

Continuum of Care Reform
Children & Family Services Bureau



October 29, 2020

Report to Family and Human Services Committee

Kathy Gallagher
Employment and Human Services Director

Family and Human Services Committee Report Continuum of Care Reform



BACKGROUND

The Continuum of Care Reform (CCR) is a product of AB 403, which was passed in October of 2015, and is a comprehensive child welfare reform effort designed to improve outcomes for youth in foster care. The goal is to ensure that youth in foster care have their day-to-day physical, mental, and emotional needs met; that they have the greatest chance to grow up in permanent and supportive homes; and that they have the opportunity to grow into self-sufficient, successful adults.

EHSD established a collaborative CCR Workgroup overseen by a Steering Committee with management representatives from Children & Family Services, Behavioral Health (BH) Department, and Probation Department, as well as parent and youth partners, to implement and monitor the essential components of CCR, such as Child and Family Team Meetings, use of congregate care facilities, permanency planning, ongoing CCR training, and data collection. CCR implementation relies heavily on the expansion of behavioral health services to keep children placed in the least restrictive settings and Behavioral Health Department is working to meet those increased demands. Strong partnerships with the Behavioral Health and Probation departments have supported the collaborative implementation of CCR in Contra Costa County.

CHILD AND FAMILY TEAM

Contra Costa County implemented Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings as of January 1, 2017. CFT meetings include the child, family, and members of their formal and informal support network who meet to ensure a collaborative approach to case planning which includes the voice of both the child and their parent(s).

Although the current statewide case management system does not sufficiently accommodate CFT tracking, in 2020, CFS developed a specific workgroup to address CFT data. This year, CFS completed an average of 65 CFT meetings per month, with an average of 25 additional CFTs per month led by Behavioral Health partners. These meetings include initial CFTs (required within 60 days of detention), ongoing CFTs (due every 6 months or less), and placement preservation CFTs.

In February 2020, a CFT Survey was developed to allow all CFT members and participants the opportunity to provide feedback to the Department about the meeting they attended. This survey is available as a hard copy, and online using a link that can be emailed or a QR code that is printed right on to the survey. (See Appendix A). CFS is utilizing the results of these surveys to continue to improve the quality of our CFT meetings. Due to the pandemic, CFTs have been adjusted to allow for virtual participation as well as in-person meetings or a combination, based on the families' preference or needs.

CFT meetings are strengthened and supported by the use of the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) Assessment. Since October 2019, Behavioral Health Partners have been

Family and Human Services Committee Report

Continuum of Care Reform

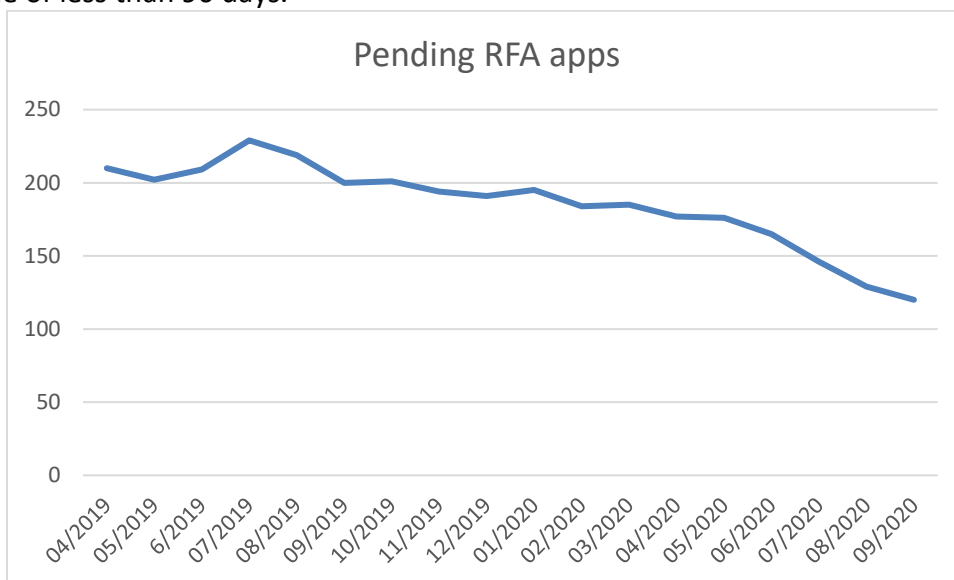
completing this assessment for any child who is eligible to Specialty Mental Health Services. Starting in October 2020, for those children who do not meet initial eligibility for Specialty Mental Health Services, CFS CANS certified staff will be completing this assessment, which will not only identify areas to be addressed by the team in the CFT meetings, but will also guide the case plan for the family and support the effort to put appropriate services in place in a timely manner at every level of placement.

RESOURCE FAMILY APPROVAL

Contra Costa County implemented Resource Family Approval (RFA) January 1, 2017. RFA shifted the way that Children and Family Services approves caregivers as it expanded mandatory foster parent training for relatives and determines permanency approval upfront, allowing additional options for the caregiver and child should the family fail to reunify.

The RFA unit receives an average of 22 applications per month (over the past 18 months), and oversees the ongoing training and well-being of the Resource Family Homes. Effective of 01/1/2020, Contra Costa County has voluntarily increased the number of required pre-approval training hours from 12 to 18 hours, offered twice per month. Contra Costa County’s training requirements now exceed the state mandates in an effort to provide our resource families best practices and resource information that supports their growth and development into successful resource homes. RFA staff participate in placement-related and matching meetings to assist in finding the best fit for each child with an appropriate resource family to meet their specific needs.

RFA staff have made significant progress in reducing the backlog of pending applications over the past year and a half despite the numerous continuous changes CDSS has made in the RFA requirements. Approximately half of the current pending applications are within the approval timeline of less than 90 days.



Family and Human Services Committee Report Continuum of Care Reform



CDSS has completed three annual Resource Family Approval Reviews in Contra Costa County, each of which was very positive and notably acknowledged the success of Contra Costa's Resource Family Approval program with limited staffing resources in comparison to surrounding counties. The State funding allocation for RFA staff is less than what is needed and is a continuation of the underfunding for the Foster Home Licensing program.

Utilizing the Resource Family Approval program, CFS has focused on recruiting and retaining quality relative and non-relative resource families. Although CFS utilizes relative notification and family finding, it is important to note that relative placement numbers may also be impacted by the Court and attorneys who have a strong voice in relative or non-related extended family member placements.

CONGREGATE CARE

CCR is designed to promote home based care, and guides the transition away from the traditional use of long-term group home care by transforming existing group home care into short term, residential therapeutic programs (STRTP) for youth who are not ready to live with families in home-based care. Youth placed in an STRTP have access to expanded behavioral and mental health services and support and are assessed regularly for their potential to step down into a lower level of care. Children & Family Services has devoted significant time and energy to ensure that we are utilizing home based family care as often as it is appropriate. However, CFS acknowledges that many children have experienced significant trauma and abuse and have behaviors and conditions that require a higher, more restrictive level of care.

Despite the high level of services STRTPs are designed to provide, there is still a lack of placement options for the very high level youth whose needs exceed STRTP capabilities. Several youth in Contra Costa County have been denied placement by every STRTP with an available bed in the state. CFS is then tasked with finding a safe place for these high risk, high needs youth, often with little notice. The specialized placements we typically resort to for these youth are costly and often require county only funds as they do not meet eligibility for Title IV-E Foster Care payment, despite the fact that they are often our only remaining option. The lack of placement options for high needs youth also creates a significant barrier to our ability to support their individual needs and long term planning.

CCR was originally presented to counties as a cost-saving initiative, as youth would not be remaining in high cost group homes for extended periods of time. Unfortunately, the state has not acknowledged that many youth who do not require STRTP level placements, also do not want to live in a family home setting, nor do we have an abundance of family homes who are interested or comfortable taking teens stepping down from high level facilities. Despite our best efforts, our renewed focus on extensive family finding, and child specific recruitment efforts, we have not seen those cost-savings, nor have there been additional funds allocated to account for the challenges that counties are experiencing.

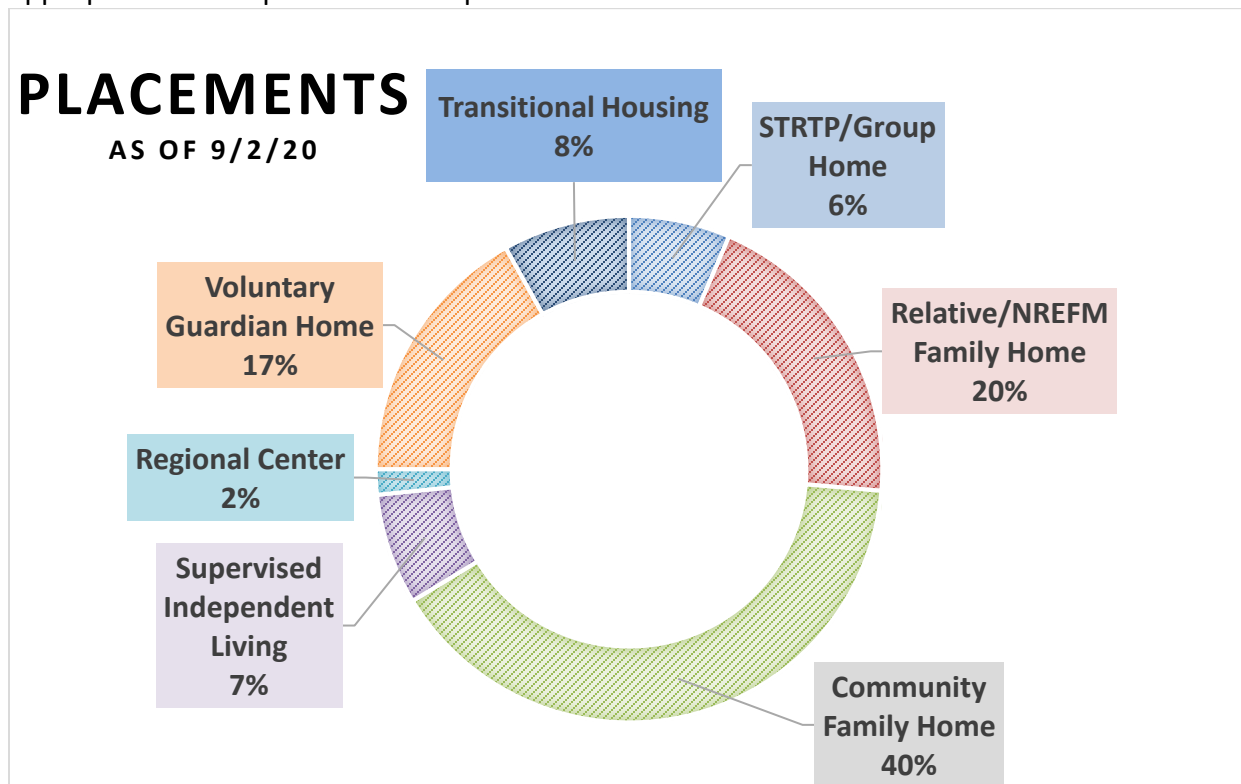
Family and Human Services Committee Report

Continuum of Care Reform

An additional, related challenge regarding the STRTP model is the sustainability of these facilities. In the past two years, we are aware of 2 large scale organizations (that also have Foster Family Agencies and other youth housing programs) who have decided to close the STRTP portion of their organization, one citing the challenges of 90% of their residents having highly acute needs. The county has concerns about the ability of these facilities to adequately serve the needs of our most vulnerable youth when there are only the highest level youth residing in their facility.

Despite these challenges, CFS has consistently been stepping down youth when safe and appropriate. In order to support the youth who are able to step down into lower levels of care after being served by an STRTP, CFS has implemented training (both formal and informal) for staff to support transition planning and preparing for successful transitions into home based family care. Transition plans include ensuring supportive services are available and in place prior to a child changing placements and encouraging caregivers and youth to build their support networks. CFS also meets regularly with providers, including STRTPs, Foster Family Agencies, and the few remaining Group Homes to encourage their collaboration in the transition planning processes for our youth, and to provide support as needed with CCR related changes.

As of 08/2018, CCC had 94 youth in Group Home and STRTP Placements. Over the course of 2 years, as of 08/2020, that number has been reduced to 53 youth in Group Home and STRTP placements. The youth who are in STRTP placements continue to have regular needs assessments completed monthly by the providers and are reviewed frequently by CFS staff for appropriateness of placement and possible transition to a lower level of care.



Family and Human Services Committee Report Continuum of Care Reform



SYSTEM OF CARE

Since the passing of AB 403 and the initial implementation of CCR, the state has passed additional legislation that both supports and sustains the principles of CCR. Counties are now mandated to establish a System of Care Memorandum of Understanding detailing how county agencies will work together to serve children and families who have been involved in the child welfare system. An oversight workgroup has been established that includes CFS, Probation, Behavioral Health, Regional Center and the County School Superintendent, who have all been extremely cooperative in this process thus far. Smaller, specialized workgroups are developing different sections of the MOU, which is due to the state on 12/31/20. CFS has embraced a lead role in this project, which will solidify and strengthen the collaborations across the above mentioned departments.

FAMILY URGENT RESPONSE SYSTEM (FURS)

The state is establishing a statewide hotline for foster and former foster youth and caregivers who need immediate assistance. State hotline calls will be delegated to the Family Urgent Response System (FURS) program of the county in which the child resides when an in-person response is deemed necessary. This new legislation also requires a collaborative effort as Children & Family Services is working with Behavioral Health and Probation to ensure we have the appropriate Mobile Response system in place to respond to these calls. Behavioral Health currently has a contract for our existing Mobile Response Team, which we will be expanding and enhancing in order to meet the regulations in the FURS legislation. FURS requires 24/7 in-person response teams to be available to respond to warm transfers from the state hotline. FURS also requires that foster youth and probation youth placed by other counties into Contra Costa County must also be served timely by this program. As of 09/2020, there are approximately 430 youth from other counties living in Contra Costa County.

The state hotline will be in place as of 03/01/2021 and Contra Costa County has done some background research and foundational work on our county plan, which is due to the state by 01/15/2021. We have also begun conversations with our existing Mobile Response provider about the expansion of the program. The main goal of the FURS program is to continue to offer in home services to our children and families that support and can help stabilize home based placements.

CONCLUSION

The Continuum of Care Reform draws together a series of existing and new reforms to our Child Welfare Services program designed out of an understanding that children who must live apart from their biological/adoptive parents do best when they are cared for in committed, nurturing family homes. AB 403, alongside the newer legislation, provides the statutory and policy framework to ensure services and supports provided to the child and his or her family are tailored toward the ultimate goal of maintaining a stable, permanent family.

Family and Human Services Committee Report Continuum of Care Reform



This report from EHSD serves to inform FHS Committee on CCR progress and challenges and to acknowledge and express appreciation for the continued support from Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors.

APPENDICES

- A. CFT Survey
- B. October 2020 CCR Dashboard Excerpt

APPENDIX A

Youth/Family Evaluation of the Child and Family Team (CFT) Meeting

Contra Costa County Children & Family Services (CFS) would like to learn more about your experience in this CFT meeting. Please help us do better by answering the following questions. Thank you.

1. Have you seen the brochure that describes CFT's? Y/N Did anyone go over it with you? Y/N
2. Have you had a CFT in the last 6 months? Y/N
3. Did your Social Worker explain the purpose of this meeting to you? Y/N
4. Did anyone inform you that you could bring family members or other support people with you to the meeting? Y/N
5. Who attended your most recent CFT meeting? Please circle all that apply.

Parent	Family member (non-caregiver)	Attorney
CFT Facilitator	Social worker/probation officer	Friend
Behavioral Health staff	School staff	Regional Center staff
CASA	Parent Partner	Youth Partner
Independent Living Skills (ILSP) Social Worker	Current caregiver/resource parent	Other
6. During the meeting, I felt included and listened to.

Strongly Agree	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Neither Agree nor Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	Strongly Disagree
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7. My ideas and suggestions were used to help develop the case plan goals and strategies.

Strongly Agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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8. I feel my worries and needs were listened to and understood.

Strongly Agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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9. The action plan and next steps are clear to me.

Strongly Agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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10. I feel that my participation made a difference.

Strongly Agree	<u>Agree</u>	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
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11. What did you like the best about the CFT meeting?
12. Was the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment discussed at the CFT meeting?
Y/N
13. What do you wish had been done differently at the CFT?
14. Please share any suggestions to improve the CFT process.



APPENDIX B

CONTINUUM OF CARE REFORM DASHBOARD EXCERPT –SEPTEMBER 2020

Resource Homes Activity August 31, 2020					
<i>Type</i>	<i>Applications pending as of end of Last Month</i>	<i>Applications Currently Pending Approval</i>	<i>New Applications</i>	<i>New Approved Apps</i>	<i>Apps Withdrawn/ Denied</i>
RFA – Community	66	64	9	3	4
RFA – Relative/NREFM	63	53	12	4	11
Total	129	120	21	7	15

STRTP Placements August 31, 2020		
	<i>End of Last Mo</i>	<i>Current Placements</i>
In County STRTP	24	22
Out-Of-County STRTP	26	27
Total	50	49

Successfully Stepped Down to Lower Level of Care During August 2020	
From STRTP	2
From Group Home	0
Total Children Stepped Down	2
New Placements into Group Home	1
New Placements into STRTP	2

Other County Children/Youth – Placed in Contra Costa Point in Time September 5, 2020												
	In Home	Non Foster Care	Court Specified Home	Group Hm or STRTP	Small Family Home	FFA Comm	FFA Rel/NREFM	Fam Home Comm	Fam Home Rel/NREFM	SILP	Guardian	Total
Alameda	11	2		9	2	42		45	27	10		148
San Francisco	10	1				54		13	19	4		101
Solano	5			1		16		1	3	4		30
Sacramento	2			7	1	2	1	1		4		18
San Mateo				2		8			2	4		16
Log Angeles						2		1	9	2		14
Marin	2					8		1	2			13
Santa Clara					1			2	5	2		10
San Joaquin	1				2	1	1	1	3	1		10
All Other Counties	7			14		14		2	11	1		49
Total	38	3	0	33	6	147	2	67	81	32	0	409

