



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Avoiding Intervention: The CARS Program

Everyone knows a family that could use some support. Maybe you have noticed them in the park, the frazzled parent yelling at their kids, possibly finishing off their frustration with a smack to the head, or the single father on an agency caseload that needs assistance finding and getting to medical care because his 18 month old has "bottle rot". Maybe the child in your day care comes dirty and underfed. You might offer assistance and find them overwhelmed, resistant or simply unable to do what needs to be done. You know that if only they received some services that things could be better for the children but nothing changes. Finally out of frustration, obligation, values or mandate you call Children's Services. Later on you might learn that while Children's Services interviewed the family they could not stay involved or the referral did not warrant an intervention. You grumble to a co-worker "How can these families do anything different if we can't get them help?"

On the local level, Butte County's Department of Employment and Social Services, Children's Services Division, has joined forces with Youth for Change to work in collaboration with Northern Valley Catholic Social Service and Catalyst Domestic Violence Services in a First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission funded program called Communities Accessing Responsive Services (CARS). This program is aimed at providing support and assistance for families with children under the age of six, before family issues escalate to the legal level of intervention by Children's Services.

In 2003, 4,962* referrals for child abuse or neglect were made to our Butte County Children's Services Division. Of those, 1,067 were investigated and assessed as meeting the legal requirements for intervention by Children's Services. This left almost 4,000 calls of concern that did not rise to a level of involvement by Children's Services.

We are all well aware that child abuse and neglect is one of the most costly and persistent social issues a community can face. According to *Prevent Child Abuse America 2001*, hospitalization for child abuse victims has an estimated national cost of \$6.2 billion a year. Mental health services for these children costs over \$425 million a year. Professionals have recognized for years that families are slipping through the cracks and coming back into the system more damaged and requiring more and more services.

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On the state level, California has been focused on creating a more workable system for the families in our communities. Beginning under Governor Davis and continuing with Governor Schwarzenegger, the Child Welfare System Improvement and Accountability Act (AB 636) has made the efforts to create different paths of preventative services a priority, before child welfare intervention is needed. Counties have been working with their community partners to develop plans specific to the needs of their communities.

Child abuse prevention can start when a family identifies and understands the stressors and needs that are present in their at-risk homes. Referrals received by Children's Services that do not meet the requirements for intervention are offered the opportunity to participate in voluntary services through the CARS Program. The CARS Program works with families in identifying and educating about those stressors. The importance of partnering with other agencies and local community resources is essential to acting early to preserve and strengthen families before child abuse or maltreatment escalates due to stress or frustration.

Each family participates in a comprehensive assessment to ensure that all identified concerns affecting the family's ability to provide a safe and nurturing environment for their children are addressed. CARS staff utilize a strengths-based model to nurture the family's skills. The parent(s) work together with program staff to develop reliable support systems, both socially and community wide. Barriers are addressed and realistic workable plans are made to work towards overcoming them. Once the family has identified the work they would like to do, the Family Support Worker can assist in advocacy and skill building so that the family begins to function as a healthy interdependent part of their community.

The Family Support Workers from CARS can also assist families by providing financial assistance for basic needs such as food or keeping the electricity turned on. The needs can be as unique as the families themselves. One family needed bus tickets to go to another county to clear traffic violations that kept the father from being able to drive to work. He now has a valid license and has been able to find and keep a job.

Since October 2004 the CARS Program has provided case management to 62 families in the Oroville area, with approximately 429 referrals to community agencies and organizations. Families have remained involved voluntarily with services for periods ranging from one to nine months. Some of the progress is slight, some has been great, and the CARS Program is but one program striving to make a difference in family's lives by providing skills to become self-sufficient. We believe it only takes one positive experience to act as catalyst for change.

The CARS Program began as a pilot program in the Oroville area with funding from the First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission. With other funding opportunities we were able to expand our target population to families with children up to age 18 and beginning July 1, 2006, CARS services became available county-wide.

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For more information, or if you know of a family that might benefit from participation in the CARS Program, please call Brian Giles @ (530) 533-2015.

About First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission

Research shows that a child's brain develops most dramatically in the first five years and what parents and caregivers do during these years to support their child's growth will have a meaningful impact throughout life. Based on this research, California voters passed Proposition 10 in 1998, adding a 50 cents-per-pack tax on cigarettes to support programs for expectant parents and children ages 0 to 5. First 5 Butte County Children and Families Commission distributes approximately \$2 million a year in Prop. 10 revenues to programs and services that meet local needs. Visit them on the Web at www.buttecounty.net/bccfc.



*Data Source: Needell, B., Webster, D., Cuccaro-Alamin, S., Armijo, M., Lee, S., Lery, B., Shaw, T., Dawson, W., Piccus, W., Magruder, J., & Kim, H. (2004). Child Welfare Services of California. Retrieved [04/14/2005], from University of California Berkeley Center for Social Services Research website. URL:<<http://cssr.berkeley.edu/CWSCMSreports/referrals/data/>

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