COUNTY OF BUTTE

DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL SERVICES

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Inter-Departmental Memorandum

FILED Butte County Superior Court SEP 25 2008 Sharol Strickland Clerk By K. Mortensen Deputy FILED

TO: Hon. Steven J. Howell, Presiding Judge

FROM: Cathi Grams, Director Employment & Social Services

SUBJECT: **Grand Jury Response – Children's Services Report**

DATE: August 1, 2008

Department of Employment and Social Services responses to the Grand Jury Report

Findings

1. **Contracted support services such as counseling and parent support groups are reportedly not available to non-English speaking parents. When needed, an interpreter can be hired, but funds for that are limited. Counseling for non-English speaking children is available through Behavioral Health.**

   The respondent disagrees with the finding. Both counseling and parent support groups are available to non-English speaking parents, primarily in Spanish and Hmong. The department has the ability to enter into individual contracts to address the needs of non-English speaking parents that cannot be addressed within existing contracts. In addition, the department has a well-defined policy for staff to access in-house interpreters as well as our contracted Language Line Interpreter Service. The department will provide refresher training to staff on existing departmental policy for accessing interpreter services as well as the process for requesting services not covered through existing contracts no later than November 30, 2008.

2. **Despite the efforts made for effective communication in Butte County Children's Services (BCCS), there is some sense of disconnect between North County Children's Services (NCCS) and South County Children's Services (SCCS). Communication and consistency are hindered by program division and geographic distance. Notification of court policy changes have sometimes not been communicated to NCCS in a timely manner.**

The respondent agrees with the finding. BCCS has begun analyzing its communication practice and gaps between the two office locations. Plans are in place to redesign the management assignments with the goal of providing consistent information and support to the staff regardless of their work location. Full implementation is expected by October 2008.

3. **Staff report that NCCS is in need of more access to attorney services.**

   The respondent disagrees with the finding. Attorney services are as readily available to both SCCS and NCCS. NCCS staff needs training regarding the various established processes to access attorney services available to them. This training will be provided to staff during unit meetings no later than November 30, 2008.

4. **Clerical Support to Children's Services is sometimes complicated by a multi-program chain of command.**

   The respondent agrees with the finding. Support staff is now included in Children's Management meetings so they are available to discuss how best to provide clerical support to social work staff when changes in work processes and/or regulations are implemented. These meetings provide an ongoing opportunity for Clerical Support staff to make suggestions for improving business practices to support social work staff as well as improve efficiencies for clerical support staff.

5. **To promote cross training, DESS receptionists are rotated to various divisions including SCCS. In the case of SCCS, receptionist rotation is detrimental. SCCS is a busy reception area, the Children's Services program is complex, and the clients are often dealing with highly emotional issues.**

   The respondent agrees with the finding. The issue of frequent rotation of reception staff in the SCCS has been addressed. There is agreement to assign staff to this function on a more long-term basis to ensure consistent service in both offices and for expertise to be developed in this position.

6. **NCCS needs better access to interview rooms to provide confidential places to meet with families and children.**

   The respondent agrees with the finding. The NCCS does not have designated interview rooms for Children's Services staff to conduct confidential interviews however there are locations within the Chico Community Employment Center where this can occur. Training will be provided to staff on how to access interview space within the building no later than November 30, 2008. The

majority of confidential interviews are conducted off site, either in the families home or in an agreed upon location.

7. **In SCCS, there is a covered outdoor play area used for supervised visitation that is in need of a way to address oppressive heat in the summer months.**

   The respondent agrees with the finding. The play area is surrounded by tall walls that prohibit air flow causing the area to become quite warm in the summer months. BCCS has identified a funding source and is in the process of evaluating a safe and economical option to remedy this situation (e.g. fans, misters etc.) with an anticipated implementation date of September 15, 2008.

8. **Social Workers spend over two thirds of their time in data entry and report work using the statewide Children's Welfare Service database (CWS). The amount of mandated information has increased dramatically in the last five years. This has made it difficult for Social Workers to keep up with their caseloads.**

   The respondent agrees with the finding. Use of the Child Welfare Services Management System (CWS/CMS) is mandated by the State and is not a County option. The system enables counties to track prior history of families throughout the State as well as extract data that is used to monitor individual county performance and develop improvement plans for service delivery. Entering information into CWS/CMS has become more time-consuming over the past several years due to the increasing complexity of the program as well as outdated computer program design. At this time the State of California is engaged in a process to redesign the existing system into a web based program with an anticipated date of 2011. This revised system will be much more user-friendly and efficient. Staff training is constantly being provided to both refresh staff on current procedures as well as identify new time saving methods for data entry and case management. U.C. Davis is developing case management training for social work staff to address this issue and Butte County has been the pilot county to receive this training at no cost.

9. **Due to the lack of authorized funds for overtime pay unless it is an emergency, some employees are reportedly working overtime without pay in order to meet deadlines.**

   The respondent disagrees with the finding. A review of Social Work Supervisors indicates they are unaware of any staff that is working overtime without being compensated. The department will follow up to ensure this is does not occur in the future.

10. **Drug use in Butte County is a concern. Children's Services participates in the Methamphetamine Task Force and also partners with Drug Court. They also provide specialized training for foster parents of drug-addicted children. (OFR-Options for Recovery). However, the use of medical marijuana by parents conflicts with the Children's Service policy of a drug-free environment for children. There is abuse of "medical marijuana" prescriptions and it is often found to one of many drugs in use. There is not a consistent policy in place to respond to this difficult dilemma.**

    The respondent disagrees partially with the finding. There is a consistent policy in place regarding any drug use that is based on the protection of children however the department's adherence to the policy is inconsistent and needs to be monitored closely. Supervisors will review the policy with staff in unit meetings no later than November 30, 2008 and will monitor compliance through individual case reviews on an ongoing basis.

11. **Although there are several drug rehabilitation programs in Butte County for women, there are limited options for men.**

    The respondent disagrees with the finding. There are programs in both North and South areas of the County. BCCS will provide training to all staff no later than November 30, 2008 to ensure they are aware of available resources and how to access them for their male parents

Recommendations

1. **BCCS should encourage service providers to include non-English speaking families in their program plans.**

    The recommendation has been implemented.

    Contracted service providers are expected to provide services in a variety of languages, primarily Spanish and Hmong. When BCCS issues a request for proposal (RFP), the request includes the requirement that services be provided in a variety of languages as needed. Several of the service providers have individual staff that are bi-lingual and generally make those staff available when needed. The level of need for services in a variety of languages fluctuates and it is sometimes difficult for service providers to consistently have staff available to provide those services. When that occurs, BCCS has the ability to contract with individuals who can provide the needed service, or to provide interpreter services.

    With regard to the process for accessing these bi-lingual services, it is not utilized as frequently and therefore can be more cumbersome for social worker staff. BCCS will provide refresher training to staff on existing departmental policy no

later than November 30, 2008, for accessing interpreter services as well as the process for requesting services not covered through existing service provide contracts

2. **DESS and BCCS should review communication practices and revise them to address the disconnect issues between NCCS and SCCS, the consistent and complete flow of communication, and general morale issues.**

   The recommendation has been partially implemented.

   DESS and BCCS have already begun analyzing its communication practices and gaps. Plans are in place to redesign the management assignments with the goal of providing consistent information and support to the staff regardless of their work location. Full implementation is expected by October 2008.

3. **BCCS should review the need for additional attorney services to NCCS and ensure that need is met.**

   The recommendation to review the need for additional attorney services to NCCS has been implemented. The findings of the review indicate that there are sufficient attorney services to NCCS.

   The current attorney has worked with supervisors and management to establish and communicate an effective process for accessing his services. The attorney has established a schedule of times he is available in each office when he is not in court. Currently he is in court approximately 22 hours per week and spends 7 hours in the office in Chico and 12 hours in the office in Oroville. A system has been developed for social workers and supervisors to request a staffing when he is not in the office. This system which involves phone and email communication appears to be working and the attorney has good response time when this process is used appropriately. Training will be provided to staff no later than November 30, 2008 regarding the established process to access attorney services.

4. **DESS should consider ways to eliminate barriers in meeting BCCS clerical support needs and should consider the need for a permanent receptionist at SCCS.**

   The recommendation has been implemented.

   The issue of an experienced receptionist in the SCCS has been addressed and there is agreement to have a receptionist assigned on a more long-term basis in this area. Support staff is now included in Children's Management meetings so they are part of the team that evaluates better ways to do business for both clerical support and social work staff. This has eliminated many of the barriers.

In addition, BCCS is currently engaged in a complete organizational review with all BCCS staff of how we do business and support staff is an active and important part of that process.

5. **BCCS should find a way to provide adequate confidential interview space at NCCS.**

   The recommendation has been implemented.

   The availability of space in the Community Employment Center in Chico is an issue for all of the occupants of the building. There is finite space and we have many activities that happen in this building. We make every effort to afford all persons needing it a confidential interview space. We have looked at alternative outlying space but it is not a reasonable option at this time. We will continue to address these needs within the processes and space we currently have available. Training will be provided to staff about how to request and access interview space within the building no later than November 30, 2008.

6. **To offset budget reductions, BCCS should identify needs and find ways to partner with service organizations, businesses, civic groups, religious institutions and individuals in Butte County to help provide needed funding and volunteer services for programs and projects.**

   The recommendation has been implemented.

   BCCS is currently involved in a Community Alliance composed of community organizations committed to providing additional services for programs and clients. This group has met needs for families including activities for children, and household items for families whose children are returning home.

   The Children's Services Coordinating Council has developed a committee charged with identifying and coordinating funding and services that may be available to BCCS and our community partners for the future.

7. **BCCS should develop a solution to the oppressive summer heat problem in the outdoor supervised visitation area in SCCS.**

   The recommendation has not been fully implemented.

   BCCS has identified a funding source and is in the process of evaluating a safe and economical resolution to this issue (e.g. fans, misters etc.). The expected date of completion of this project is September 15, 2008.

8. **DESS and BCCS should explore ways to reduce the time demands placed on Social Workers from CWS data entry requirements and facilitate understanding of its process.**

   The recommendation will be partially implemented. Use of the Child Welfare Services Management System is mandated by the state and is not a county option. However, the county is exploring ways to streamline and expedite data entry through case management training.

   The CWS/CMS computer system enables child welfare agencies to track prior history of families throughout the state as well as extract data that is used to monitor individual county performance and develop improvement plans for service delivery. Entering information into the CWS/CMS has become more time-consuming over the past several years due to the increasing complexity of the program as well as outdated computer program design. At this time the State of California is engaged in a process to modify the existing system with an estimated 2011 implementation date.

   Staff are regularly updated regarding the importance of the information entered into the computer system and its usage for quality assurance in child welfare. Staff and supervisors meet regularly to identify and resolve individual issues with data entry and case management.

   As a part of the current strategic planning process BCCS is looking at any adjustments that can be made to increase efficiency in the use of the CWS/CMS system without additional staff. BCCS is coordinating with UC Davis to develop a time/caseload management training series specifically designed around the CWS workload issues, including the cumbersome data entry requirements.

9. **BCCS should establish a consistent medical marijuana policy which is based on the protection of children.**

   This recommendation has been implemented. BCCS already has a consistent medical marijuana policy that is based on the protection of children.

   Medical Marijuana is treated in the same manner as any drug/alcohol that is identified as an issue in a report made to us. Risk factors to a child are evaluated by BCCS and include; drug/alcohol use, neglect issues, physical safety and protection issues. Once a child has been made a dependent of the Juvenile Court and placed in a plan of reunification, BCCS monitors the effect of drug usage through the caseplan. This means that regardless of the possession of a medical marijuana prescription, if the use of drugs is prohibited in the court approved case plan, BCCS would expect that the parent not use marijuana and look for alternative methods to deal with the underlying medical concern.

Supervisors will provide refresher training to staff on the established policy no later than November 30, 2008 and ensure adherence to the policy through individual case reviews on an ongoing basis.

10. BCCS should encourage the development of men's drug treatment options in the community.

The recommendation has been implemented

A drug treatment service geared for men is an area of need that the community has been working on for some time. DESS has been proactive in identifying the need for services among its child welfare families and encouraging the development of additional resources with our county and community partners who are funded for this activity. As a result there are currently drug treatment services for men available through the Well Ministry and Salvation Army drug treatment services. These include residential and outpatient treatment. There are co-ed drug treatment services on an outpatient basis provided by Butte County Behavioral Health in both Chico and Oroville. Butte County Behavioral Health will be providing Men's Health Groups that will be located in the Butte County Employment Centers and will be available to clients in the CalWORKs and Children's Services programs. These groups will address substance abuse issues as well as other issues affecting families.