

## 2009 El Dorado County Self Assessment Executive Summary

A County Self Assessment (CSA) is a required component of the Child Welfare Services Outcome and Accountability System that commenced operation in California in 2004 pursuant to State Law (Assembly Bill 636), proceeds on an ongoing triennial cycle and focuses primarily on measuring outcomes in safety, permanence and child and family well-being. As a prerequisite to receiving child welfare services funding, local jurisdictions must participate in an evaluation process that includes a County Peer Quality Case Review (PQCR), County Self Assessment and County System Improvement Plan (SIP).

This CSA represents a County-wide analysis of child welfare services in El Dorado County and was developed by the El Dorado County Departments of Probation and Human Services in collaboration with local community partners specified by the California Department of Social Services (CDSS). Community input was sought through distribution of a comprehensive survey that asked over sixty community partners and their extended contacts to identify those services they felt generated the best outcomes in the identified focus areas, as well as local barriers to provision of services, and to offer suggestions for service improvements.

The CSA incorporates County demographic data; local child welfare services outcomes as compared to Federal and State program measures; public agency characteristics, such as the size and structure of public agencies that provide child welfare services in the County; systemic factors, such as case review systems; services available in the County; County-wide prevention activities and strategies; community responses to the CSA survey and results of the County's Peer Quality Case Review that was conducted in May 2008.

### **Areas of Focus**

The CSA identified three key system focus areas that will be addressed by the Department:

- Reentry Following Reunification
- Recurrence of Maltreatment
- Placement Stability

Strategies are being developed through a collaborative partnership and will be identified in the upcoming SIP, which will be presented for Board approval in late April. The strategies and measurements identified will be designed to improve outcomes to meet Federal and State goals.

### **Challenges**

The current global economic decline and State budget cuts have impacted the County and created uncertainties relative to future funding availability. The increased need for services exceeds the available resources.

Child Welfare Services (CWS) System issues surrounding social worker retention continue to be problematic, but not unique to El Dorado County. The staff retention issue is limited to social workers and does not extend to other job classifications within the Department of Human Services. Ongoing factors include competing for social workers with other child welfare agencies, particularly in surrounding counties that offer higher salary and benefits and with the non-profit community where caseloads and requirements are not equivalent to those in child welfare services. Department social worker caseloads continue to exceed statewide averages and recommended levels. While training needs and strategies identified in the CSA will continue to be addressed, continuous staff turnover interferes with continuity in training procedure, process and effectiveness.

A collaborative educational effort led by the Child Abuse Prevention Council (CAPC) to increase community awareness to promote early identification and intervention of potential child neglect or abuse has contributed to an increase in CPS referrals. A strong collaborative and supportive relationship with the local educational system further contributes to early detection of possible abuse with concurrent increases in referrals. Additionally, as the economy deteriorates, families face increased stress from loss of income and household stability that can be expected to result in further increases in incidences of neglect or abuse. Caseloads have increased over the past three years as indicated below and are expected to continue to rise.

### El Dorado County Child Protective Services – Statistical Data

#### Three-Year Comparison

	2005	2006	2007
Child Population	41,439	40,781	40,461
Children with One or More Referrals	2,374	2,321	2,483
Incidence of Referrals per 1,000 Children	57.3	56.9	61.4

#### Point-in-Time Numbers

	July 1, 2005	July 1, 2006	July 1, 2007	July 1, 2008
Number of Cases	386	395	392	408
Number of Children in Care	230	234	270	280

#### Strengths

While DHS recognizes the challenges identified and set forth in the CSA, system strengths were also recognized. Several key successes were identified that exceed State standards:

- Timely social worker visits for immediate response times to referrals
- Timely social worker visits for 10-day response times to referrals
- Timely and consistent social worker monthly visits
- A viable adoption program that results in a high percentage of permanent placements

#### Conclusion

Ongoing challenges compromise to some extent the Department's ability to implement and maintain successful strategies for improved outcomes. Implementation of successful strategies to improve CWS outcomes requires creativity, balanced with the reality of declining resources. The Department of Human Services will continue to seek to improve coordination of services, eliminate duplication of services and improve organizational capacity to address these challenges through innovative internal approaches to case staffing and tracking and maximizing limited resources to ensure the best possible outcomes for at-risk children in El Dorado County.