California – Child and Family Services Review Signature Sheet

For submittal of: CSA ☐ SIP ☐ Progress Report ☒

County	Merced
SIP Period Dates	March 1, 2011 to February 28, 2014
Outcome Data Period	Q2 13
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Human Services Agency
and Probation Department

System Improvement Plan

March 3, 2014

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Human Services Agency

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A. Introduction

Child Welfare Services (CWS)

The Merced County System Improvement Plan (SIP) was approved by the Board of Supervisors on June 28, 2011. The CWS plan drew on the knowledge and expertise of the community, findings of the Peer Quality Care Review (PQCR), the County Self-Assessment (CSA), guidance from the California Department of Social Services, and evidence based practice models to identify a plan to increase the capacity of Merced County to provide safety, permanency, and well-being to children. The planning process activities covered a 13-month time period that began with the PQCR in March 2010, included the CSA, and concluded with the development of the SIP in March through June, 2011. Community partners were included in each step of the process and information gathered in each step was carried forward into the planning and execution of the next.

After reviewing the information and conclusions from the PQCR and the CSA, CWS leadership, in consultation with community partners, identified three measures for focus in the SIP. Those measures are:

- C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months, Exit Cohort
- C2.2 Median Time to Adoption (more than 24 months), Exit Cohort
- 4.B Foster Care in Least Restrictive Settings

B. Stakeholder Participation

The Blue Ribbon Commission, Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), Merced County Placement Council, and Merced's Foster Family Agencies (FFAs) are actively involved in monitoring and implementation of County's SIP strategies and action steps. The Blue Ribbon Commission is apprised of progress at its monthly meetings. Merced County was selected by the AOC to receive training in family finding through the Seneca Center. Both AOC and Seneca Center are aware that placement in relative homes and faster adoptions are priorities for the county and are kept aware of our progress. CASA of Merced is actively involved in the family finding process. Through a contract with CWS, CASA has hired family finding specialists who are currently actively conducting family finding.

FFAs are kept apprised of progress in both adoptions and family placement measures through regular quarterly meetings with a Program Administrator. At this time, these meetings were temporarily suspended due to staffing changes in management, but they will be reinstated in January, 2014. Other stakeholders with which Merced County CWS meets regularly include:

- Merced County Probation
- Merced County Sheriff Office
- Family Resource Council
- Merced County Superior Courts
- Merced County Counsel

- Merced County Mental Health
- Merced County Drug and Alcohol
- Merced County Head Start
- Youth Representatives
- Parent Partner
- First 5 of Merced County
- Merced County Library
- California State University of Fresno
- Ace Overcomers
- Aspiranet

In regard to representation by the ethnic groups in Merced County, the county does not have a recognized Native American tribe. Merced has a majority-minority population with 54% of the population Hispanic. The organizations listed above have a diverse membership on their boards that is reflective of the ethnic make-up of the community.

C. Current Performance Towards SIP Improvement Goals

1. Merced County's current performance and discussion of obstacles, systemic issues, and environmental conditions that may be contributing to outcome improvement or decline.

C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months, Exit Cohort and C2.2 Median Time to Adoption, Exit Cohort

These two measures are discussed together because they are so closely related. At the time of the SIP, April 2011 quarterly report, Data Extract Q3 2010, Merced's rate of adoption within 24 months fell relative to the baseline, however, it was above the California average and the national goal. The SIP Team attributed this performance to changes in the configuration of the Adoption Team made prior to the SIP. However, given a history of inconsistent performance and the dramatic drop from the baseline period July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003, the SIP Team felt it important to continue the focus begun in the PQCR and ensure that the improvements represent a permanent change to practice and are not merely the result of a "Hawthorne effect" in which improvements are generated for no reason other than the attention focused on the process and the people.

At the time of the SIP, the data available on measure C2.1 and C2.2 were:

Goal	Baseline Merced	October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2010 Merced	October 1, 2009, to September 30, 2010 California	National Standard or Goal
C2.1	69.0%	37.2%	32.0%	36.6%
C2.2	18.0 months	27.4 months	30.7 months	27.3 months

[1]Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved April, 14, 2011], from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

The goal set for performance on measure C2.1 is to continue to meet or exceed the national goal of 36.6% for each of the five years of the SIP plan. The goal set for performance on measure C2.2 is to continue to be at or near the national goal of 27.3 months.

The table below shows Merced County's performance on the most recent data report, Q2, 2013. As of the most recent data report, Merced County is exceeding its goal on both of these measures.

Goal	Baseline Merced	July 1, 2012, to June 30, 2013	National Standard or Goal
C2.1	69.0%	60.0%	36.6%
C2.2	18 months	19.9 months	27.3 months

[1]Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved October 30, 2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare. Retrieved 11/26/13.

The positive progress on these goals is attributable to the implementation of plans developed for the SIP. Primary among the interventions was the increase in the number of social workers in the Adoptions Team. Currently the Adoptions Team is staffed with one supervisor, four social workers, and one social services program worker (SSPW). Performance on the measures has improved consistently and was not impacted by changes in supervisors. Management focus and attention on the importance of timely adoptions has been consistent, and the policy change to move the assignment of an adoption worker to an earlier stage of the case contributes to the reduced time to adoption. Building awareness among the FFAs of the importance of concurrent placements has also been important. Finally, the commitment of the Adoption Team has played a key role in the successful achievement of the goals for these two measures. The team has shown a keen interest in how it is performing on the measures and has pride in the outcomes. While the team's major concern has been and remains the children and the family, they understand and appreciate the importance of monitoring their data and promptly documenting case actions in Child Welfare Services/Case Management System (CWS/CMS).

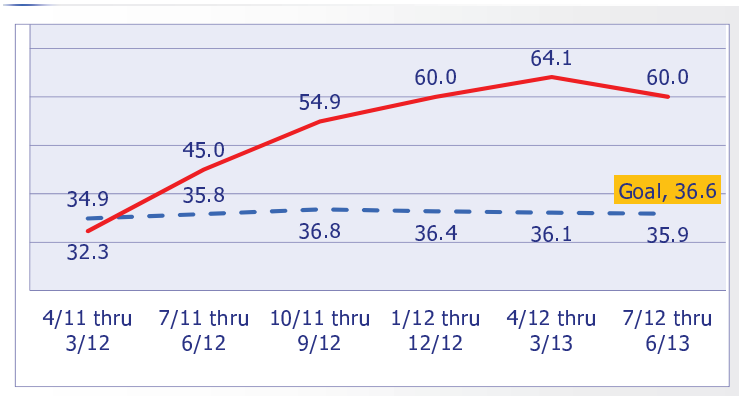
The number of adoptions in the county showed a considerable increase after implementation of the SIP strategies. However, in the third year of the SIP the total number of adoptions has decreased to 43. CWS leadership attributes this change to elimination of the backlog of adoption cases.

SafeMeasures	October 1, 2009 to September 30, 2010	October 1, 2010 to September 30, 2011	October 1, 2011 to September 30, 2012	October 1, 1012 to September 30, 2013
Total Adoptions	43	118	102	43

[2]Children's Research Center SafeMeasures® Data. Merced County, Full List, 1/01/10 to 12/31/10. Retrieved December 17, 2012 from Children's Research Center website. URL: https://www.safemeasures.org/ca/safemeasures.aspx. (Note: data varies slightly between Berkeley data and SafeMeasures for the same time period.)

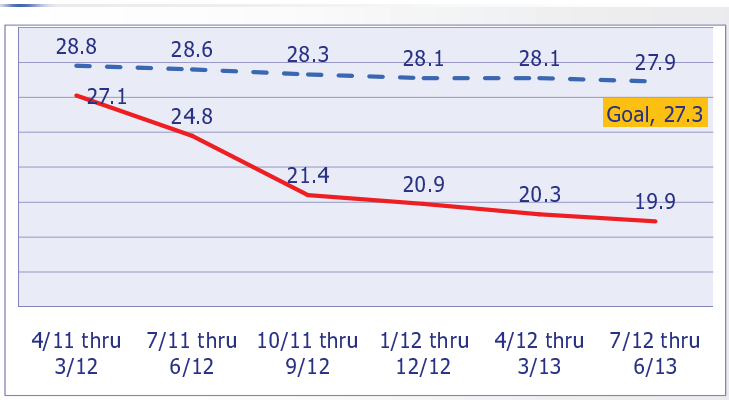
The tables below illustrate Merced County's performance in relation to the national standard.

C2.1 Adoption within 24 months (Exit Cohort) in Percent



Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

C2.2 Median Time to Adoption (Exit Cohort) in months



Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

D. Strategies Status

The status of all strategies and action steps scheduled to start and/or be completed within the past 12 months.

- Strategy 1.1 – Restructure the Adoptions Team to lower case loads.
  - Milestone A – *Restructure the work process for the Adoptions Team.*

    The Adoptions Team was reconfigured to raise the total number of social workers from two to five. In the last year, the Adoption Team has been reconfigured to four social workers and one social services program worker. This change is appropriate for the Adoptions Team's workload which has decreased with the elimination of the backlog of adoption cases. Although not a part of the original plan, a new supervisor over the Adoptions Team brought a new focus and energy to the team. Since the implementation of the SIP, the Adoptions Team has had two supervisors, one of whom was promoted from within the team and both of whom carried on the enthusiasm for high standards. Prior to reorganization, several people were involved in each case, leading to a lack of clear responsibility. One social worker is now responsible for the management of the case, resulting in greater accountability. This milestone is complete.

  - Milestone B – *Identify changes to policy and procedure for revision and review.*

    The success of the work of the Adoptions Team has been in part due to the supervisors encouraging creativity and individual attention to each child's situation. CWS leadership feels the team can continue to operate using good social work practice, following contact and documentation requirements, and using supervisory oversight. CWS leadership proposes to drop Milestone B and redirect the resources it would require to other efforts.

  - Milestone C – *Provide training to staff on policy changes and best practices.*

    Changes in practice have been implemented through supervisor's direction and coaching, but no formal policy training has been conducted for social workers assigned to the Adoptions Team. See above. CWS leadership proposes to drop Milestone C.

- Strategy 1.2 – At the time of termination of family reunification, assign one Adoptions social worker to meet needs of entire case.

- Milestone A – *Review and revise policy and practice.*

  Practice has been implemented without formal written policy change. See above. CWS leadership does not see a need to create a formal policy since practice has been implemented. CWS leadership proposes to drop Milestone A.

- Milestone B – *Restructure work process to allow for assignment of adoptions social worker at termination of family reunification.*

  Practice has been implemented without formal policy change. Complete.

- Milestone C – *Implement policy.*

  Practice has been implemented without formal written policy change. Complete.

- Strategy 1.3 – Focus on permanency for all children entering care. One social worker and an office assistant have been assigned the family finding duties for CWS. Their focus is on each child that enters the CWS system. Social work staff continue to search for relatives using the limited tools available.

  - Milestone A – *Identify training topics and a trainer appropriate for both technical and motivational aspects of professional development.*

    Family Finding overview training was provided for the social workers, supervisors, and managers by AOC in conjunction with the Seneca Center. Due to the length and complexity of the in-depth training, Merced County adopted a train-the-trainer strategy. Three staff members were identified to participate in the training with Seneca Center and implement the procedures on selected cases. CASA and Probation staff also participated in the training. A barrier that has arisen is the complexity of the procedures and the amount of time required to implement the process for each case. The issue of time is being addressed through the contract with CASA which allows CASA to supply staff or volunteers to focus on family finding while the social worker attends to other aspects of the case. Additionally, after the first group of CASAs and social workers were trained, they worked on simplifying the steps to family finding. The process is being adapted to meet needs of the county. HSA recently approved a contract for CASA to obtain Lexus/Nexus software for searching for potential relatives. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *Schedule training for identified staff.*

    Family Finding training was provided by Seneca Center in July 2011. Complete.

- Milestone C – *Conduct training and follow-up on transfer of learning activities.*

  Training for family finding is complete for CASA and the initial group of social workers. Family finding is currently being conducted by CASA staff and volunteers. Complete.

Improvement Goal 2.0 – Maintain the median length of time for adoption at 27.3 months for each year of the five-year plan.

- Strategy 2.1 – Review all foster care cases for adoption possibility and concurrent planning.

  - Milestone A – *Include placement review in Case Conference Group (CCG) meetings and case conference reviews.*

    CCG form has been revised. Practice is implemented. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *All court reports will address permanency and concurrent planning.*

    Implemented in summer 2012. All children are assessed by an adoptions worker for permanency. Complete.

  - Milestone C – *Train staff on new procedures and implement.*

    Implemented. Complete.

- Strategy 2.2 – Increase the number of concurrent homes.

  - Milestone A – *Emergency Response (ER) staff will identify relatives as soon as case is opened and record in Relative Tracking Form in CWS/CMS.*

    Social workers update relative tracking form as needed. Relatives are documented in CWS/CMS. Supervisors monitor and review relative information prior to passing case to the court unit. Designated staff member attends the detention hearing and meets with available family members to gather information about other family members. Staff member conducts an Acurrint search to locate family members. Designating individual positions to conduct family finding is proving to be a better business process than assigning the task to all ER staff. The deputy and the program administrators will continue to evaluate the effectiveness of the current arrangement and consider whether the family finding responsibilities should be extended to additional positions. Complete.

- Milestone B – *Refer county foster homes for adoption study as soon as they are licensed.*

  County foster homes are referred to Promesa FFA as soon as licensed. The need for adoptive homes is emphasized in county foster home recruitment. Complete.

- Milestone C – *Identify FFA homes with a current adoption home study.*

  Complete.

- Strategy 2.3 – Increase the number of children in concurrent homes.

  - Milestone A – *Ensure each child under age five is in a concurrent home by disposition hearing.*

    Concurrent home is discussed at placement and at each CCG. Concurrent home status is documented in CCG forms and supervisors verify that a concurrent home has been identified before Disposition Hearing. Adoption possibility is addressed with family members when they come forward. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *Review permanence for each child in care during Performance Management Conference.*

    This milestone is complete.

  - Milestone C – *Review permanence for each child in care at case review and in court reports.*

    CCG form has been revised. Instructions for court reports are revised to address permanence. Case reviews now include reviewing current placement, concurrent planning, and relative searches. This milestone is complete.

Improvement Goal 3.0 – Support adoptive families in completing requirements for adoption finalization to occur.

- Strategy 3.1 – Partner with home study providers to support families.

  - Milestone A – *Articulate to staff and community partners, including home study providers, HSA's vision for supporting families through the adoption process.*

    We are now communicating monthly regarding status of each home study. If issues arise on an individual case, the adoptions supervisor initiates communication with the FFA. HSA's vision for supporting families through the adoption process has been articulated verbally in discussions and the regular meetings. Complete.

- Milestone B – *Develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with home study providers to articulate a shared vision.*

  The agreement with FFAs is that a home is not considered a concurrent home unless it has completed the adoption home study. MOU has been drafted and is under legal review. Extend due date to March 2014.

- Milestone C – *Evaluate progress and effectiveness in monthly meetings with home study providers.*

  Quarterly meetings have been determined to be sufficient. Complete.

- Strategy 3.2 – Seek feedback from families on perception of support with the adoption process.

  - Milestone A – *Develop interview tool for use with families to elicit their perceptions of the adoption process and the support they received during the process.*

    Given the success of the SIP interventions in reaching the goals set for adoptions, CWS Leadership has determined the resources required to carry our Milestones A, B, and C could be better directed toward other efforts. Rather than formal interviews and focus groups with both parents and social workers, CWS will conduct one feedback meeting with the Adoptions Team in February 2014. This feedback meeting will be an opportunity for the team to share best practices, suggestions for improvement, and personal reflections. It will be combined with a celebratory event such as a luncheon or reception.

  - Milestone B – *Schedule interviews or focus groups.*

    See above.

  - Milestone C – *Conduct interviews or focus groups.*

    See above.

- Strategy 3.3 – Seek feedback from social workers on perception of support with the adoption process.

  - Milestone A – *Develop interview tool for use with social workers to elicit their perceptions of the adoption process and the support they received during the process.*

    See above.

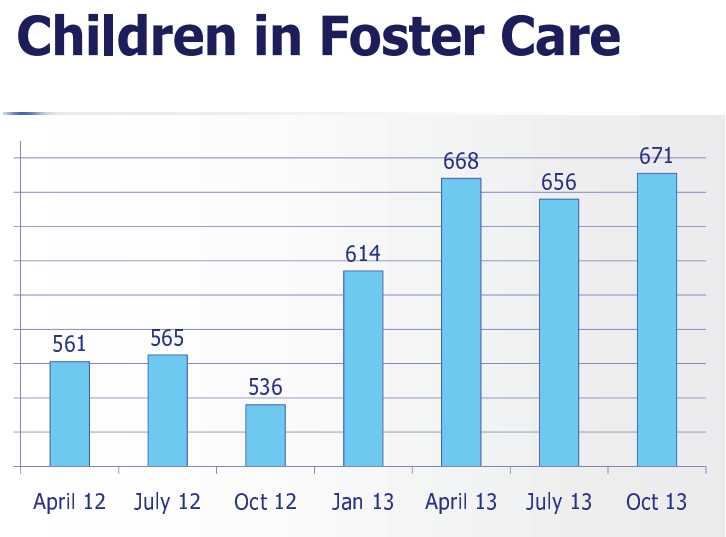
- Milestone B – *Schedule interviews or focus groups.*

  See above.

- Milestone C – *Conduct interviews or focus groups.*

  See above.

  Although not a formal part of the SIP plan, Merced County continues to closely monitor the number of children in foster care. In the fall of 2012, HSA initiated an aggressive mandated reporter outreach which included enclosing brochures in the pay check envelopes of all Merced County Office of Education personnel and providing thousands of wallet-sized plastic cards with mandated reporter information and the hot line number. The success of that campaign led to an increase in reports, substantiations, and detentions. Those changes are reflected in the rise in the number of children in foster care.



[2]Children's Research Center SafeMeasures® Data. Merced County, Full List. Retrieved November 15, 2012 from Children's Research Center website. URL: https://www.safemeasures.org/ca/safemeasures.aspx

E. Barriers to Implementation

1. Obstacles and barriers to **future** implementation.

   In regard to Measures C2.1 and C2.2, the greatest threat to maintaining the current level of performance is potential staff turnover. The Adoptions Team has had two new supervisors in the last year and a staff realignment which moved the Team to a new Program Administrator. Both of the new supervisors and the Program Administrator are experienced personnel well known to the team members. Continuity of purpose and the motivation and enthusiasm of the

team for their goals and mission have remained strong. HSA has only limited control over the filling of social worker vacancies and the replacing of social workers who leave can be impacted by county-wide human resource policies. When working below full staffing, priority must be given to answering the abuse and neglect reporting telephone lines and investigating allegations. In these circumstances, social workers can be taken off their adoption work assignments and reassigned to duties that are more urgent in terms of protecting children from risk.

Merced County recognizes that maintaining timeliness in adoptions is effective in reducing the caseload of foster care which results in savings of budget dollars and staff time. The county is committed to maintaining a staffing level and resources to keep the Adoptions Team performing at its current level of success.

2. Measure 4B: Foster Care in Least Restrictive Setting.

This measure reflects the percent of children placed in each type of foster care setting. It is measured at two points, entry and point-in-time (PIT). Merced County has historically had lower rates of family/relative placements at both measures than the average for the state of California. There is no national standard or goal for this measure. While there may be many environmental issues such as high rates of poverty, high rates of illegal drug use, and a large percentage of undocumented residents, Merced County desires to maintain the connections with their families for children and increase the percentage of initial and PIT placements with relatives. The tables below describe the placement data at the time of the SIP and the most recent quarter.

Initial Placement	SIP	July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013
Relative	7.4%	12.0%
Foster Home	10.0%	7.6%
FFA	77.2%	76.2%
Group/Shelter	1.3%	1.2%
Other	4.1%	2.9%

[1]Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

PIT Placement	SIP	July 1, 2013
Relative	20.5%	27.6%
Foster Home	5.0%	4.0%
FFA	52.0%	39.2%
Group/Shelter	4.5%	3.8%
Other	18.0%	25.5%

[1]Needell, B., Webster, D., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Dawson, W., Magruder, J., Exel, M., Glasser, T., Williams, D., Zimmerman, K., Simon, V., Putnam-Hornstein, E., Frerer, K., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Winn, A., Lou, C., & Peng, C. (2009). Child Welfare Services Reports for California. Retrieved November 15, 2012, from University of California at Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL: http://cssr.berkeley.edu/ucb_childwelfare

Merced County's percentage of initial relative placements (7.4% at the time of the SIP) is substantially lower than the California performance of 21.6%. In order to achieve an initial relative placement that equals the PIT placement and approaches the state average of 21.6 %, Merced County must increase the percentage by a factor of .4 in each of the first three years of the SIP cycle and maintain that achievement for the last two years of the five year cycle. The annual goals are expressed in the tables below.

Year	Relative Placements Initial
1	10.4%
2	14.5%
3	20.5%
4	20.5%
5	20.5%

Year	Relative Placements PIT
1	23.6%
2	27.1%
3	31.2%
4	31.2%
5	31.2%

Merced County's performance on initial placements does not meet the second year goal. The second year goal for initial placements was 14.5%, and the achievement as of Q3 12 was 12.9%. The third year goal was 20.5% and the achievement as of Q2 13 was 12.0%. The second year goal for PIT placements was 27.1% and the achievement was 27.4%. The third year goal was 31.2% and the achievement as of Q3 12 was 27.6%. Merced management interprets this data to mean that while our staff understands and appreciates the emphasis on relative placements, the time required to make the initial placement with family, combined with the less-than-full staffing, makes achieving the goals for initial and PIT placements challenging.

3. Progress on implementing strategies.

- Strategy 1.1 – Assign Social Worker positions to assist primary worker with emergency relatives by locating relatives.

  - Milestone A – *Identify staff positions to assist with locating relatives.*

    One SSPW and one office assistant are assigned to family finding and locating relatives. The SSPW goes to the detention hearings to contact the family and ask about extended family members. The SSPW conducts an Accurint search to locate relatives for possible placement. Although these contacts cannot always be made prior to placement, they are still useful and can be engaged if the child remains in placement. The case carrying social worker engages the child in conversation about potential relatives at detention and throughout the life of the case. The social workers continue to ask at every step in the case if there are relatives to consider for placement. Additionally, the CCG form has been modified to include whether we are discussing relative placement and/or concurrent placement.

    A social worker from Home Assessment Team (HAT) has been designated to do emergency approval process for family members or non-relative family members.

    CASA has a full-time person that has a desk at HSA and full access to CWS/CMS. A social worker is assigned as a Family Finding liaison and works with CASA and social workers to help identify family members. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *Train identified social workers and other staff on locating relatives using family finding methods.*

    Family finding training overview was provided for the social workers, supervisors, and managers by AOC in conjunction with the Seneca Center. Due to the length and complexity of the in-depth training, Merced County adopted a train-the-trainer strategy. Three staff members were identified to participate in the training with Seneca Center and implement the procedures on pilot cases. Although a train-the-trainer strategy was initially planned, CWS leadership determined that contracting with CASA to provide family finding was preferable to extending the training to more CWS staff. CASA has a contract with HSA and additional external grant funding for staff to participate in family finding. A simplified referral process has been developed to allow social workers to refer cases to CASA for family finding. Most referrals are coming from Permanent Placement and children that are assigned to CASA volunteers. The CASA family finding specialist has access to CWS/CMS and the Adoptions supervisor serves as liaison between CWS and CASA for family finding. Plans are underway to invite CASA family finders to speak at Supervisors' meeting, have CASA family finders present at individual team meetings, and finally develop training on the process.

- Milestone C – *Develop schedule and implement assignments.*

  Although the original intent at the time of the SIP was to train and assign CWS staff, contracting with CASA has proven to be a more effective strategy. Since CASA family finding staff are identified and assigned specifically to this work, this milestone is complete.

- Strategy 1.2 – Implement early identification of relatives by ER workers.
  - Milestone A – *Develop policy.*

    ER workers have been instructed in early identification of relatives in staff meetings. No formal policy has been developed. As of the time of the writing of this update, CWS leadership has learned that the state may be issuing policy changes that align the requirements for relative placements with the requirements for foster homes. Given the possibility of a major change in requirements, CWS leadership will delay this Milestone to October 2014 rather than spend staff time developing a policy which may quickly be outdated.

  - Milestone B – *Train workers on policy.*

    ER workers have received training on family finding and have implemented as best practice. No formal policy training has been provided. See above. This due date is moved to December 2014.

  - Milestone C – *Implement policy.*

    See above. This due date is moved to April 2015.

- Strategy 1.3 – Include family members in initial case conference.
  - Milestone A – *Identify any needed policy changes and revise if needed.*
  - Milestone B – *Train social workers on policy and best practices.*
  - Milestone C – *Implement policy.*

    These three milestones which were due in summer 2012 have not been achieved. Merced County CWS leadership recognizes and acknowledges the importance of including families in CCG meetings. However, an issue was identified with the level of comfort and expertise of the workers in presenting cases in CCG. Also, it was recognized that some supervisors were more effective than others in conducting the meetings. Leadership has addressed these concerns with training for social workers and supervisors, revision of the forms for preparing a CCG presentation, and designating permanent members for the CCG team. Training on how to effectively

participate in CCG was provided to social workers in 2013. CWS leadership anticipates that a hybrid family meeting process may be more appropriate than including the family in CCG. At this time, CWS has a preponderance of new staff who will need extensive training and experience before implementing a family meeting process. CWS leadership does not anticipate implementation prior to July 2015.

- Strategy 2.1 – Increase ability to certify relative homes for emergency placement.
  - Milestone A – *Train all staff on licensing rules and regulations for relative home approval.*

    Home Assessment Team (HAT) provided training for social workers on this process. Certifying a relative placement is being added to the in-house training curriculum that new social workers have to attend prior to being assigned a caseload. This milestone was completed ahead of schedule. In addition to all new social workers and current staff receiving training on emergency relative/non-relative extended family member (NREFM) placements, we also now have a Placement Specialist (an SSPW) who assists in completing emergency relative/NREFM placements and finds best matching foster homes for our children. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *Train home visitors on licensing rules and regulations for relative home approval.*

    Merced County's home visitors are now all contract staff and are not appropriate for conducting relative home approvals. While this milestone was not implemented, it is considered complete and will not be dated for future implementation.

  - Milestone C – *Develop rotational schedule and implement.*

    A step-by-step list of requirements for certifying a home for emergency placement has been developed and provided to social workers. If a social worker is recommending denying certification to a relative home, the denial must be approved at the Program Administrator level. HAT has provided training for social work staff on this process. See Milestone A above. While this milestone was not implemented, it is considered complete and will not be dated for future implementation.

- Strategy 2.2 – Review foster care placement for appropriateness to move to relative placement and/or concurrent placement.
  - Milestone A – *Develop criteria to identify children with potential to move to relative and/or concurrent placement.*

    Potential for relative placement reviewed in CCG. Complete.

- Milestone B – *Develop a schedule or review in coordination with regular case staffing.*

  Potential for relative placement reviewed in CCG. Complete.

- Milestone C – *Implement review schedule.*

  The desirability of relative and/or concurrent placement has become widely understood and embraced among the CWS staff in Merced. The question of a relative and/or concurrent placement is routinely reviewed in supervisor/worker conferences and CCG meetings. Developing a separate schedule for these reviews has not been required. Complete.

- Strategy 2.3 – Evaluate effectiveness of Strategies.

  - Milestone A – *Review quarterly reports.*

    Format developed and reports are reviewed by managers and supervisors quarterly. Reports are reviewed in supervisor's meetings with social workers when appropriate, and reports relating to their units are shared with individual supervisors. Complete.

  - Milestone B – *Review initial and PIT placements in social worker/supervisor conferences.* Complete.

    Supervisors are asking social workers about relative placement during case conferences. Complete.

  - Milestone C – Revise procedures, provide training, or offer other interventions as required if initial and PIT placements with relatives are not increasing.

    Relative placements are improving, although not as quickly as management wishes. However, management believes the major issue is staff turnover and the vacancy rate. Revision of procedures or additional training would not be helpful at this time. Complete.

In summary, the data shows progress was being made in placing children with relatives, both initially and at PIT in year one of the SIP but has leveled off in years two and three. While Merced County's performance on these measures is still below California, it is trending in the desired direction and one measure is exceeding the goals set for the second year. Merced's demographics will continue to be a factor in relative placement. Wide spread poverty, drug abuse, gang membership, and domestic violence means that finding a safe home among relatives can be challenging. The high percentage of undocumented residents means that some families cannot be certified because some members of the household have no identification to provide for required background checks. Anecdotal information indicates that some families are reluctant to give information about potential relative placements at the time of detention for a variety of

reasons including distrust of the Agency and a desire to keep relatives from knowing about the detention. Some parents are new to the area and have no relatives in the county. Although some environmental obstacles will always be present, Merced County will continue to work on the identified strategies, adjust as needed, and work towards continuing progress on achieving the goals.

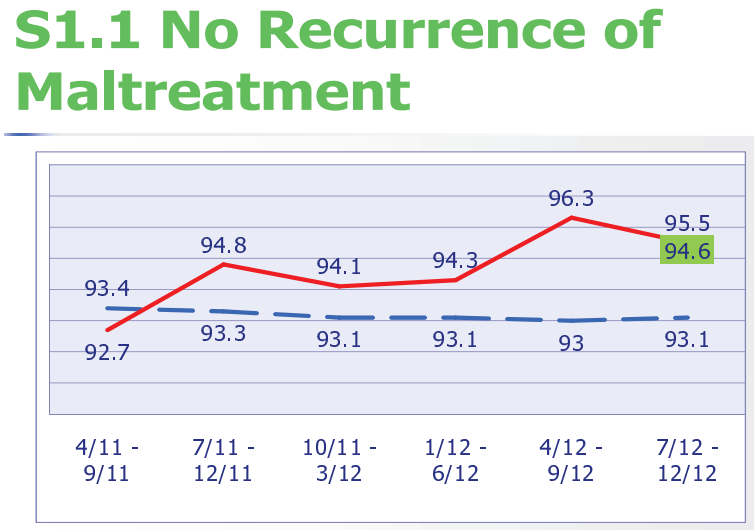
The reaction to the training provided by the Seneca Center is that the family finding process in its entirety is very time consuming and may require more resources than CWS has available. Reaching out to CASA with a contract for staffing for family finding is bridging this resource gap.

F. Other Successes/Promising Practices

Note: All measures in this section are taken from the website cited in the charts earlier sections of this report. The red line is Merced performance, the green rectangle is national standard or goal, and the blue dotted line is California average.

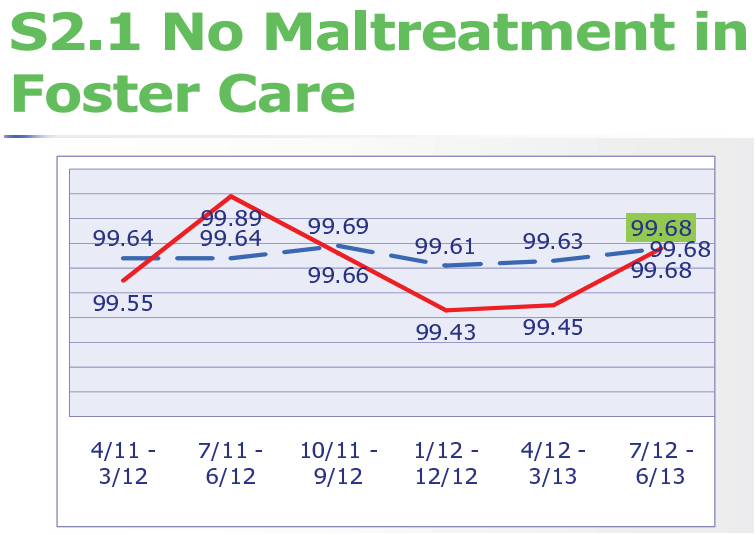
S1.1 No Recurrence of Maltreatment

Merced County exceeds the national goal/standard and the California average.



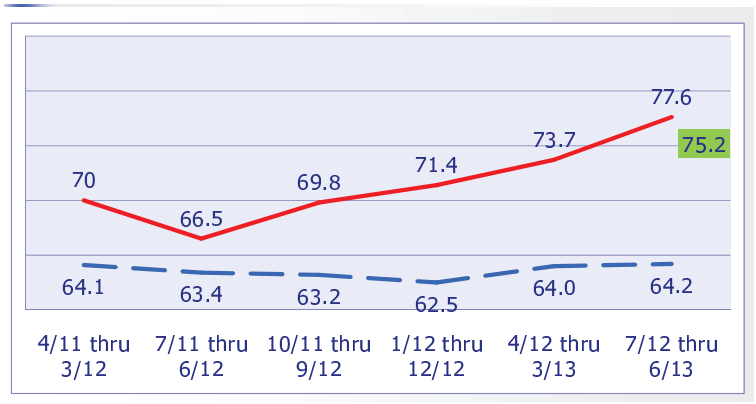
S2.1 No Maltreatment in Foster Care

Merced County is meeting the national goal/standard.



C1.1 Reunification within 12 Months, Exit Cohort

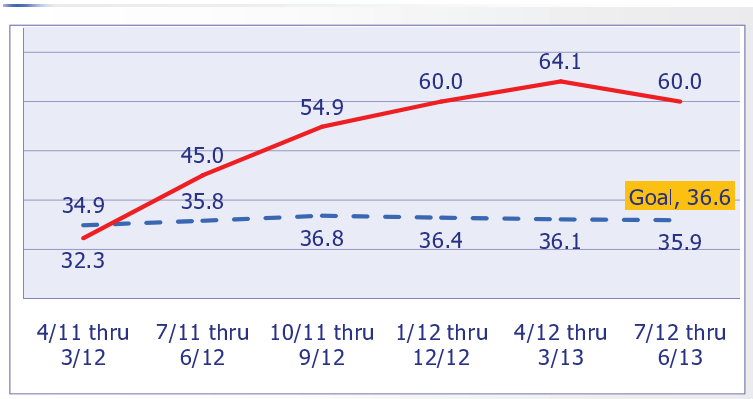
Merced County has been improving over the last 12 quarters and is exceeding the national standard/goal.



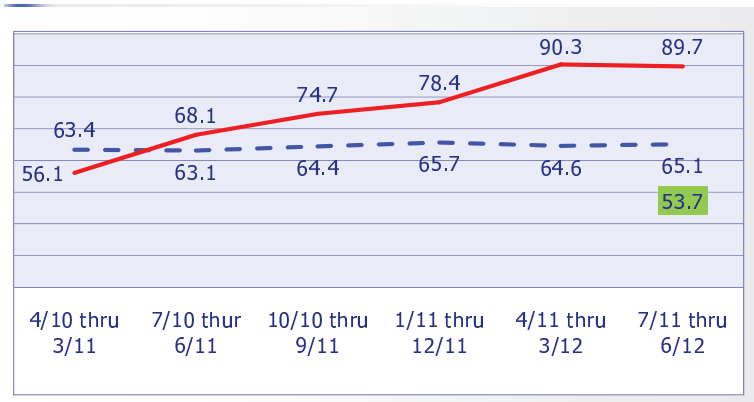
C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months (Exit Cohort) in Percent
C2.5 Adoption within 12 Months Legally Free (Percent)

Success in these measures is a consequence of the changes in the adoptions process. Merced County has exceeded the national standard/goal for five consecutive quarters in C2.1 and six quarters in C2.5

C2.1 Adoption within 24 months (Exit Cohort) in Percent

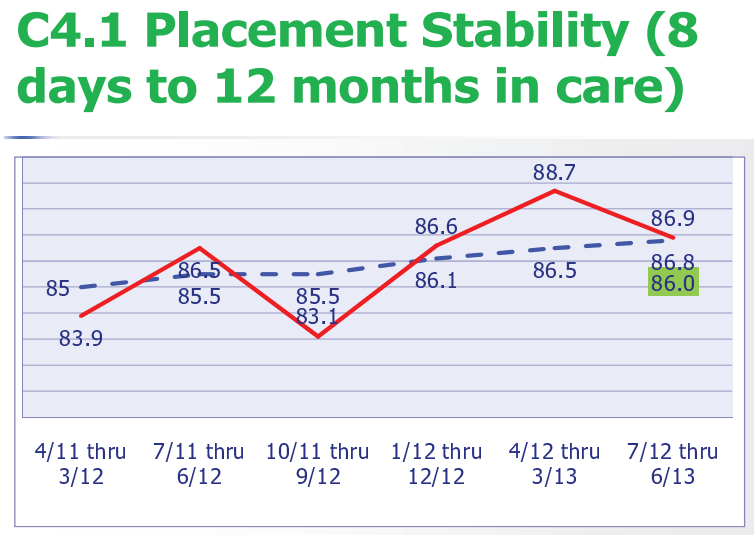


C2.5 Adoption within 12 Months Legally Free (per cent)



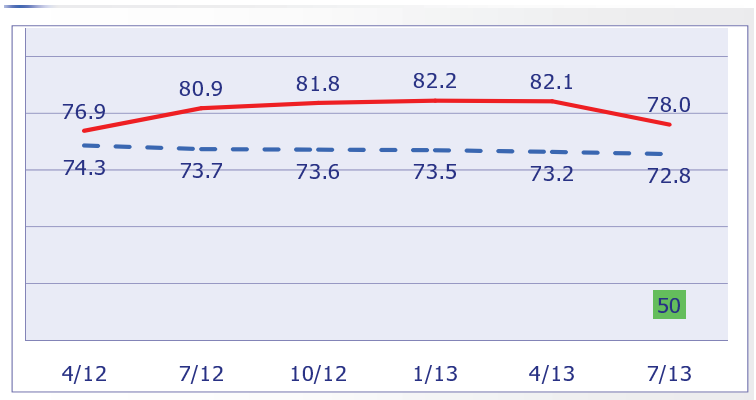
C4.1 Placement Stability (8 Days to 12 Months in Care)

Family Reunification/Family Maintenance (FR/FM) social workers make regular visits to children in foster care and make sure the homes are a fit for the child. Supervisors do not permit placements of convenience (just because a home is the first to respond) and require that the home is concurrent and committed to those particular children. These practices result in stability and avoid moving children.



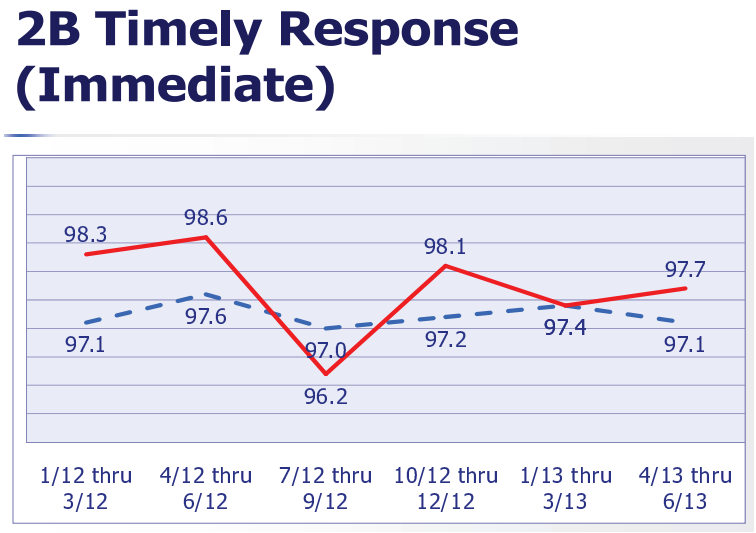
4A Siblings Some

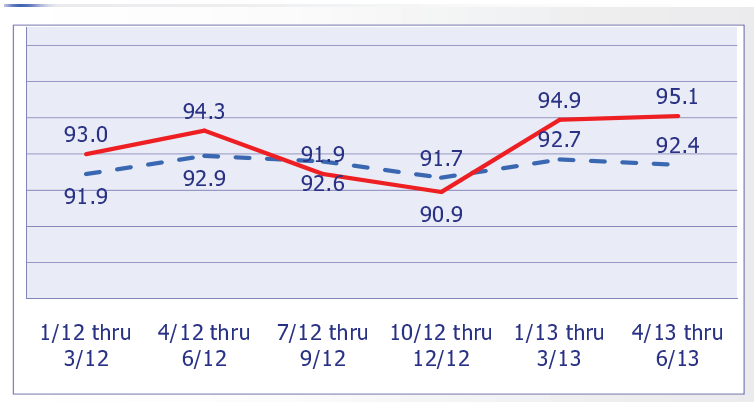
Merced County consistently exceeds the national standard/goal and the California average.



2B Timely Response (Immediate)
2B Timely Response (10-Day)

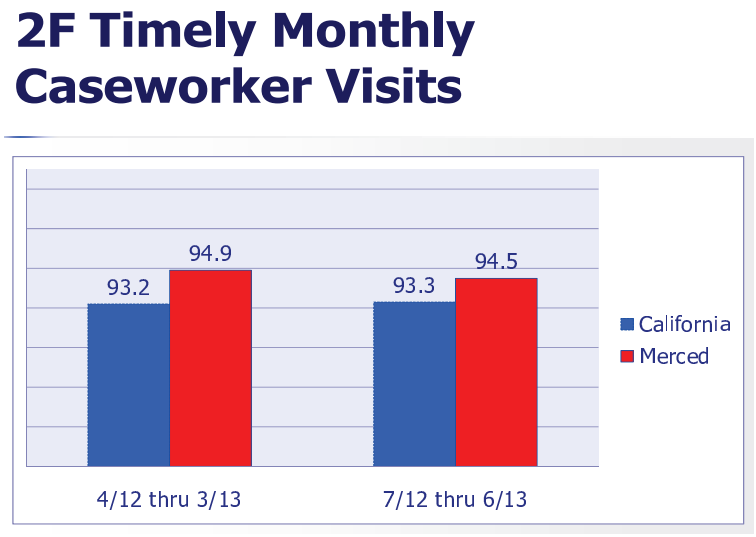
Both of these measures have been somewhat erratic but are currently exceeding the California average.

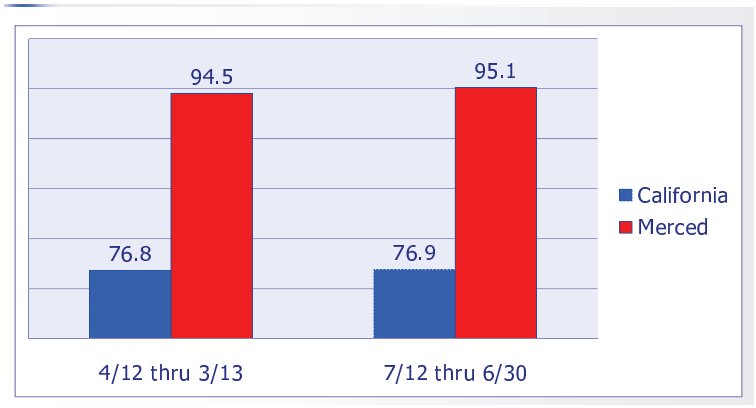




2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Visits
2F Timely Monthly Caseworker Visits in Residence

Merced County is exceeding the California average for both of these new measures. CWS leadership emphasizes the importance of both timely visits and accurate documentation.

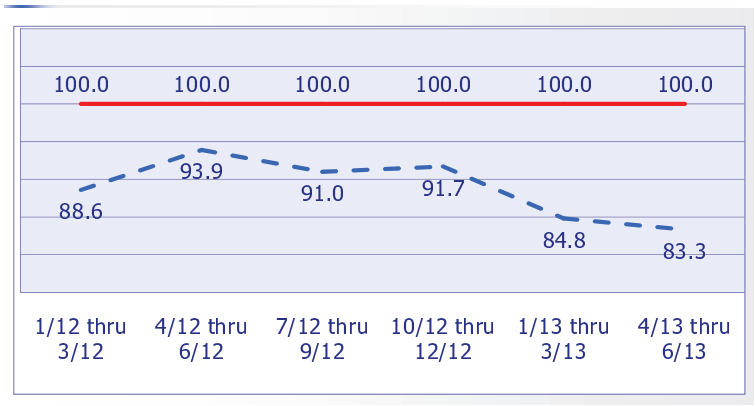




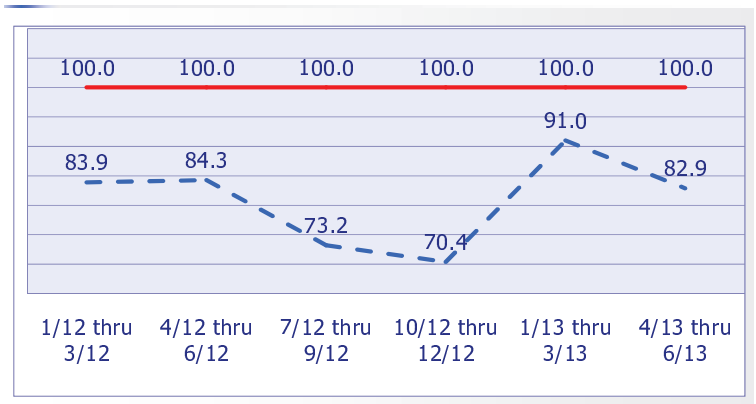
8A Have Housing Arrangements
8A Received ILP Services
8A Permanency Connection with an Adult

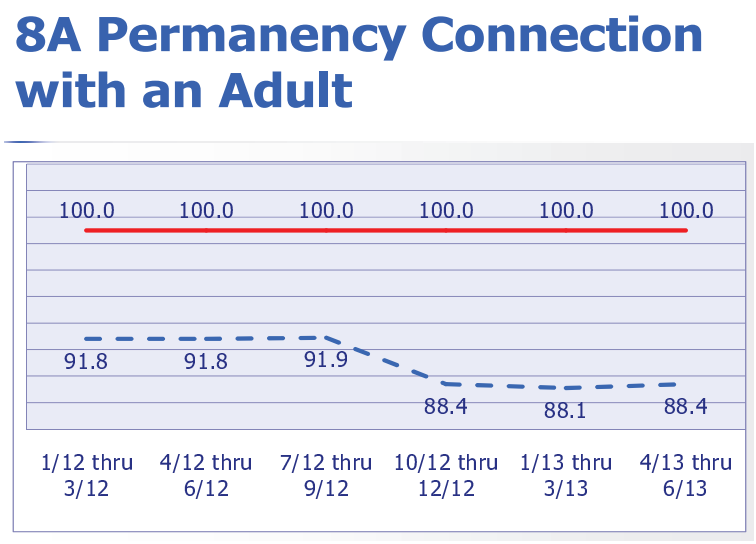
Merced County has a very active Independent Living Program (ILP) which engages youth in preparation for adult living and planning for the future. The results of these programs are reflected in the outcomes for youth exiting care.

8A Have Housing Arrangements



8A Received ILP Services

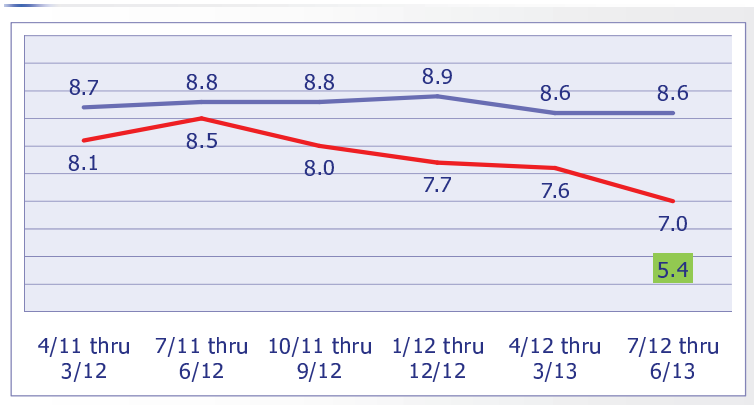




G. Outcome Measures Not Meeting State/National Standards.

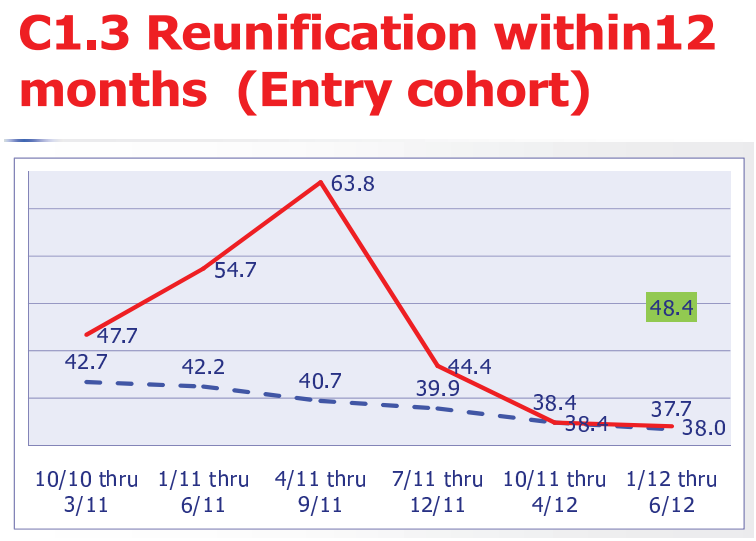
C1.2 Median Time to Reunification Exit Cohort

Merced's performance is higher than (not as good as) the national goal/standard. However, the last four quarters are trending in the right direction and Merced County is consistently below the California average.



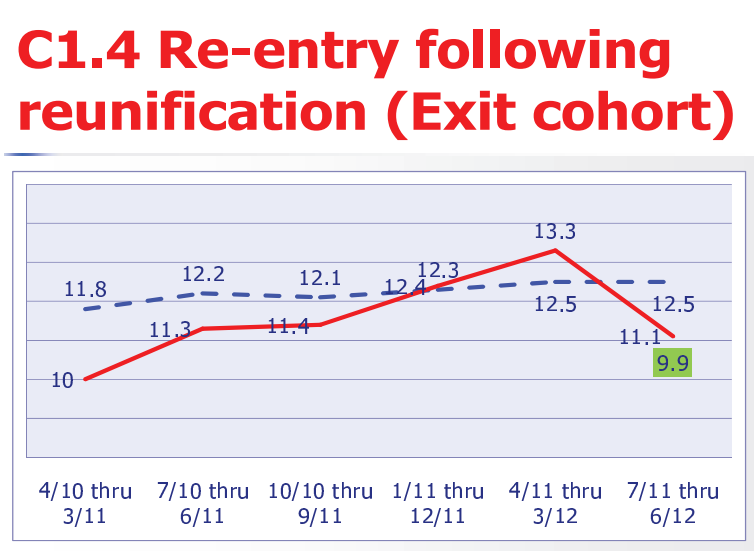
C1.3 Reunification within 12 Months (Entry Cohort)

The dramatic change in reunification within 12 months coincided with changes in supervision. Changes have been made to supervisory assignments, and CWS leadership expects to see this measure improve as new data comes in after the date of the supervisor changes. CWS leadership will closely monitor this measure.



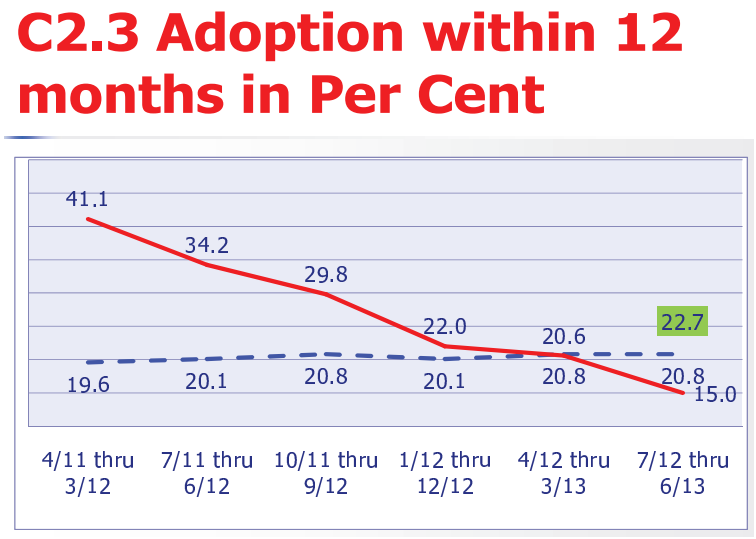
C1.4 Re-entry Following Reunification (Exit Cohort)

Performance on this measure has been trending in the wrong direction but took a turn to the right direction in the most recent quarter. It is currently close to the national standard/goal.



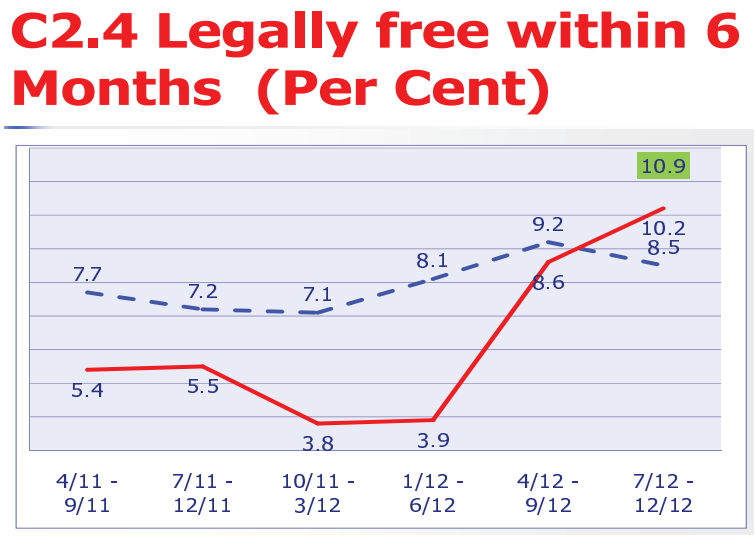
C2.3 Adoption within 12 Months in Percent

The denominator of this measure is the number of children in foster care for 17 months or longer. Examination of the SafeMeasures data shows that AB 12 eligible youth are included in this number, although the number of AB 12 youth is small and does not have a major impact on the outcome. Of the under-18 youth in the denominator, many are older youth on the Permanency Planning (PP) caseload. CWS leadership will monitor this group of foster youth to ensure that no adoption possibility is overlooked.



C2.4 Legally Free within 6 Months (Percent)

Merced is underperforming the national goal/standard. However, the last two quarters have taken a decided turn in the right direction and the most recent quarter is within one percentage point of the national goal/standard. CWS leadership attributes this positive change to significant improvements in practice to avoid trailing cases. CWS leadership has been tracking the trailing of cases and seeing improvements in avoiding trailing.

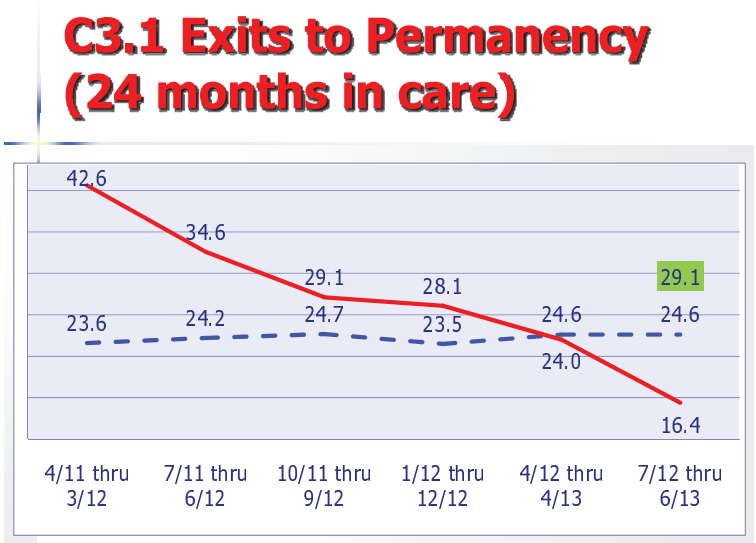


C3.1 Exits to Permanency (24 Months in Care)
C3.2 Exits to Permanency (Legally Free at Exit)
C3.3 In Care Three Years or Longer, Emancipated/Age 18

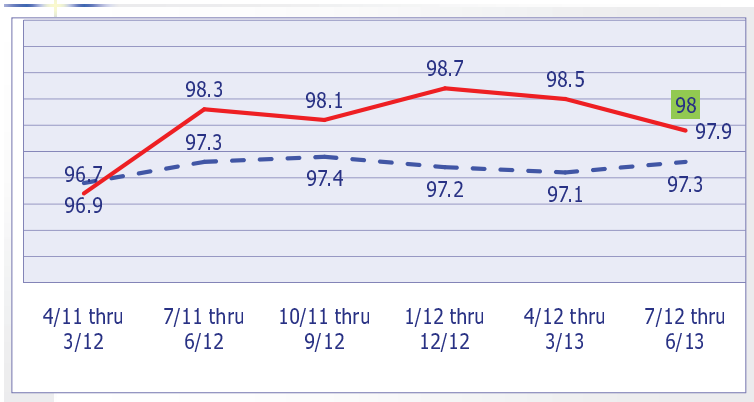
C3.1 has been trending down for six consecutive quarters. CWS leadership attributes the decrease in the percent of exits to the introduction of AB 12 as an option. Older youth are opting to stay in care so they can take advantage of AB 12 when they reach age 18. Foster youth under 12 are still leaving foster care, but AB 12 has made it advantageous for some older youth to remain in care.

C3.2 while technically below the national standard/goal, this measure is within 1% of meeting the standard/goal.

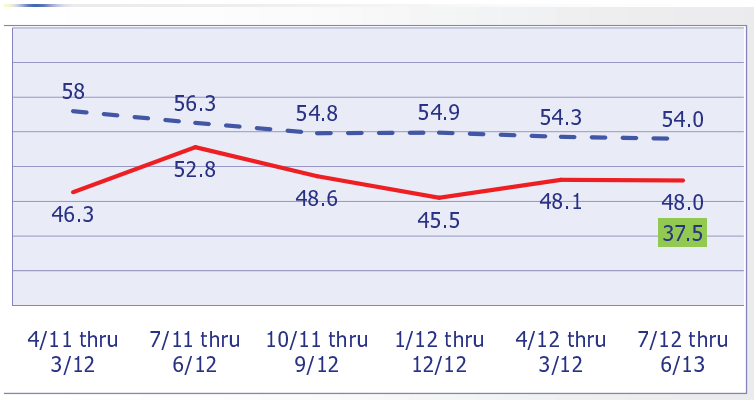
C3.3 this measure is above (not as good as) the national standard or goal but better than the California average. Permanency for children remains a top priority for Merced County.



C3.2 Exits to Permanency (Legally free at exit)

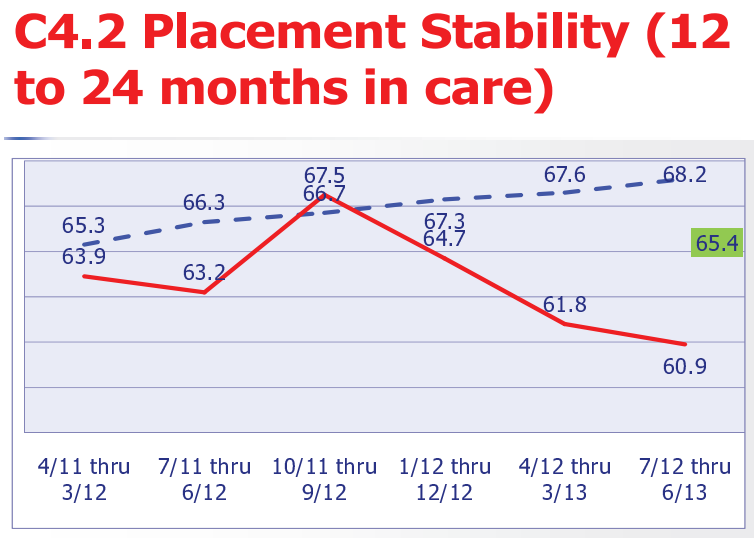


C3.3 In Care 3 years or longer, emancipated /age 18

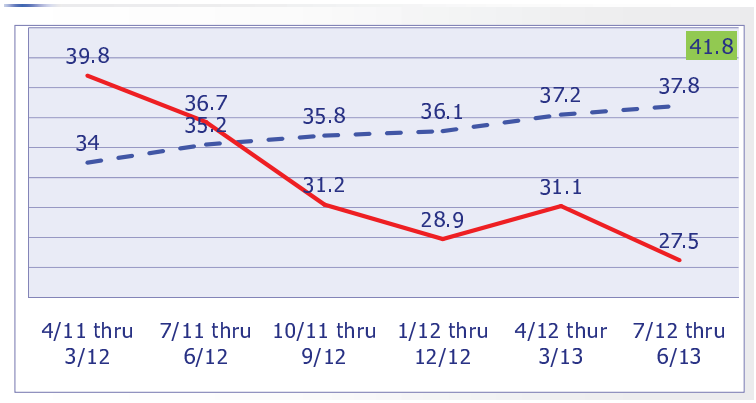


C4.2 Placement Stability (12 to 24 months in care)
C4.3 Placement Stability (At least 24 months in care)

Placement stability has been erratic for these measures. Stability could be affected by the emphasis on relative placements and concurrent placements. The gap between initial relative placements and PIT relative placements indicates at least one placement change attributable to moving a child into a relative placement. Additionally, social workers have been provided training from Child Care Licensing, and reminder e-mails have been sent pointing out red flags to look for when the social worker is in the foster home. The goal is to train the social workers to look at the home similarly to the way the HAT views the home. Templates for in-placement visits have been provided to the social worker, and social workers are providing documentation not previously required. Social workers are looking closely at the placement at every monthly visit. In some situations, parents have come forward with concerns about foster placement. These concerns may or not be reasons to move the child, but the concerns are investigated, and, in an effort to work with the family, children may be moved at the family's request. CWS responded to problems with FFA homes with increased vigilance and attention to conditions in the foster home, resulting in movement of some children to more suitable placements.



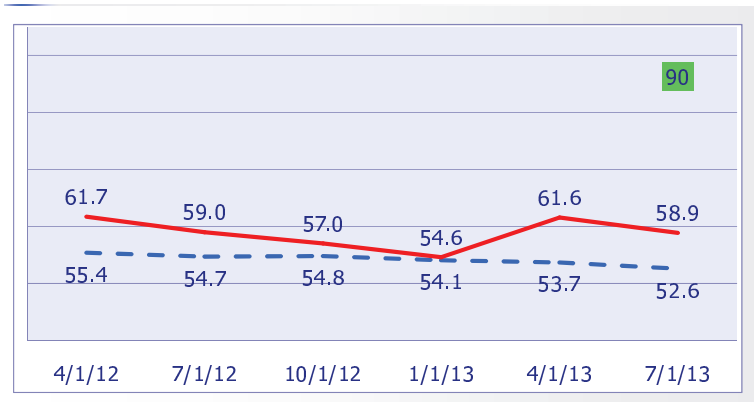
C4.3 Placement Stability (At least 24 months in care)



4A Siblings All

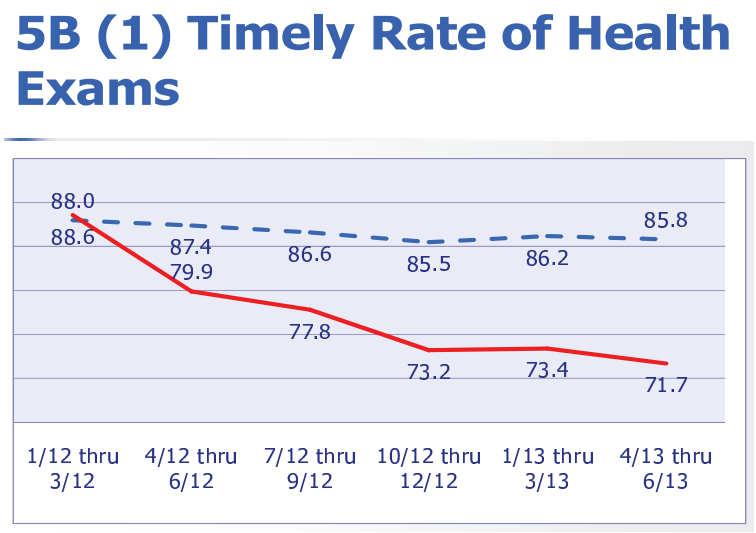
Merced County is underperforming the national standard/goal but exceeding the California average. Merced County exceeds the national standard/goal on the Siblings Some measure. Placement with siblings is not mandatory in CWS/CMS, so some of this data may be entry error. The extra help worker who does data entry will be provided with training on correct data entry. Additionally, CWS leadership will talk to supervisors about having staff review their caseload for correct data entry.

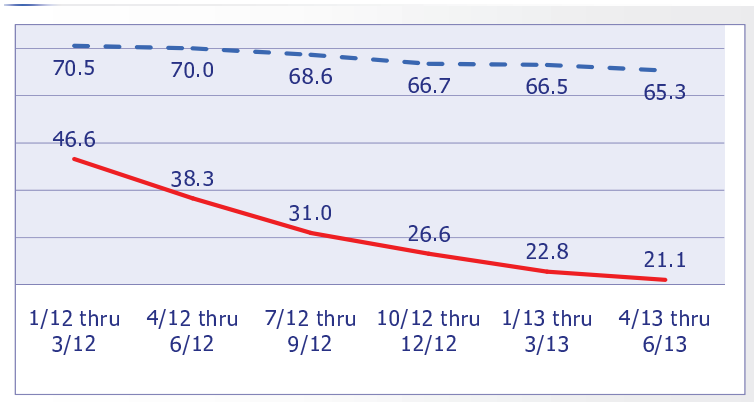
4A Siblings All



5B (1) Timely Rate of Health Exams
5B (2) Timely Rate of Dental Exams

Management believes the underperformance on these measures reflects a documentation problem rather than an actual lack of timely exams. CWS leadership has met with the Health Department to address documentation. A SSPW has been assigned to updating information after contacting social workers. One issue that has been identified is that doctors are holding onto the forms and submitting them in batches. CWS has developed a form for the foster parent to take to the doctor at the time of the visit and provide to the social worker at the next contact.





H. Link to the Program Improvement Plan (PIP)

Strategies

- Expand use of participatory case planning strategies.

  Merced County's Strategy 1.3, **Include families in initial case conference**, addresses this PIP strategy.

- Sustain and enhance permanency efforts across the life of the case.

  Merced County's focus on the timely measures addresses permanency efforts.

- Enhance and expand caregiver recruitment, training, and support efforts.

  Merced County's focus on family placements and family finding address caregiver recruitment, training, and support.

- Expand options and create flexibility for services and supports to meet the needs of children and families.

  Merced County's SIP does not specifically address this strategy.

- Sustain and expand staff/supervisor training.

  Merced County's SIP does not specifically address this strategy.

- Strengthen implementation of the statewide safety, risk and needs assessment system.

  Merced County's SIP does not specifically address this strategy.

The outcome scores below are taken from Q3 2013.

Safety Outcome 1: Absence of Maltreatment Recurrence
National Standard: 95.5%
California: 93.1%
Merced: 94.1%

Safety Outcome 1: Absence of Maltreatment of Children in Foster Care
National Standard: 99.68%
California: 99.68%
Merced: 99.68%

Permanency Outcome 1: Timeliness and Permanency of Reunification
National Standard: 122.6 (scaled score)
California: 111.6
Merced: 128.2

Permanency Outcome 1: Timeliness of Adoptions (Permanency Composite 2)
National Standard: 106.4 (scaled score)
California: 116.6
Merced: 149.3

Permanency Outcome 3: Permanency for Children in Foster Care for Extended Time Periods (Permanency Composite 3)
National Standard: 121.7 (scaled score)
California: 112.0
Merced: 107.8

Permanency Outcome 1: Placement Stability (Permanency Composite 4)
National Standard: 101.5 (scaled score)
California: 101.4
Merced: 86.0

Outcome: Safety 1 Item: 1 Timeliness of initiating investigations of reports of child maltreatment
National Standard: 95.0%
California: 97%
Merced: 97.7% on immediate response; 95.1% on 10-day response

I. SIP Chart

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: Measure 4B: Initial Placement
National Standard: none
Current Performance: 12.9% relative placements
Target Improvement Goal: 14.5% relative placements for 2012

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: Measure 4B: PIT Placement
National Standard: none
Current Performance: 27.4% relative placements
Target Improvement Goal: 27.1% relative placements for 201

Strategy 1.1–Assign social worker positions to assist primary worker with emergency relatives by locating relatives.
Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT

☐ CAPIT
☐ CBCAP
☒ PSSF
☐ N/A

Action Steps	Time Frame	Person Responsible
A. Identify staff positions to assist with locating relatives. One social worker and one office assistant have been assigned to family finding.	August to December 2011 Complete	Program Administrator for ER and Deputy Director
B. Train identified social workers and other staff on locating relatives using family finding methods.	January to February 2012 Family Finding training provided in summer 2011 Complete	Deputy Director, Program Administrators, Courts, and Seneca Center
C. Develop schedule and implement assignments.	June 2012 Complete	Program Administrator for ER

Strategy 1.2–Implement early identification of relatives by ER workers.
Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT

☐ CAPIT
☐ CBCAP
☐ PSSF
☒ N/A

Milestone	Time Frame	Assigned To
A. Develop policy.	October 2014	Program Administrator for ER
B. Train workers on policy.	January 2015	Program Administrator for ER
C. Implement policy.	April 2015	Program Administrator for ER

Strategy 1.3–Include families in initial case conference.
Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT

☐ CAPIT
☐ CBCAP
☐ PSSF
☒ N/A

Milestone	Time Frame	Assigned To
A. Identify any needed policy changes and revise if needed.	May 2015	Program Administrator for ER and Deputy Director
B. Train Social Workers on policy and best practices.	June 2015	Program Administrator for ER, Seneca Center, and Staff Development
C. Implement policy.	July 2015	Program Administrator for ER

Strategy 2.1–Increase ability to certify relative homes for emergency placement. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT		☐ CAPIT ☒ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Train all staff on licensing rules and regulations for relative home approval. HAT Team provided training for social workers on this process.	January 2012 Completed	Program Administrators, and HAT Supervisor
B. Train home visitors on licensing rules and regulations for relative home approval.	This milestone is no longer appropriate.	Program Administrators and HAT Supervisor
C. Develop rotational schedule and implement.	This milestone is no longer appropriate.	Program Administrators

Strategy 2.2–Review foster care placements for appropriateness to move to relative placement and/or concurrent placement. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Develop criteria to identify children with potential to move to relative and/or concurrent placement.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning
B. Develop a schedule or review in coordination with regular case staffing.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning
C. Implement review schedule.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning

Strategy 2.3–Evaluate effectiveness of Strategies. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): 4B Initial and 4B PIT		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Review quarterly reports.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning
B. Review initial and PIT placements in social worker/supervisor conferences.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning
C. Revise procedures, provide training, or offer other interventions as required if initial and PIT placements with relatives are not increasing.	Complete	Program Administrator for Permanency Planning

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months
National Standard: 36.6%
Current Performance: 54.9%
Target Improvement Goal: 36.6%

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: C2.2 Median Time to Adoption
National Standard: 27.3%
Current Performance: 21.4% (note: for this measure, lower is better)
Target Improvement Goal: 27.3%

Strategy 1.1–Restructure Adoptions Team to lower case loads.
Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):
Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months
Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption

☐ CAPIT
☐ CBCAP
☒ PSSF
☐ N/A

Milestone	Time Frame	Assigned To
A. Restructure the work process for the Adoptions Team.	April to October 2011 Complete	Program Administrator for Adoptions
B. Identified changes to policy and procedure for revision and revise.	March 2014 Delete	Program Administrator for Adoptions
C. Provide training to staff on policy changes and best practices.	October 2014 Delete	Program Administrator for Adoptions and Staff Development

Strategy 1.2– At the time of termination of family reunification services, assign one Adoptions social worker to meet the needs of the entire case.
Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s):
Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months
Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption

☐ CAPIT
☐ CBCAP
☒ PSSF
☐ N/A

Milestone	Time Frame	Assigned To
A. Review and revise policy and practice.	March 2014 Delete	Program Administrators and Deputy Director
B. Restructure work process to allow for assignment of case to Adoptions social worker at termination of family reunification.	Complete	Program Administrators and Deputy Director
C. Implement policy.	Complete	Program Administrators, Deputy Director, and CWS Supervisor

Strategy 1.3–Focus on permanence for all children entering care. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Identify training topics and a trainer appropriate for both technical and motivational aspects of professional development.	April 2011 to October 2012 Safety Organized Practice overview provided. Family Finding training provided to CWS staff and CASA volunteers in summer 2011. Complete	Program Administrators, Deputy, and Staff Development
B. Schedule training for identified staff.	January to June 2012 Complete	Program Administrators, Deputy, and Staff Development
C. Conduct training and follow-up on transfer of learning activities.	July 2014	Program Administrators and Deputy

Strategy 2.1–Review all foster care cases for adoption possibility and concurrent planning. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Include placement review in CCG meetings and case conference reviews.	August 2012 and forward Complete	Program Administrators and CWS Supervisors
B. All court reports will address permanency and concurrent planning.	Complete	Program Administrators and CWS Supervisors
C. Train staff on new procedures and implement.	Complete	Program Administrators, Staff Development, and CWS Supervisors

Strategy 2.2–Increase the number of concurrent homes. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. ER staff will identify relatives as soon as case is opened and record in Relative Tracking Form in CWS/CMS. Social Workers will update form as needed. Supervisors will monitor. Designated Family Finding social worker to attend detention hearing and gather family information.	September 2012 Complete	Program Administrators, CWS Supervisors, ER Social Workers
B. Refer county foster homes for adoption study as soon as they are licensed.	September 2011 and forward Complete	Program Administrators and Licensing Analyst for County homes
C. Identify FFA homes with a current adoption home study.	September 2012 Complete	Program Administrator and Licensing Analyst

Strategy 2.3–Increase the number of children in concurrent homes. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Ensure each child under age five is in a concurrent home by disposition hearing. Identify the steps required.	December 2014	Program Administrators, Court Team Supervisor, and Home Visitors
B. Review permanence for each child in care during staff performance management conferences.	December 2012 and on-going Complete	Program Administrators and CWS Supervisors
C. Review permanence for each child in care as case review and in court reports.	December 2012 and on-going Complete	Program Administrators, CWS Supervisors, CWS Social Workers, and Home Visitors

Strategy 3.1–Partner with home study providers to support families. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption less than 24 months Measure C2.2 Median time to adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Articulate to staff and community partners, including home study providers, HSA's vision for supporting families through the adoption process. Vision has been discussed but not put into writing.	January to March 2012 Complete	Program Administrators and Deputy Director
B. Develop MOU with home study providers to articulate a shared vision.	March 2014	Program Administrator for the Adoptions Team
C. Evaluate progress and effectiveness in monthly meetings with home study providers.	Complete	Program Administrator, Placement Specialist

Strategy 3.2–Seek feedback from families on perception of support with the adoption process. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption within 24 Months Measure C2.2 Median Time to Adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Develop interview tool for use with families to elicit their perceptions of the adoption process and the support they received during the process.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant
B. Schedule interviews or focus groups.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant
C. Conduct interviews or focus groups.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant

Strategy 3.3–Seek feedback from social workers on perception of support with the adoption process. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Measure C2.1 Adoption less than 24 months Measure C2.2 Median time to adoption		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☒ PSSF ☐ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Develop interview tool for use with social workers to elicit their perceptions of the adoption process and the support they received during the process.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant
B. Schedule interviews or focus groups.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant
C. Conduct interviews or focus groups.	Delete	Program Administrators and Management Consultant

J. Probation Narrative

After reviewing the findings of the PQCR and CSA and consulting with agency partners, Probation identified the following measure to target: Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections. This measure will reflect the number of children who age out of foster care with an established life-long connection.

Automated outcome data is not available on this measure. Since Probation would be entering data into CWS/CMS, it was anticipated specific information regarding this measure could be extracted and analyzed. Unfortunately, other than tracking non-minor dependent (NMD) status, probation is unable to extract specific lifelong connection data from CWS/CMS. Fortunately, given the overall number of probation placement cases, this data is not difficult to track at this time. Currently between the two Placement Officers, there are 34 out-of-home placement cases, including five extended foster care cases. Of these 34 cases, all but one has an identified lifelong connection; therefore, 97% of the Probation out-of-home placement cases have an identified lifelong connection. Of the five youth participating in extended foster care, all have an identified lifelong connection; therefore, 100% of the extended foster care cases have an established lifelong connection.

As a result of recommendations from the PQCR, the Probation Department has implemented a process for notifying potential relatives of minors suitable for and/or ordered into out-of-home placement. In addition, Deputy Probation Officers are now encouraged to ask about potential family members and/or caring adults in these minors' lives at every level of contact (intake to supervision). As anticipated, this increased family engagement has helped identify and increase the number of potential lifelong connections for minors in out-of-home placement. A Deputy Probation Officer was participating in a train-the-trainer family finding strategy previously adopted by Merced County. This strategy is no longer being used by the County, due to some complexities of the procedures and the amount of time required in implementing the process for each case. Even so, Probation continues to make finding lifelong connections for youth in out-of-home placement a priority for every placement case. The Probation Department has recently collaborated with Merced County's CASA for Children to find a lifelong connection for a 602 WI Ward who was a prior 300 WI Dependent for many years. This collaboration resulted in the minor reconnecting with his biological mother whom he had not communicated with since he was five years old. Due to time constraints in Juvenile Delinquency Court, the family finding process has proven to be most effective in finding relatives/lifelong connections of probation minors already in out-of-home placement or those at risk of out-of-home placement who are participating in the wraparound programs.

The Probation Department has implemented most of the listed strategies, which has resulted in an increased number of lifelong connections for each minor exiting foster care. Currently, Probation has surpassed the targeted improvement goal.

K. Probation SIP Chart

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor: Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections.

National Standard: Unknown for Probation Departments

Current Performance: Automated outcome data is not available on this measure. Since Probation would be entering data into CWS/CMS, it was anticipated specific information regarding this measure could be extracted and analyzed. Unfortunately, other than tracking non-minor dependent (NMD) status, probation is unable to extract specific lifelong connection data from CWS/CMS. Fortunately, given the overall number of probation placement cases, this data is not difficult to track at this time. Currently between the two Placement Officers, there are 34 out-of-home placement cases, including five extended foster care cases. Of these 34 cases, all but one has an identified lifelong connection; therefore, 97% of the Probation out-of-home placement cases have an identified lifelong connection. Of the five youth participating in extended foster care, all have an identified lifelong connection; therefore, 100% of the extended foster care cases have an established lifelong connection.

Target Improvement Goal: To increase efforts in identifying relatives or caregivers/other caring adults as lifelong connections for probation youth in out-of-home placement so that 95% of youth in out-of-home placement have an identified lifelong connection prior to emancipation or aging out of foster care.

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor:

National Standard:

Current Performance:

Target Improvement Goal:

Priority Outcome Measure or Systemic Factor:

National Standard:

Current Performance:

Target Improvement Goal:

Strategy 1.1– To develop risk and needs assessment tools and business processes to assess for lifelong connections and permanency options from initial intake through termination of probation services.

Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections.

- ☐ CAPIT
- ☐ CBCAP
- ☐ PSSF
- ☒ N/A

Action Steps	Time Frame	Person Responsible
A. Determine accurate level of intervention in order to avoid undue placements and/or escalating delinquent behavior. The Department implemented the use of the Positive Achievement Change Tool (PACT) assessment software on March 5, 2013. All Juvenile Deputy Probation Officers (DPOs) who have been in their assignment since before March 5, 2013, have completed either a PACT refresher training or initial training. DPOs who were reassigned to the Juvenile Division after March 5, 2013, receive informal training of the PACT by their Supervisor and/or other trained DPOs. DPOs continue to use Motivational Interviewing techniques to gather pertinent information to aid in determining accurate and appropriate levels of intervention. Formal training of PACT is completed; ongoing training of newly assigned officers will be ongoing.	August 2011 to March 2014	All Juvenile Intake, Field Services, Placement staff, and Juvenile Services Supervising Probation Officers

B. Use the risk and needs assessment outcomes in developing relevant and useful case plans. The Department implemented the use of the PACT assessment software on March 5, 2013. The PACT software has a case plan included; although, the Department has not implemented the use of this case plan due to the consortium (which includes Fresno County Probation) not being ready to move forward. Fresno County asked that the case plan not be addressed by the PACT Implementation Team until they had a chance to implement and use the PACT assessment tool; which they began using in mid to late 2013. It is anticipated training on the PACT case plan is to begin in January or February 2014.	June 2011 to December 2014	All Juvenile Intake, Field Services, Placement staff, and Juvenile Services Supervising Probation Officers

Strategy 1.2– To ensure that all relatives and/or caring adults are properly identified at the earliest stage of probation. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections.	☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A

Milestone	Time Frame	Assigned To
A. Engage families and understand the importance of lifelong connections and family finding for at-risk youth at all levels of the probation stages. Officers continue to engage with the juveniles and their families at intake and during field services to determine who is important in their lives. A family finding policy has not been developed to date; although, the Department has made family finding an important part of the entire probation process (intake, supervision, termination). Training on the importance of lifelong connections and family finding is an ongoing process that the Probation Department will continue to emphasize to Juvenile Division officers.	April 2011 to ongoing	All Juvenile Intake, Field Services, Placement staff, and all levels of Juvenile Services Management staff.
B. Encourage families to identify lifelong connections for at risk youth by utilizing motivational interviewing techniques. Supervisors continue to consistently encourage staff to seek lifelong connections for the minors they interview and/or supervise. All staff continues to use their motivational interviewing skills to glean this information from the minors and their families.	April 2011 to ongoing	All Juvenile Intake, Field Services, Placement staff, and Juvenile Services Supervising Probation Officers

Strategy 1.3– To complete background checks and/or home evaluations on potential relative/caregivers prior to youth having engagement and/or being placed in relative/caregiver's home. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections.		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Educate staff on the importance of investigating backgrounds and living environments of potential family members/caregivers and ensure staff understands the home assessment and approval process. Both placement officers have attended NREFM and Relative Assessment training provided by The Resource Center for Family-Focused Practice. The newly assigned Placement Unit Supervisor will attend the training when it becomes available.	June 2011 to March 2014	Placement staff initially and all other Juvenile Intake and Field Services staff as permitted, and Juvenile Services Supervising Probation Officers.
B. Develop policy and procedures for relative home approval which may include collaborating with Child Welfare Services (CWS). The MOU with CWS has been completed. It is being reviewed by CWS's legal advisors. Once this review is completed, the MOU will be sent to the Board of Supervisors for approval. The Social Worker assigned to the Probation Department will assist with home assessments/approvals when necessary.	June 2011 to March 2014	Placement Unit Supervisor, Juvenile Services Program Manager, and CWS staff.

Strategy 1.4– To collaborate with CWS to acquire Family Finding search engines and software to aid in the search of potential family members who may serve as lifelong connections for minors in out-of-home placement. Applicable Outcome Measure(s) and/or Systemic Factor(s): Improving Permanency Outcomes. Identifying and developing lifelong connections.		☐ CAPIT ☐ CBCAP ☐ PSSF ☒ N/A
Milestone	**Time Frame**	**Assigned To**
A. Research available Family Finding search engines and software. The Department has not committed to the cost of search engine software. The County is no longer working with Seneca Center on a train-the-trainer process; although, CWS has identified a family finding coordinator through CASA for Children. The Probation Department has been able to utilize this family finding coordinator in a case involving a youth who was a previous 300 dependent. The outcome of this collaboration resulted in the finding of the youth's biological mother. It is hoped the Department will be able to continue to collaborate with CWS and the CASA family finding coordinator on similar cases in the future.	April 2011 to March 2014	Placement Unit Supervisor, Juvenile Services Program Manager, and CWS staff.

B. Continue to attend collaboration meetings with CWS and other community stakeholders. The Department continues to collaborate with CWS and CASA regarding family finding issues. The County's Family Finding train-the-trainer process has been discontinued, due to some complexities of the procedures and the amount of time required in implementing the process for each case.	April 2011 to March 2014	Placement Unit Supervisor, Juvenile Services Program Manager, and CWS staff.
C. Assist with development of County-wide policies and procedures for Family Finding practices. The County's Family Finding train-the-trainer process has been discontinued, due to some complexities of the procedures and the amount of time required in implementing the process for each case. CASA has a Family Finding Coordinator who is dedicated to finding lifelong connections for identified 300 WI dependents. This coordinator has been utilized by the Probation Department to assist with family finding for a 600 WI Ward who was a previous 300 WI Dependent. The outcome of this case was positive. It is anticipated assistance will be offered on similar cases in the future.	April 2011 to June 2013	Placement Unit Supervisor, Juvenile Services Program Manager, and CWS staff.