efforts are being made to intervene with preventative strategies in an attempt to prevent youth from entering the juvenile delinquency court system.

Juvenile Probation is also successfully pursuing adoption for a ward of the court. This youth has been involved in both CPS and Probation cases. After successfully completing a group home program, she returned to her former foster parents who are in the process of adopting her. This is the first time that Probation in Amador County has pursued adoption in a case.

Lastly, as mentioned previously, the SIP led to the utilization of the evidence based Nurturing Parenting Program for parent education services, including classroom and home visitor services, provided by the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency (ATCAA). The program utilizes the Adult Adolescent Parenting Inventory (AAPI) to evaluate the parenting program's effectiveness. ATCAA also utilizes the Nurturing Skills Competency Scale (NSCS) to assess the knowledge and use of nurturing parenting concepts, practices, and strategies. According to the county's 2011/2012 OCAP Report Overview, the AAPI indicated that families who participated in ATCAA's classes showed gains in the following constructs: Expectations of Children; Parental Empathy toward Children's Needs; Use of Corporal Punishment; Parent-Child Family Roles; and Children's Power and Independence. The NSCS has indicated that the parents who participated in ATCAA parenting education classes with initial or pre responses that were detrimental or directly contributed to higher levels of stress, individual harm, or family dysfunction gained assets that contribute to healthy individual and family functioning. Similar outcomes were determined with the home visitor program.

The assessment of the parents' understanding, knowledge, and skills by the instructors is shared with the family, the Social Worker, and the Court. The concise analysis pinpoints areas of success and areas requiring additional support and training.

The success of this program is encouraging the exploration of the utilization of evidence based practices within other agencies and programs in the county. It is anticipated that this will be considered during the County's next self-assessment and System Improvement Plan.

OUTCOME MEASURES NOT MEETING STATE/NATIONAL STANDARDS

Below is an analysis of the outcomes not meeting standards during the reporting period and not otherwise discussed above.

S1.1 No Recurrence of Maltreatment

Of all children who were victims of a substantiated maltreatment allegation during the selected six-month period, what percent were <u>not</u> victims of another substantiated allegation within the following six months?

April 1, 2012 to September 30, 2012
(Q 1 2013, CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports)

Amador County:	90% (3 children were victims of another substantiated allegation within six months)
National Standard/Goal:	94.6%

From July 1, 2009 through September 30, 2011, Amador County stayed above the national standard. As stated above, during the most recent reporting period, 3 children were victims of another substantiated allegation within six months.

A review of the specific cases does not appear to indicate a pattern of systemic issues to address. However, as can be seen below, decisions made regarding how information was entered into the CWS/CMS computer system did affect the data. If the information had been entered differently, Amador County would have met the national standard/goal.

Child #1: The first referral substantiated emotional abuse of the child by both parents. The second referral substantiated emotional abuse by the father. These referrals were opened just days apart and investigated simultaneously. Cases were opened for this child and this child's sibling.

Child #2: The first and subsequent referral both substantiated caretaker absence/incapacity by the mother. These referrals were received one month apart and both involved an out of control teenager who the mother refused to allow to return home. The first referral resulted in the minor being voluntarily placed by the mother. The minor ran away from placement. Once located, the mother allowed the minor to return to the home and voluntary services were initiated. The subsequent referral, received one month later, included information that the minor was using drugs and had brought a razor and a lighter to school. The minor was detained when law enforcement was unable to contact the mother. The minor was placed in a group home and was transferred to Juvenile Probation and made a ward of the court.

Child #3: The first referral substantiated caretaker absence and general neglect. Amador County obtained a protective custody warrant for the child who could not be located. The mother's county of residence was contacted when information was received that the minor might be with her there. That county entered a referral with this information, located the minor, and the protective custody warrant was served. It could be argued that this second referral did not need to be entered as a referral but could have been entered as contact information in the open case.

C1.1 Reunification Within 12 Months (Exit Cohort)

Of all children exiting foster care to reunification during the selected 12-month period, what percent were reunified in less than 12 months from the date of their latest removal from the home?

April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013
(Q1 2013, CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports)

Amador County: 45.5% (5 children reunified in less than 12 months; 6 children reunified in 12 months or more)
National Standard/Goal: 75.2%

AND

C1.2 Median Time To Reunification (Exit Cohort)

April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013
(Q1 2013, CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports)

Amador County: 12.5 months
National Standard/Goal: 5.4 months

These outcomes show Amador County significantly below the national standard. It is suspected that in the county's efforts to avoid reentry into foster care, reunification has become a longer process with gradual returns home. In addition, Amador County is striving to remove children from parental custody only when absolutely necessary. Caseloads include parents with severe mental health issues and long term drug addictions, which are challenging to overcome in a short period of time. It is anticipated that the county's next SIP may address an examination of the services being provided to these parents and the implementation of evidence based practices.

It is interesting to look at the correlation between length of time to reunify and reentry rates over time. In the years in which Amador County reunified the majority of children in less than 12 months (2007 and 2009), reentry rates were higher than the other years. It appears that there is a delicate balance between timely reunification and reducing reentry into foster care.

Calendar Year	Reunified in less than 12 months (Exit Cohort) %	Reunified in less than 12 months (Exit Cohort) #	Reentry into foster care (Exit Cohort) %	Reentry into foster care (Exit Cohort) #
2011	58.8	10	0%	0
2010	50.0	9	11.8	2
2009	75.0	12	31.3	5

2008	70.6	12	5.9	1
2007	82.6	19	13.0	3

C4.3 Placement Stability (At Least 24 Months): Two or fewer placement settings

April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013
(Q1 2013, CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports)

Amador County: 0% (5 children with 2 or more placements)
National Standard/Goal: 41.8%

These five children include two who have been in group home placements due to severe mental health needs. Both have had a total of seven placements. One recently had a failed adoptive placement and has since been returned to a group home. The other has a parent who recently successfully petitioned the court for an additional six months of family reunification services. This parent has remained actively involved in his child's treatment, and it is anticipated that the family will reunify.

Two of the five children are siblings who had four placements. One was a failed placement with a relative. The fourth placement became the siblings' adoptive home.

The remaining child of the five had a total of three placements. Placement changes were due to her challenging behavior as a child with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder. This child's third and final placement was with her adoptive home.

These were difficult to place children. Efforts are being made to improve foster parent training and to increase timely access to quality mental health services.

2B Timely Response – 10 day

Quarter 1 2013 (CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports)

Amador County: 82.8%
State Standard/Goal: 90.0%

Prior to September 2012, this was an area in which Amador County consistently met the standard. From September 2012 until February 2013, the county fell below the standard, and it is believed that this is a direct result of the loss of multiple staff members due to medical leaves. Since February, staff has returned and new staff has been hired, and the county has exceeded the standard. For instance, for the time period of April 1, 2013 through June 30, 2013, Amador County was at 93.1% which exceeds the

state goal. It is anticipated that Amador County will once again consistently meet the standard.

Other Outcome Measures Meeting State and/or National Standards

Amador County met or exceeded the national standards/goals in the following outcome measures (2013 Quarter 1, CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports):

S2.1 No Maltreatment in Foster Care
C1.3 Reunification Within 12 Months (Entry Cohort)
C2.1 Adoption Within 24 Months (Exit Cohort)
C2.2 Median Time to Adoption (Exit Cohort)
C2.3 Adoption Within 12 Months (17 Months in Care)
C2.4 Legally Free Within 6 Months (17 Months in Care)
C2.5 Adoption Within 12 Months (Legally Free)
C3.1 Exits To Permanency (24 Months in Care)
C3.2 Exits to Permanency (Legally Free at Exit)
C3.3 In Care 3 Years or Longer (Emancipated/Age 18)
C4.2 Placement Stability (12 to 24 Months in Care)
2B Timely Response – Immediate
2C Timely Social Worker Visits

State and Federally Mandated Child Welfare/Probation Initiatives

Amador County has fully implemented the Fostering Connections After 18 Program. As youth aged out of foster care, many were found to have no permanent connections. They struggle with establishing a social network, accessing medical and health care, obtaining employment, and completing educational goals. The program allows youth to remain in foster care to continue to receive support. Amador County currently has six youth taking advantage of this opportunity. County staff is working closely with the Independent Living Program to assist these youth in reaching independence. Child Protective Services, Juvenile Probation, and the Court have revised the county's 241.1 protocol to indicate that transition jurisdiction youth from the Probation Department will be supervised by Child Protective Services once the conditions of probation have been met.

Amador County is also actively working toward implementation of the requirements which resulted from the *Katie A. v Bonta* lawsuit. The CPS Social Workers have begun

utilizing mental health screening tools, and assessments now include the use of CANS, Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Comprehensive Multisystem Assessment. A team approach is being used, and services are being modified to improve the county's mental health services for children. The County is working toward improving accountability with the use of outcome-based performance measures and the sharing of data between agencies.

Amador County's SIP contributes to the achievement of the State of California's Program Improvement Plan (PIP). The PIP outlines evidence based strategies to bring about change in the child welfare system.

Strategy 1, expand use of participatory case planning strategies, is supported by Amador County's implementation of reunification transition meetings, family engagement efforts, and the use of motivational interviewing skills when working with families. Families actively participate in identifying their strengths and resources. The increased collaboration by foster parents and service providers has allowed for their direct input into critical decision-making and the development of strategies to support a family's success. According to the PIP, "research indicates that increased levels of family and community involvement are related to lower foster care re-entry rates (Littell & Tajima, 2000; The Results Group, 2008)."

Strategy 2 in the PIP is identified as sustain and enhance permanency efforts across the life of the case. This strategy addresses the importance of relative placements and states that "research shows that children's outcomes are improved for those placed into relative care (Hartnett et al., 1999)." Amador County has made efforts to increase family finding efforts, not only for placement resources but for added support for the child and the family.

Strategy 3 is titled enhance and expand caregiver recruitment, training, and support efforts. Amador County's SIP addresses this component while striving to increase placement stability. Active efforts have been made to enhance the training provided to foster parents and relative caregivers. Input was directly provided by foster parents and relative caregivers during this process. Collaborations between community partners are developing in order to expand the training and support available. The local foster family agencies have been working diligently to recruit new foster homes within the community. It is hoped that the additional placement options will decrease the number of placements in each home and subsequently reduce caregiver stress.

Amador County's SIP focused on increased usage of the Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment tools. This directly links into the PIP's Strategy 6, strengthen implementation of the statewide safety, risk, and needs assessment system. Also, the county's family engagement efforts have expanded family involvement in discussions related to safety and risk.

SIP CHART

Amador County's SIP included specific strategies and action steps to be followed in an effort to reach the target goals in each area. Following is an update regarding progress made with each specific strategy.

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: **C1.4 Reentry Following Reunification** **National Standard: 9.9%** **Current Performance: 13.6% or 3 out of 22 children (8 days or more)** (CSSR UC Berkeley Data Report, Q1 2013, April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2012) **Target Improvement Goal:** The goal is to meet the national standard. The target goal was not met during the selected time period.
Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: **C4.1 Placement Stability (8 days to 12 months in care)** **National Standard: 86%** **Current Performance: 81.3% or 26 out of 32 children (6 children experienced more than two placements)** (CSSR UC Berkeley Data Report, April 1, 2012 to March 31, 2013) **Target Improvement Goal:** The goal is to meet the national standard. Current performance shows an improvement in this area, although the target goal was not met during this reporting period.
Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: **4B Least Restrictive Placement (Point in Time: Relative)** **Child Protective Services** **Current Performance: 13.9% (5 out of 36 children) were placed with relatives.** (CSSR UC Berkeley Data Reports, Q 1 2013, April 1, 2013) **Target Improvement Goal:** The goal for Child Protective Services is to increase relative placements to 35%. The target goal has not been met for Child Protective Services during the selected timeframe. **Juvenile Probation** **Current Performance: In Q1 2013, 1 child out of 7 children (14%) was placed with a relative.** **Target Improvement Goal:** The goal for Juvenile Probation is to increase relative placements by 25%. The goal has not been met.

Strategy 1 Increase family engagement efforts.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C1.4 Reentry Following Reunification

ACTION STEPS	TIMEFRAME	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
1.1 **CPS Social Workers will participate in training and coaching to enhance Motivational Interviewing Skills.**	*Completed other than one on one coaching.*	CPS Social Workers, CPS Program Manager, Northern California Training Academy.
1.2 **CPS Social Workers will hold reunification transition meetings with parents and children, when appropriate, at least one month prior to the child's return home to identify needs and strengths and to develop family maintenance case plans.**	Beginning June 2011 and ongoing. *Completed and on-going.*	CPS Social Workers, oversight provided by Program Manager
1.3 **CPS Social Workers will document reunification transition meetings in CWS/CMS case contacts, indicating that this is a family engagement effort, and in court reports indicating how the case plan was developed.**	Beginning June 2011 and ongoing *Completed and In progress.*	CPS Social Workers, oversight provided by Program Manager

Strategy 2 Complete Structured Decision Making (SDM) Reunification tools no more than 65 days prior to recommending reunification of a family to court.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C1.4 Reentry Following Reunification

ACTION STEPS	TIMEFRAME	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
2.1 **Social Workers will complete the Reunification Reassessment tool no more than 65 days prior to recommending reunification of the family.**	By June 30, 2014, compliance will be 90%. *In progress.*	CPS Social Workers
2.2 **Social Workers will monitor compliance with the use of Safe Measures at least once a week.**	On-going. *In progress*	CPS Social Workers
2.3 **Program Manager will monitor compliance with the use of Safe Measures at least once each week.**	Completed and on-going.	CPS Program Manager

Strategy 3 Identify, assess, and expand the use of home visitor	☒ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C1.4 Reentry Following Reunification

services.	☐	N/A	
ACTION STEPS		**TIMEFRAME**	**PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE**
3.1 **Survey community agencies to assess availability of home visitor programs.**		*Completed.*	First 5 Amador, community partners
3.2 **Compile resource guide of available home visitor services. Identify gaps in services.**		Complete by April 30, 2011. *Completed.*	First 5 Amador, community partners
3.3 **Distribute resource guide to CPS Social Workers and review. Evaluate current level of use of each of the available home visitor programs and any barriers to accessing these services.**		Complete by July 31, 2011. *Completed.*	CPS Program Manager, CPS Social Workers
3.4 **Develop referral processes, including referral forms, when necessary, for CPS Social Workers to utilize in order to expand use of home visitor services.**		Complete by November 30, 2011. *Completed.*	CPS Program Manager, community partners
3.5 **Incorporate home visitor services into Family Maintenance**		*Completed and*	CPS Social Workers, CPS Program Manager to provide oversight

case plans where appropriate.	*ongoing.*	

Strategy 4 Recruit, train, support foster parents, relative caregivers, and non-related extended family members (NREFM) to minimize placement disruptions and to maintain children in their own community.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C4.1 Placement Stability (8 days to 12 months in care) 4B Least Restrictive Placement (Point in Time: Relative)

ACTION STEPS	TIMEFRAME	PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE
4.1 **Recruit, train, and certify four foster family agency homes within Amador County through target advertising and other outreach efforts.**	Recruitment to begin April 1, 2011, and complete by April 1, 2013. *Completed and ongoing.*	Foster Family Agency staff
4.2 **Develop community resource guide or access existing resource guide for foster parents and relative/NREFM caregivers to be given to caregivers at the time of placement and/or certification.**	Complete by September 1, 2011. *Completed.*	Foster Family Agency staff, Foster-Kinship Care Education (FKCE) Program, CPS Program Manager, Juvenile Probation Supervisor, community partners
4.3	First assessment	FKCE staff, CPS Program Manager, Juvenile

Assess current Foster-Kinship Care Education (FKCE) course offerings and continuing education opportunities provided by Foster Family Agencies with the possible use of a survey to foster parents and relative caregivers to identify supportive course topics. Explore availability of web-based trainings. Take into consideration that relatives and foster parents caring for Juvenile Probation youth may have needs different from those providing care for CPS children.	completed by December 31, 2011, followed by annual assessments. *Completed and ongoing.*	Probation Supervisor, CPS Social Workers, Juvenile Probation Officers, Foster Family Agency staff, foster parents and relative/NREFM caregivers
4.4 **Modify course offerings according to assessment.**	*Completed.*	FKCE staff, CPS Program Manager, Juvenile Probation Supervisor, Foster Family Agency staff, foster parents and relative/NREFM caregivers

Strategy 5 Implement Family Finding and other "diligent search" activities.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C4.1 Placement Stability (8 days to 12 months in care) 4B Least Restrictive Placement (Point in Time: Relative)
ACTION STEPS	**TIMEFRAME**	**PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE**
5.1 **Explore family finding strategies being utilized by other counties.**	Complete by June 30, 2011. *Completed.*	CPS Program Manager, Juvenile Probation Supervisor

5.2 **Develop family finding protocol for CPS and Juvenile Probation staff to utilize at the front end of cases. Consider utilizing support staff to assist with searches.**	Complete by December 31, 2011. *Completed.*	CPS Program Manager, Social Services Case Aide, Juvenile Probation Supervisor, Juvenile Probation Support Staff
5.3 **Provide training for CPS and Juvenile Probation Staff to implement family finding protocol.**	Completed by February 29, 2012. *Completed.*	CPS Program Manager, Juvenile Probation Supervisor
5.4 **Social Workers and Probation Officers will document family finding efforts and results in case records and in court reports.**	*In progress.*	CPS Social Workers, Juvenile Probation Officers, oversight provided by supervisory staff

Strategy 6 Utilize Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) meetings to identify possible placement disruptions and to access support and services to maintain placements.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A	**Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):** C4.1 Placement Stability (8 days to 12 months in care)
ACTION STEPS	**TIMEFRAME**	**PERSON(S) RESPONSIBLE**

6.1 **Consider expanding Multi-Disciplinary Team (MDT) membership to include a foster parent representative and/or a foster family agency representative.**	Complete by June 30, 2011. *Completed.*	Multi-Disciplinary Team members
6.2 **Consider expanding MDT membership to include additional service agencies.**	Complete by June 30, 2011. A staff person from the Amador-Tuolumne Community Action Agency was added to the team in September 2010 as a result of feedback received during the PQCR process. *Completed.*	Multi-Disciplinary Team members
6.3 **Invite foster parents, relative caretakers, NREFMs and foster family agency social workers to attend MDT meetings on a case by case basis when placement disruption appears possible.**	Beginning April 1, 2011, and on-going. *Completed and on-going.*	Multi-Disciplinary Team members

Data Source Cite for CCWS Outcomes System Summary Reports
Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Williams, D., Yee, H., Hightower, L., Lou, C., Peng, C., King, B., Henry, C.,& Lawson, J. (2013). *Child Welfare Services Reports for California*. Retrieved 8/4/2013, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: <http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare>

Data Source Cite for Safe Measures
Children's Research Center Safe Measures Data, Amador County CWS/CMS reports from Children's Research Center Website. URL: www.safemeasures.org/c