

Foster Care in San Francisco (Approved June 7, 1996)

Summary

The original report made by the 1993-1994 Civil Grand Jury, Foster Care in San Francisco, reviewed the Department of Social Services/Family and Children's Service's Unit (DSS/FCSU). It examined their role and performance in providing foster care in San Francisco. Unfortunately, for many years the city had been delivering these services at a level below State regulations, and to the dissatisfaction of many in the community.

Background

The 1993-1994 Civil Grand Jury found that San Francisco had the highest rates of youth dependency in the state. Since then, DSS has made solid progress to correct non-compliance problems. These youth dependency problems call for a coordinated effort to create permanent programs such as: an ombudsman program, an independent agency to develop family preservation planning, and increased efforts to remove the continuing non-compliance status.

The Grand Jury had summarized their findings as follows:

"To address the community's excessive youth dependency problems, the Grand Jury recommends that the mayor and the Board of Supervisors coordinate efforts to create prevention programs and services to reduce the incidence of youth dependency. It is recommended that the Department continue with the current changes, which have led to progress in addressing its non-compliance problems. However, the Grand Jury strongly recommends that, once the non-compliance problems have been resolved, the Department redesign its case management system to focus on children and families rather than maintaining its current focus on "process". Finally, the Grand Jury recommends that the mayor establish an independent ombudsman's office where grievances can be heard and resolved without penalty to children and foster parents."

Findings - by the 1995-1996 Civil Grand Jury

An ombudsman program is currently being developed. After considerable delay, a contract was approved in November 1995 by the Social Service Commission. Community Boards of San Francisco was awarded the contract. Since then, they have organized a Community Advisory Board, started the development of a protocol, and currently are screening applicants for the position of Coordinator in the ombudsman program - which is called the Provider and Client Complaint Resolution Program.

The planning process for the Family Preservation and Family Support Committee (FPFSC) has been underway since April 1994. The planning group is comprised of parents, foster parents, community-based organizations, advocates, the clergy, foundations, staff from University of California at San Francisco and San Francisco State University, representatives of relevant county departments, and staff from the DSS/FCSU. This resulted in a five-year plan for targeted communities which was approved by the Board of Supervisors in May 1995.

The California Department of Social Service (CDSS) determination of non-compliance was based on the infrequency of face-to-face visits by social workers to youths in foster care, to the parents of these youths, and to foster care parents. The social workers had

outrageous case loads and poor morale due to staff shortages, lack of ancillary help, and funding cutbacks.

Over the past few years, support for social workers was developed through the addition of assistant case load workers; the addition of frequent meetings to review procedures, problem cases and successes; and the addition of volunteers to accompany youths to dental and medical appointments.

An adoption coalition has recently been established. It is comprised of five adoption agencies in the Bay Area and the DSS/FCSU. This coalition will develop procedures to place eligible children more rapidly, and thus prevent long delays in foster care.

The CDSS reviewed 150 foster care cases in August 1995, and were pleased with the substantial progress that had been made through corrective actions. The State agreed verbally, with a letter to follow, to remove the non-compliance order. They rescinded this verbal agreement when they learned that Brian Cahill, Director of DSS, was being replaced. Mayor Brown appointed Dr. Michael Wald to take over as Director of DSS on June 1, 1996.

The DSS/FCSU has made tremendous progress in correcting many deficiencies since the 1993-1994 Civil Grand Jury report, and there is every indication that this progress will continue.