

County of Santa Clara

2021

Annual Report

Department of Family &
Children's Services



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DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE



Santa Clara County, along with the rest of the country, faced continued challenges from an ongoing pandemic. Many within our own community, who are already extremely vulnerable, experienced disproportionate impacts. Unfortunately, this disproportionate impact overlaps with who experiences disproportionate rates of child welfare involvement and especially child separation. While DFCS has a core mandate to investigate allegations of child abuse and neglect, we are also mindful of the impact on children and families when a removal does occur. Our social workers have done an incredible job of further incorporating the Child and Family Practice Model to ensure family voice is included in all aspects of our work. Throughout 2021 we have seen fewer children separated from their families and brought into foster care and instead served as a family unit. I am proud of the work that has been done in collaboration with community providers, foster parents, parents with lived experiences, and DFCS staff as we continue along the pathways to being a trauma aware department.

Early in 2021, I rolled out an updated visual to the DFCS Culture. Our guiding principle is to "treat everyone with dignity and respect." We developed three core agreements which state: Children do best with family and within their community; DFCS strives to be a learning culture that utilizes data to inform decisions; DFCS staff will feel connected to the agency and to their work. The Child and Family Practice Model forms the foundation of the organization. It is through these concepts that we continue to develop innovative practices to best serve the most vulnerable in our communities.

I am extremely excited for the work we have done around child removal and separation, as well as the tremendous work we have done to realize and address racial equity. 2021 was just the beginning, as there is still significant work to do. The next year will bring a new focus on family finding and family seeing. DFCS is so appreciative to all our partners, as we work to create an equitable and accessible service continuum. Our county has been at the center of many innovations in service delivery. I truly believe we can lead the way in reimagining child protection as we build around family wellbeing.



DANIEL LITTLE

DFCS Director

INTRODUCTION

Introduction



The Santa Clara County DFCS 2021 Annual Report provides an overview of the agency's successes, goals, initiatives, and community commitments during 2021 and sets the stage for our efforts in 2022. The guiding principles for departmental efforts are consistent with our foundational pillars, mission and vision statement. In our continued efforts to keep children safe, and support child, family, and community well-being, there has been and continues to be a disproportionate number of children of color in the child welfare system. The identification of disproportionality as one foundational pillar drives all aspects of the organization toward targeted efforts to reduce disproportionality, through use of Safety Organized Practice (SOP), Structured Decision Making (SDM), legal analysis, and DFCS staff with child welfare and well-being expertise. DFCS is also committed to the community to continue to shift the focus on clear, appropriate, and equitable risk and safety assessments to intervene only when legally and clinically necessary to protect children from safety threats.

This intentional cultural shift in child welfare specific to Santa Clara County has already significantly reduced the number of children and families involved with Juvenile Dependency Court. This is significant because children have better outcomes when placed with family of origin versus foster care. In lieu of court intervention, DFCS is committed to the community to utilize preventative services. Such interventions include voluntary services, and temporary voluntary placement of children when necessary to shore up safety by linking families to community services. Other efforts include: The Child and Family Practice Model, prevention, the Child Abuse and Neglect Center, early intervention, continuum of care, educational services, internships, and youth programs. DFCS continues to work with internal and external stakeholders to collaborate on strategies to address disparity and reduce children and families entering our Child Welfare Court System for primary prevention. Our agency is aware that bias related to race plays a role in disproportionality at both the institutional and community level. Intentional efforts such as viewing every aspect of the work we do through a race and equity lens is our first foundational pillar. The organization values agency staff highlighted in our second foundational pillar of safety culture. Our third foundational pillar of continuous quality improvement drives all decision making in our organization. This report provides further details regarding our departmental goals and the tools being used to keep community children safe.

Vision, Mission, Values



VISION

A community where every child and family are on a path to reaching their unique potential.



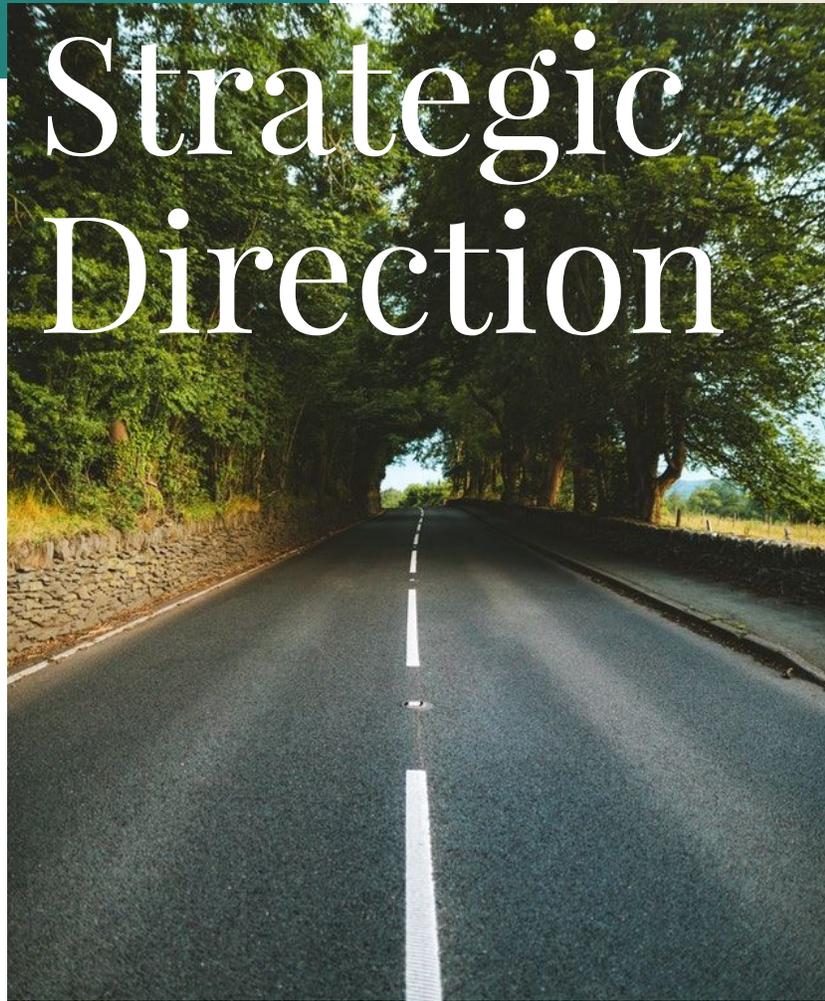
MISSION

To protect children from abuse and neglect, promote their healthy growth, and strengthen families. In carrying out this mission, DFCS partners with the community to create safe and stable homes for children under its supervision. The family's circle of support plays a major role in this effort. Made up of parents, siblings, extended family, service providers, and community members, the circle of support shares in the care of children, provision of services to families, and the establishment of safe environments.



VALUES

Respect
Trust
Integrity
Innovation
Teamwork/Collaborative Leadership



Strategic Direction

The mission of County of Santa Clara's Department of Family and Children's Services (DFCS) is to partner with communities to keep children safe and families strong.

In doing so, DFCS aims to:

- Provide trauma-informed services to children, youth, and families;
- Build community-based prevention and services; and
- Support its workforce through continuous recruitment and retention efforts.

DFCS uses the Child and Family Practice Model to provides equitable and responsive services to children, youth and families.

DFCS has also developed foundational pillars: continuous quality improvement, race equity and building a safety culture.

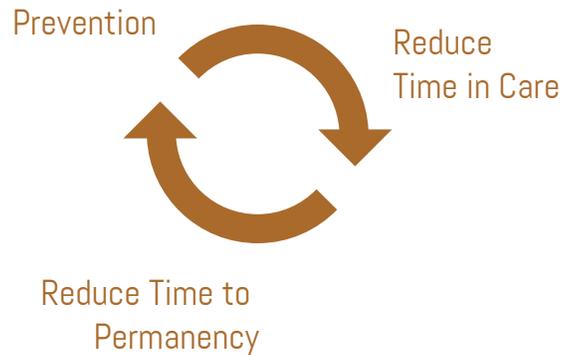
DFCS intends to positively impact specific federal performance measures, such as

- Reduction of entries into care
- Time in care, and
- Time to permanency

DFCS intent is to truly move towards a child and family wellbeing system by partnering across communities to support Santa Clara County children and families.

FOCUS AREAS

STRATEGIC THEMES



FOUNDATIONAL PILLARS



1. Continuous Quality Improvement Culture
2. Equity/Disproportionality & Disparity Culture
3. Safety Culture

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- IF families are connected to the built-in supports within their community;
- IF the family's values and culture guide the services they receive from committed staff well-versed in trauma-informed services;
- IF the duty for child safety and well-being is shared between the Department and the community, and
- IF we continually measure and increase positive results...
- THEN we are more likely to ensure that children are safe and that families are supported within the context of their communities.

PRE

1

Prevention

Neighbor to Neighbor launched in partnership with First 5 and African American Community Services Agency

The DFCS Prevention Bureau's goal is to create safe, supportive, and self-sufficient communities where families and children have timely access to culturally appropriate services and resources to mitigate the need for child welfare intervention. Prevention is defined holistically, from preventing families from entering into the child welfare system (Primary), diverting families that have entered into the system from further DFCS and court monitored involvement (Secondary), and preventing families with DFCS monitored involvement from re-entering into the system (Tertiary). Collaborating with cross system partners is key to child abuse prevention. Some key successes in this year:

2

Supporting development of upcoming First 5 Demonstration sites including the new San Ysidro and Valley Palms Sites

3

Cultural Brokers now partnering with Juvenile Probation to reach youth who are Dually Involved or in Prevention & Early Intervention

4

Differential Response expanded to serve youth and families from Gilroy, Morgan Hill, Downtown College Prep, Alum Rock, Campbell, and San Jose Unified School Districts



ION



The Child Abuse and Neglect Center (CANC) serves as the central call center to receive and respond to reports relating to child abuse and neglect in Santa Clara County.

Child Abuse & Neglect Center

The CANC focused on continuous quality improvement for operational effectiveness and efficiency. Areas highlighted were the use of the Structured Decision-Making (SDM) tool; exploration of technology improvements, including a comprehensive information management tool; and strengthening practices and processes. As a result, the CANC dashboard was created to provide an overview of day-to-day performance. Additionally, a three-by-five CANC protocol card was created and distributed to law enforcement agencies.

6

CANC

Early Intervention

Emergency Response

The Emergency Response Program responds to allegations of abuse or neglect. When abuse or neglect has occurred within a family, our emphasis is intervention to ensure the safety of the child and then to provide services and whenever possible have the child remain in the home.

A Child Welfare Worker will interview children and other parties involved in referrals and determine what actions, if any, are necessary to protect children from further abuse or neglect and ensure necessary resources and supports. Below are some other services we provide:

- Refer families to community based organizations or our support programs in our department.
- Evaluate if a child may remain safely in the home and provide supportive services to the family on a voluntary basis.
- Determine whether a child should be taken into protective custody and could safety remain in the home with court intervention or needs to be placed outside of the family home.
- In the past year, increases in immediate in-home support for parents and children have been added and social workers have worked to support Child and Family Team meetings to hear family voice and connect to resources or to ensure placement with family members.

Dependency Investigations

Dependency Investigations supports child safety when a child has been brought into protective custody and determines if there is the need for further court intervention for a child. They provide case management services needed for a family to address safety issues and continue to assess a family's situation to support a child returning safely to a parent(s) care or for a child to be placed with family.

Voluntary Services

A family may choose to accept services voluntarily if the court does not need to be involved.

A social worker will work with the family to help create a case plan to meet the needs of the family and provide services to keep the family together and safe.



KinGap, Post Adoption, & Probate After Care Support

Services remain available for family members identified as caregivers for children to ensure connection to resources. Resources for families have been expanded to ensure greater access.

WELL BEING

Safety and Well-being

SAFETY



COURT SERVICES

Family Maintenance

Children remain in the care of their parent(s) by order of the juvenile dependency court when determined they can be safely maintained with their parents. Services are court ordered to provide the parents with the necessary means to safely care for their children and address any identified challenges or risks that were brought to the attention of the child welfare system.

Family Reunification

Children are placed in out-of-home care by order of the juvenile dependency court when determined that they cannot be safely maintained with their parents. From the beginning, every effort is made to identify placement options with extended family members and other identified natural supports so children stay connected to their existing circles of support. While in placement, supportive services and resources are provided to children while their parents address the concerns that brought their families to the attention of the child welfare system. When a child is removed from their parents' care, family finding is utilized at every stage of involvement with DFCS to identify and build upon existing circles of support.

Permanency

The ultimate goal for children and youth in the care of the County of Santa Clara is to remain in safe and permanent families if their parents are not able to address the challenges and risks that were brought to the attention of the child welfare system and are unable to reunify with them. Permanency can be achieved through guardianship or adoption with a relative or non-relative extended family member, or a resource family. Family Finding engagement is used to support priority placement with family.

Continuum of *care*

Since December 2019, DFCS has worked with County partners, including Behavioral Health Services Department (BHSD), Juvenile Probation Department (Probation), and community stakeholders to develop a new continuum of care system. Continuum of care is a concept involving an integrated system of care that makes available a comprehensive array of services and programs spanning all levels of intensity of care.

The focus of DFCS with continuum of care is to prevent the necessity of placing children in congregate care, to reduce the number of children currently placed in congregate care, and to increase capacity for more home-based settings. This includes creating more specialized trauma informed placements with supportive services for children who might otherwise be placed in a congregate care setting.



Child & Family Practice Model

CFPM



The California Child and Family Practice Model (CFPM) is aimed at reducing long-term foster care and improving the lives of children, youth and families in the child welfare system. DFCS first implemented CFPM ten years ago and it remains the foundation of how staff engage with one another and the families that are provided services: Exploration & Engagement, Power of Family, Circle of Support, and Healing Trauma.

A few of the initiatives that continue to embed CFPM into DFCS practice:

- Staff Development and Training conducted a mandatory Case Planning through the Lens of CANS training that highlighted the CFPM value of power of family in collaborative case planning. It incorporates tools from Safety Organized Practice (SOP) to create transparency on why the family is involved with DFCS.
- There are four identified Safety Organized Champions at the supervisor and manager level who are in the process of being trained in SOP. They will be leaders who will ensure the engagement tools are implemented throughout DFCS.
- DFCS has contracted with a national expert on family finding, Kevin Campbell, to provide training and coaching for DFCS on Family Seeing, which builds upon the values and principles of CFPM. Family Seeing utilizes tools to prevent maltreatment, facilitate healing, and support families in their homes and community.

Education



DFCS led an educational merge with the Santa Clara County Office of Education (SCCOE) Foster Youth Services Coordinating Program (FYSCP) to hire six education managers to provide educational services to children and foster youth with open dependency cases. The program provides the following:

- Supports educational needs of foster youth and children ages 0-5, and K-12 including Non-minor Dependents
- Assigns education managers to school districts in Santa Clara County who follow the child and youth on their caseload throughout the duration of dependency
- Prioritizes serving children and foster youth in out-of-home placement
- Refers foster youth and children for educational consults for in depth educational assessments and legal advocacy within the school district
- Since the onset of the novel coronavirus pandemic, supportive services were developed to address educational needs of foster children in virtual settings

Additional supports to address the educational needs of children in the County's care:

- DFCS' Educational Services Unit, in collaboration with FYSCP, ensures Transition Age Youth (TAY) are enrolled in school, attending classes, and participating in programs based on academic needs
- Legal Advocates for Children and Youth (LACY) advocates for appropriate educational needs and provides legal advocacy when needed
- Morrissey-Compton Education Center provides diagnostic education assessments
- Weekly scheduled educational consultations for social work staff, educational rights holders, and foster youth to discuss and identify supports and services
- DFCS contracts for transportation and works with local school districts to ensure children who want to remain in their school of origin can remain
- Tutoring provided when a school district does not offer this service
- Interns from local universities are co-located in DFCS to participate in Child and Family Team meetings to coach foster youth interested in higher education
- For those who seek or are enrolled in post-secondary education:
 - DFCS collaborates with community partners to host annual Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) assistance in completing this application
 - Provides additional scholarship funds for post-secondary education
 - Case management and mentoring for youth qualified for transitional housing programs to support post-secondary educational goals

INTERNSHIPS

The Intern & Earn 1.0 program serves eligible youth from the CalFresh, CalWORKs, and Foster Care programs. Participating youth earn \$16.50 per hour as interns at local non-profit agencies, private businesses, and County departments that provide career and work opportunities. Interns develop real-world skills, learn work-related responsibilities, and explore a wide array of future career options.

In fiscal year 2021, the Intern & Earn 1.0 Program afforded 151 Transition Age Youth (TAY) job positions to learn and demonstrate employment skills.



Social Capital

"I really feel like I belong there. This program truly helped me become a better version of myself compared to who I was before doing this internship."

Career Development

"I'm grateful because I'm in college and it has been hard to find internships during this time and I feel like it prepared me for the future."



Financial Security

"My onsite supervisor asked me and another intern to have permanent jobs after the internship. I said yes because I really like working at this store and it's close to where I live."



INTERNSHIPS

Youth Programs

The Hub

Located at 591 North King Road in San Jose, the Hub provides in-person services to youth and young adults ages 16 through 24 offering food, laundry, shower facilities, and clothing through the HubMart. Additionally, laptops and use of computers were made available to support youth with educational distance learning. New projects in 2021 for Transition Age Youth (TAY) to support their financial needs include the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance tax preparation services and the Chafee Cash Payments for COVID-19 Public Health Emergency. The County is currently in the process of developing a new Hub at 1510-1540 Parkmoor Avenue in San Jose with an expected opening in late 2024 to early 2025. The new Hub site will include 81 units of affordable housing, of which 41 will be allocated for foster youth transitional housing.



Transitional Housing Programs

Transitional Housing Programs provide subsidized housing, case management support, coaching/mentoring, financial literacy workshops, and other life skill building activities. Housing, in combination with paid internship programs and access to scholarship funds, ensure Transition Age Youth (TAY) are prepared to transition into self-sufficiency. In November 2021, the State allocated to the County a second round of Housing Navigator Program funding of \$126,080, and a third round of Transitional Housing Program funding of \$705,600 to further augment housing support for those youth and young adults who need additional assistance in finding and securing housing.



Summer Camps and Enrichment Activities Program

Recognizing that foster youth and low-income children do not have equitable access to summer camps and enrichment activities, the Board of Supervisors approved funding to ensure these youth have access. Summer camps and enrichment activities include, but not limited to, day camps, cooking classes, sports camps, coding and youth science camps, and season passes to amusement parks. Transportation was arranged for those children who lacked it. During fiscal year 2021, DFCS enabled 365 children and youth to participate in summer camps and activities.



Transition Age Youth Services

Transition Age Youth (TAY) services are a diverse array of programs, including the Independent Living Program (ILP), that provide service for housing, employment, and health and wellness programs to youth ages 16 through 24. Despite the prolonged novel coronavirus pandemic that lasted through the 2021 fiscal year, foster youth continued to receive services in person and through various social media platforms. During fiscal year 2021, 528 TAY received services. Of the 528 TAY who received services, 324 participated in ILP.



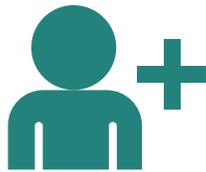
2021 by the Numbers

Calls to Child Abuse & Neglect Center



24,474

In person responses



6063

Probate Guardianship Cases



78

Referrals



9057

Adoptions



76

Petitions Filed



198

In custody removals
(child removed from
parent)



174

Out of custody
removals (child stayed
with parent)



26

Extended Foster Care
(Supportive Transition)



251

Family Maintenance
Services
(court or voluntary)



1183

Family Reunification
Services
(court or voluntary)



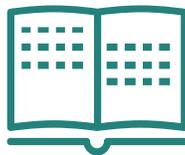
332

Youth placed with
Family
(Relative/NREFM)



232

Number of new
children for whom
services started



673

Out of Home
Placement



972

Number of children
who received child
welfare services



2346

Number of
children for whom
services ended



1089

* Note: Unless indicated as "new," numbers include children who were receiving services as of 12/31/2020.



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