



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES OFFICE OF CHILD PROTECTION

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April 30, 2021

To: Supervisor Hilda L. Solis, Chair
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From: Judge Michael Nash (Ret.)
Executive Director

PROGRESS UPDATE ON THE WORK OF THE OFFICE OF CHILD PROTECTION

In the final report of the Los Angeles County Blue Ribbon Commission on Child Protection (BRCCP), [The Road to Safety for Our Children](#),¹ two key recommendations were to “establish an entity to oversee one unified child protection system,” and for it to create a strategic plan for the work it will focus on. On June 10, 2014, the Board adopted the recommendations contained within that BRCCP final report and took action to establish the Office of Child Protection (OCP) as a separate entity reporting directly to the Board and located within the Executive Office. In October 2016, the OCP submitted to the Board its Countywide Child Protection Strategic Plan, which categorizes the work across five goal areas: prevention, safety, permanency, well-being, and cross-cutting approaches. It has submitted quarterly updates on its progress since August 1, 2016; this is a report on its progress since the last update submitted on January 31, 2021.

GOAL 1: PREVENTION *Provide children and families with the upfront supports and services they need to prevent them from entering the child welfare system and/or limit their involvement with the system once they are known to it.*

In June 2017, the OCP released a [prevention plan](#)—written in collaboration with dozens of County departments, advocates, and community stakeholders—for enhancing prevention efforts across the county. Many successful initiatives came out of this work, moving us closer to the goal of providing primary prevention supports to families who want them (these efforts are highlighted in our annual prevention reports). More recently, additional endeavors have begun taking shape that hold the promise of moving this work to its next phase of implementation.

¹ Unless otherwise noted, all reports mentioned in this document are available through the embedded links and on the Office of Child Protection website at <http://ocp.lacounty.gov/>.

From this point forward, we will report on our work through updates on these key initiatives, all of which include cross-departmental and cross-sector partnerships that are necessary for broadening the scope and deepening the foothold of prevention priorities in future.

- **Supporting Los Angeles County's Transition to Prioritizing Well-Being**

- ✧ Invest LA—Worked with the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), Casey Family Programs, and other key partners to complete the *Invest LA* plan that will guide DCFS's work over the next 5 years. The final plan includes alignment with other cross-sector prevention initiatives, including *Thriving Families*, *Safer Children* and *Family First*, and a foundational commitment to improving equity.
- ✧ Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)—The state released its draft prevention plan on March 31, 2021, and by April 16, DCFS, Probation, the OCP, and several key stakeholders and advocates had submitted feedback. The OCP, DCFS, Probation, and others continue to work with partners and advocates to encourage the state to widen its eligibility criteria (who can be served under FFPSA) and increase the number of programs that can be used. These changes would help the County preserve crucial supports like prevention and aftercare, Partnerships for Families, family preservation, and pregnant/parenting teen programs, as well as draw down more federal funding for administrative and training costs. They would also increase preventive access to substance-abuse, mental health, and in-home parenting resources for families *before* an open DCFS case is needed. On April 20, your Board also passed a motion to send a 5-signature letter to the state with additional feedback.
- ✧ Information, Referral, and Connection System—The Chief Executive Office (CEO) and the Chief Information Office (CIO) are collaborating with the OCP, County departments, and other stakeholders to include a TAY [Transition-Age Youth] Hub in the procurement of a new information and referral service to be integrated with an enhanced Los Angeles County Community Information Exchange (LACCIE) that will initially be rolled out to meet the needs of transition-age youth. This new approach leverages and combines existing CIO platforms/resources with new information and referral services to create a new countywide Information, Referral, and Connection (IR&C) system. A Request for Proposals (RFP) for establishing the IR&C system in Los Angeles County was released in February, with proposals due in May and an anticipated vendor selection timeline of fall 2021.

- **Ensuring That Community-Based Resources Thrive**

- ✧ Home Visitation—Partners are working together to expand home-visiting programs to all mothers across the county who want to participate.
 - The Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health (DMH) has eliminated its contribution to home visiting in Los Angeles from a fiscal-year (FY) 2019–20 high of approximately \$21 million—\$13 million for the Healthy Families America and Parents as Teachers models and \$8 million for Nurse-Family Partnership—to zero in FY 2022–23, allowing only for the spend-down of unexpended funds from FY 2021–22. This includes eliminating DMH’s original long-standing contribution to Nurse-Family Partnership (\$6 million in FY 2017–18) that pre-dated its expanded investment in FY 2018–19. The change also reduces the Department of Public Health’s (DPH’s) ability to draw down \$800,000 in matching Medicaid Targeted Case Management funds. It is anticipated that this adjustment will result in a loss of services for 900 families, and a reduction of up to 34 staff positions.
 - In response, DPH is striving to maximize California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids (CalWORKs) home-visiting and California Home Visiting Program (CHVP) funds, but awaits the Governor’s May Revise budget to be certain of the extent to which those funds may close the gap left by the cessation of DMH funding. (The Governor has proposed a reduction to CalWORKs home visiting, but whether that will remain in his revised budget or affect the County’s budget are unknown.)
 - DCFS, Probation, the OCP, and others are advocating for the state to include additional home-visiting programs in its Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA) prevention plan, the draft of which included only Healthy Families America as an allowable intervention program, and also narrowed eligibility criteria. Expanding eligibility and adding more programs would increase families’ preventive access to home-visiting resources *before* an open DCFS case is needed.
 - Key home-visiting stakeholders are finalizing a plan of action to strengthen Los Angeles County’s early home-visiting system, having launched an ad hoc group in February to develop recommendations for overcoming the challenges of multiple contracts and funding streams that affect providers and service implementation at a systemic level. A second ad hoc group addressing population needs will be launched in May.
- ✧ Early Care and Education (ECE)—DPH’s Office for the Advancement of Early Care and Education (OAECE) is working with the Policy Roundtable for Child Care and Development and the Child Care Planning Committee to increase access to early care and education programs for interested parents. Recent OAECE activities and COVID-19 responses include:

- As of April 1, 2021, 6,374 licensed ECE programs are open, which represents 79% of the Los Angeles County system.
- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act child-care vouchers were extended through February 2021 and the contract amount was expanded to \$20 million. The Child Care Alliance of Los Angeles is currently processing February invoices.
- Child care has been elevated as a central issue in the federal American Rescue Plan, and several County departments have reached out to OAECE to develop joint proposals:
 - DPH—child care vouchers
 - Department of Human Resources (DHR)—stabilization of Los Angeles County Child Development Centers, including 1 full-time-equivalent (FTE) for OAECE
 - Department of Consumer and Business Affairs—child-care stabilization grants
 - Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS)—supporting the child-care workforce

In addition, Supervisor Kuehl's Office requested a \$5 million proposal from OAECE to support child care, and OAECE submitted a plan to stabilize operations in family child-care homes.

- **Measuring Our Impact**

- ✧ Measuring Prevention—Working with First 5 LA, DMH, DCFS, the Children's Data Network, the CEO, the CIO, DPH, the Department of Health Services (DHS), the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE), and other data experts to develop a set of standardized measures of prevention to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention-plan implementation efforts
 - Engaging subject-matter experts and stakeholders to identify data indicators and sources for the next iteration of the Countywide Prevention Metrics (CPM). To date, DCFS, DMH, DHS, DPH, LACOE, DPH's Office of Violence Prevention, DPH's Substance Abuse Prevention and Control unit, DHS' Office of Diversion and Re-Entry, the CEO's Alternatives to Incarceration Initiative and its Homeless Initiative, and LA Best Babies Network have discussed CPM data needs related to:
 - Child protective services involvement
 - Education
 - Infant and maternal health
 - Community health and well-being
 - Juvenile-justice involvement
 - Preventable child injuries and deaths
 - Domestic violence
 - Substance abuse
 - Homelessness and housing insecurity

GOAL 2: SAFETY *Minimize, if not eliminate, the risk that a child known to one or more entities in our system will be harmed.*

Implementation of Anthony A. Report Recommendations

On August 10, 2018, the OCP, DCFS, the Health Agency, DHS, and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) filed a [joint response](#) to the Board's motion to review the case that included the death of 10-year-old Anthony Avalos. The report contained eight recommendations for systems improvements. A [six-month follow-up report](#) on efforts to implement these recommendations was submitted to the Board on February 14, 2019. Implementation efforts to date on the recommendations are below.

1) Reevaluate DCFS's Voluntary Family Maintenance (VFM) process.

The revised VFM policy was released on August 3, 2020, and now governs how VFM cases should be handled.

2) Improve the skills of staff interviewing children.

A training video on different aspects of interviewing was released in June 2020 and is now required for children's social workers (CSWs) and their supervisors (SCSWs) in both DCFS's emergency-response and continuing-services sections. Of 527 SCSWs, 434 have completed the training, representing 82% of the total; full completion is targeted for June 30, 2021. Of 2,665 CSWs, 1,038 have completed the training, representing 39% of the total; full completion is targeted for December 31, 2021.

3) Retrain social workers on the proper use of Structured Decision Making® (SDM).

See "Risk Assessment and System Improvement Recommendation Implementation" on page 8 for a full description.

4) Increase collaboration between DCFS and law enforcement.

- The joint response/investigation pilot that DCFS and the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department (LASD) launched in the Antelope Valley in February 2019 has encountered a series of pandemic-related implementation issues.
 - Lancaster is implementing a modified version of the joint response pilot, with the assigned Electronic Suspected Child Abuse Report System (eSCARs) emergency-response CSW meeting with the eSCARs deputy after both drive separately to the location. LASD Lancaster station has identified office space for the co-located DCFS staff assigned to the pilot; because of COVID-19 concerns, DCFS has not yet occupied the space.

- Santa Clarita was not able to implement its joint response/investigation pilot; while a soft launch was initiated in February 2020, the pilot was suspended in March 2020 because of COVID-19 concerns. Santa Clarita anticipates re-launching the pilot once staff are fully vaccinated. LASD Santa Clarita station also identified office space for co-located DCFS staff, but DCFS has not yet occupied the space.
- Palmdale had to suspend its joint response/investigation pilot in April 2020 as a result of COVID-19 and staffing issues. However, the eSCARs deputies and eSCARs CSWs still conduct joint investigations by consulting with each other on eSCARs and gathering and sharing information. Palmdale intends to restart the joint response/investigation protocol soon. LASD Palmdale station identified office space for co-located DCFS staff who used it early in 2020, but it has not been occupied in about a year.
- DCFS and law enforcement are together creating a glossary of common terms they each use for child-abuse investigations, with particular attention to those that may have agency-specific definitions or could be confusing to others.
- Working with DCFS and law enforcement to better understand each of their investigative processes and create a training on conducting joint responses/investigations, sharing information, and addressing common misconceptions each may have about the other.
- DCFS pilot offices are tracking the number of eSCARs assigned to their offices, the number of joint responses requested by eSCAR deputies, the number of joint responses occurring, and the number of instances where neither a joint response nor a joint investigation could be conducted.
- Working with DCFS and law-enforcement partners to identify the process to be used when DCFS needs law enforcement's help in serving child-abuse warrants, especially in situations when forced entry to remove a child is necessary. Partners are also identifying the appropriate process when DCFS needs law enforcement's help in stabilizing a situation or conducting a welfare check. Once developed, these processes will be added to the pilot's protocols.
- Work continues on developing a comprehensive DCFS/law-enforcement protocol. The workgroup includes the OCP, DCFS, County Counsel, and representatives from LASD, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD), the District Attorney, and other police agencies. The group has focused on identifying the roles of social workers and law-enforcement personnel in conducting joint investigations. The protocol will also include an easily understood section on the eSCAR system and its role in coordinating investigations by DCFS and law enforcement.

5) Improve the Medical Hub system.

See the “County Medical Hubs” section on page 19 for a full description.

6) Improve the investigation skills of social workers at the front end and beyond.

- DCFS’s continuous quality improvement (CQI) division conducted three mini-reviews concerning specific populations during the first quarter of 2021.
 - A qualitative review for four youth housed at Hillsdale House, an Emergency Temporary Shelter Care Facility. A debrief was held with the CSW and supervising CSW assigned to each case to highlight practice strengths and opportunities for further development. A briefing was also held with leadership and management for the four regional offices supervising the youth.
 - A qualitative review for six youth involved in a critical incident in January 2021 when they resided at Wayfinder Family Services’ Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP). A debrief was held with the CSW and SCSW assigned to each case to highlight practice strengths and opportunities for further development. A briefing with management was scheduled for late April.
 - A review of a cohort of 25 children ages 0 to 5 receiving Voluntary Family Maintenance services as of January 25, 2021, each with a parent previously unsuccessful in family reunification efforts. A debrief was held with the CSW and SCSW assigned to each case to highlight practice strengths and opportunities for further development. A briefing with management was scheduled for late April. An additional 65 children meeting the same criterion were identified, and further reviews will continue in the second quarter of this year.
- The CQI division continues to develop a tiered communications plan that will allow review findings and insights to be shared across the organization. The plan includes creating an automated review database and partnering with the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) and DCFS’s training section to produce micro-learnings focused on skill development.

7) Improve the capacity to assess needs and progress made throughout the span of the case.

DPH’s Substance Abuse Prevention and Control (DPH–SAPC) unit, DMH, and DCFS partnered to outstation substance-abuse counselors in DCFS regional offices to provide on-site support and connections to further substance-abuse supports for parents or youth who need them. These counselors were also available to consult with social workers on cases involving substance-abuse issues and to offer guidance on how best to handle them.

- A scaled-down version of the SUD–TIPS (Substance Use Disorder–Trauma-Informed Parent Support) program is in place, as DPH and DCFS were able to

identify funding for 8 part-time counselors to continue this work in FY 2020–21. The counselors are stationed at Client Engagement and Navigation Services (CENS) area offices and receive referrals directly from the DCFS offices aligned with them.

- Over 150 clients have been referred to CENS counselors for linkage to substance-use disorder treatment programs since the start of 2021. DCFS is conducting additional outreach efforts to its staff and anticipates that these numbers will increase.
- DCFS is seeking funding options to support the program beyond June 30, 2021, including seeking congressional support for federal funding via the FY 2022 Community Project Funding (CPF) process, and the possibility of using funds the County expects to receive through the American Rescue Plan.

8) Reduce social worker caseloads.

- DCFS is holding monthly Caseload Accountability Panel meetings with Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 721 to jointly track and monitor caseloads. This effort is helping DCFS get closer to its goal of 15 cases per worker in its continuing-services sections.
- Since December 2019, DCFS has hired 141 CSWs, all of whom were assigned to continuing-services sections to reduce caseloads. Out of these, 21 were assigned to regional offices in the Antelope Valley.
- As of April 2021, the average number of cases for continuing-services workers is 18.5. DCFS will continue to assess workloads and hire CSWs as necessary to further reduce these caseloads.

Risk Assessment and System Improvement Recommendation Implementation

- Partnering with DCFS to implement the recommendations outlined by the OCP in its [report of May 2017](#)
- Evident Change and DCFS developed a two-day remote “safety and risk” foundational training focused on best practices in safety assessment, safety planning, and risk assessment. By March 31, 2021, 3,554 staff had completed this training, representing 96% of staff required to take it; 165 more staff remain to be trained.
- Evident Change is working with the DCFS policy unit to finalize changes to the Structured Decision Making® sections of the reunification, case-closure, and permanency sections of DCFS policy. This effort should be complete by the end of April, and updated training on the SDM tools associated with these sections will follow this summer and continue through the end of 2021.

- Evident Change delivered two coaching sessions to assistant regional administrators (ARAs) and a group of DCFS coaches on the proper use of safety and risk case conferences. Those ARAs and coaching participants will deliver this content to other ARAs in the coming months.

Use of Public Health Nurses (PHNs) in Child Welfare

- The Child Welfare PHN (CWPHN) Steering Committee continues to meet and address issues resulting from the consolidation of the child-welfare PHNs into DPH, and has begun working to implement some of the recommendations from the OCP's report on the [*Best Use of PHNs in Child Welfare*](#) (December 2017).
 - ✧ A CWPHN Coronavirus Warmline launched in April 2020 to support the needs of DCFS and Probation families, clients, employees, contractors, and facility staff after hours and on weekends and holidays. A total of 1,107 non-duplicated COVID-19–related initial PHN consultations were logged between mid-April 2020 and mid-April 2021.

From January 1 through April 30, 2021, a total of 136 consultations were received. Approximately 86% were for children involved with the foster care system; 14% were for children in home-of-parent placements. Most calls/questions were from relative/non-relative caregivers (53%), followed by inquiries from children's social workers and deputy probation officers (27%) and STRTPs (20%). Interventions provided by the PHNs included sharing COVID-19 information and resources (83%), referring children to a primary care physician (24%), and making referrals to the DHS medical hubs, urgent care, the DPH provider line, or 2-1-1 (14%).

- ✧ The Budget Act of 2020, signed by Governor Newsom on June 29, 2020, included legislation sponsored by SEIU Local 721 for \$8.25 million for the CWPHN Early Intervention Program (EIP). The CWPHN Advisory Committee and its advisory panel—composed of CWPHN program PHNs and clinical administrators, DCFS' children's social workers, union representatives, and the OCP—were divided into four subcommittees (evaluate, automate, improve, innovate) to review the services and interventions from the workplan prior to its submission to the state for approval of its eligibility for Medicaid Administration funding. Even though many key DPH project staff were assisting with the County's COVID-19 point-of-dispensing (POD) vaccine sites, these subcommittees have met weekly/bi-weekly to submit the final plan to the state by the end of June 2021.

Electronic Data-Sharing Efforts

- Emergency Response Investigative Service (ERIS)—Working with DCFS, the CIO, and County Counsel on a web-based portal to facilitate the electronic sharing of information relevant to investigations of child abuse or neglect across 6 County departments and DCFS, based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that the OCP finalized with participating departments, County Counsel, and the CEO

- ✧ Launched a revised ERIS in December 2020 designed to help streamline DCFS investigations and the placement of children with relatives when a removal is necessary. The new system—created by the Internal Services Department, the OCP, DCFS, and the CIO—adds data from other departments and includes changes suggested by users to improve system functioning.
 - 13 DCFS regional offices have implemented the system: Lancaster, South County, West San Fernando Valley, Command Post, Santa Fe Springs, Compton-Carson, Belvedere, Metro North, Hawthorne, Palmdale, Torrance, El Monte/Covina Annex, and Pomona. The Wateridge office should be operational the first week of May.
- Los Angeles Network for Enhanced Services (LANES)—Working with LANES (a health information exchange system), DPH, County Counsel, DCFS, and the CEO to provide child-welfare teams with health information from LANES to support health-care coordination and effective treatment for DCFS youth. Using LANES, child-welfare PHNs are able to view, download, and print timely, comprehensive health records for their clients and update children’s social workers and caregivers, as appropriate, about client needs.
 - ✧ In March 2021, access to LANES was extended to all County child-welfare public health nurses, as well as their intermediate typist clerks (ITCs).
 - Worked with DPH and DCFS to gather user feedback and provided it to LANES to enhance usability.
 - Worked with LANES to produce a recorded training module for use with newly on-boarded staff and available as a refresher for those who have already been trained.
 - Worked with partners to launch the use of LANES' alert/notification feature, allowing DPH administrators (on a daily basis) to identify hospitalized clients and ensure that the assigned PHN is aware of the hospitalization. Subsequently, DPH accessed that information and identified 16 more hospitalization cases in a single month than were identified in its existing hospitalization logs.
 - Launched the use of LANES' self-service audit tool, allowing DPH administrators to monitor the audit trail created by LANES to ensure the appropriate use of the tool.
 - Worked with DCFS to pull a sample of 100 clients and begin a review of LANES records for that sample population.
- Electronic Education Passport System (EPS)—The Education Coordinating Council (ECC), working with DCFS and LACOE, has also made significant progress toward greater access to accurate and consistent education data about foster youth.

- ✧ Between January and April 2021, LACOE trained 25 staff members at 8 school districts and 105 Probation Department staff on using EPS. During this period, district staff made 5,530 document searches and 3,112 student searches in EPS.
- ✧ Partners are testing and gathering feedback on a School Stability Transportation module in EPS, launched in October 2020, that will track additional school-stability metrics, such as the method of transportation.
- ✧ LACOE is also working with partners and stakeholders to create a Post-Secondary tab, including a financial-aid section to capture information relating to Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA®) completion, and an interests section showing what fields and post-secondary schools youth are attracted to.
- ✧ The ECC is working with LACOE to ensure that stakeholder input is gathered and included before any more development of new EPS modules.

GOAL 3: PERMANENCY *No child leaves the system without a permanent family or a responsible caring adult in his or her life.*

Increasing the Use of Relative Placements

- The upfront family-finding (UFF) project continues in 10 DCFS offices: Belvedere, West Los Angeles, West San Fernando Valley, Santa Fe Springs, Glendora, Vermont Corridor, Santa Clarita, Wateridge, Hawthorne, and Lakewood.
 - ✧ From January through March 2021, 872 children have been the subject of detention hearings in participating offices; 84% of those children were placed with kin following removal from their homes.
 - ✧ The OCP worked with DCFS on its report to the Board of Supervisors laying out a plan to expand the project to the remaining DCFS offices. A Board motion on expansion was approved on January 26, 2020. DCFS submitted a quarterly report on its efforts on April 26, 2021.
 - ✧ Child Trends' completed [longitudinal study](#) of the project, plus its [executive summary](#), can be found on the OCP website.

Permanency and Self-Sufficiency Planning for Transition-Age Youth (TAY)

- On September 4, 2019, the OCP submitted a report to the Board of Supervisors, [Increasing Stability and Permanency for Transition-Age Youth](#), which contained recommendations from the OCP Permanency Workgroup on data, family reunification, DCFS's Youth Permanency Units, and the Dave Thomas Foundation's foster-child adoption project, "Wendy's Wonderful Kids," plus a draft analysis of programs and benefits available to eligible youth.

- ✧ The OCP Permanency Workgroup continues to meet monthly. DCFS provided the following data as of April 1, 2021:
 - 2,074 children have been freed with a plan of adoption and are awaiting adoption finalization
 - 881 have been in adoptive placement for more than six months
 - 294 adoptions were finalized this year through February, down from 442 through the same period in 2020
 - 890 cases in the dependency court for 90 days or longer have not reached disposition
- ✧ DCFS has convened a multidisciplinary group from within the Permanency Workgroup to review the adoption process with the goal of increasing efficiency and avoiding future backlogs. The group is currently meeting every other week to improve the process.
- ✧ The benefits chart created by OCP and other stakeholders has been completed and is being readied for distribution as a PDF; the group is also working to create an interactive electronic version.

Transitional Shelter Care Facility (TSCF) Pilot

- Bi-weekly meetings continue with stakeholders—including DCFS, DMH, Probation, the Juvenile Court, the Children’s Law Center, Court-Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), County Counsel, and others—to discuss the multidisciplinary teaming pilot led by DCFS’ Accelerated Placement Team (APT), along with DMH, to stabilize and find permanency for hard-to-place youth (overstays and chronic repeaters) at 10-day Temporary Shelter Care Facilities (TSCFs). The APT has named the special social workers staffing this effort “the OCP unit.”
- ✧ To date, **112** of the highest-risk youth in County systems have been served by this pilot; 13 of them had never been in placement prior to being in a TSCF, so the following data is calculated on the 99 who were.
 - 70 of the 99 (**70%**) increased the average length of time they spent in a single placement. Many of these youth are now in stable placements as a result of this pilot, and that number is expected to increase as additional youth “graduate.”
 - 74 of 99 (**75%**) had a reduction in the number of placements they needed after participating in this pilot; youth were removed from placements less frequently and remained in their placements longer.
 - Prior to participating in the pilot, 9 (**20%**) of the youth had experienced between 18 and 33 placements each, an average of 21 placements per youth. Since entering the pilot, the average number of placements for these same youth dropped to **5** placements each. The most challenging **20%** of youth have experienced a decrease of over **75%** in placement-removal frequency since participating in the pilot.

- Another **15%** of pilot youth went from averaging **7** different placements pre-pilot to now each remaining in a single placement post-pilot, never experiencing another removal.
 - Over the pilot's last quarter, only **2** of the **44** youth enrolled re-entered a TSCF; both went to stable non-STRTP placements within 3 days.
 - ✧ Of the 48 cases open currently, **100%** of the youth report increased satisfaction with DCFS now that the OCP pilot program is involved with them.
 - ✧ These outcomes have been achieved through a fundamental shift in the approach to working with youth and foster families, as well as often-expressed deep admiration for these youth. OCP unit staff members demonstrate an unconditional commitment for the youth and to the youth, all the while teaching the entire resource team how to engage with both the individual youth and foster families and work with them to become self-sufficient in maintaining life cohesion.
- Youth Summaries

- ✧ **RH**—RH came to the attention of the OCP team in July 2019 as an overstay at one of the TFCFs. He was on probation for an assault charge and was difficult to place because of his struggles with anger control, assaultive behavior, and severe alcohol and cannabis use. RH had always been mistrustful of social workers because, in his own words, "Their need for a good and easy workday always took priority over looking out for my best interest, no matter what it took." After experiencing effective anger de-escalation through the pilot, RH became a strong vocal advocate for his needs and acknowledged his shortcomings in anger management and abusing substances.

For six months, RH was able to control his aggressive behavior and anger. However, he continued to abuse substances, and his placement was unable to address this issue. He was placed at another STRTP, where he successfully engaged in substance-abuse treatment and has been in recovery for the last year.

RH's motivation to succeed in school has varied from month to month, but after a recent visit to juvenile hall (after violating probation by returning back late from a community pass), he has been very focused and more motivated than ever. In the last four weeks, he has improved all of his grades to passing marks, joined the football team, and recently joined the track team. He plans on attending summer school to recover some lost credits; he is now motivated to graduate on time next year.

- ✧ **AP**—In 2008, AP came to the attention of DCFS due to his mother's history of illicit drug use. AP and his sibling are both deaf, and his mother also neglected medical and educational needs and left them unsupervised for extended periods of time. In 2015, AP and his sibling entered a legal guardianship with foster caregivers who were Deaf and proficient in American Sign Language. However, in 2019, a physical-abuse allegation was substantiated against the legal guardians

and they relinquished guardianship, citing AP's frequent emotional and behavioral outbursts.

AP was placed in a TSCF as a result of behaviors such as destruction of property, running away, and suicidal ideation; he also experienced multiple psychiatric hospitalizations. AP continued to run away, endanger himself by jumping out of windows, and put himself in risky situations at night in the city streets. He was hospitalized almost weekly and starving for a connection.

Once AP entered the pilot program, he was placed with a resource family; however, he continued to display behavioral difficulties and was removed from that home. In April 2020, AP was re-placed in an STRTP, where he was linked to outpatient mental health and psychiatric services, wraparound services, and in-house treatment services.

Within a few months, AP showed significant improvements in his behavior. He was able to communicate his needs to his treatment team and began engaging in behavioral-specialist sessions and Child and Family Team (CFT) meetings. As a result, AP has maintained a stable placement. Additionally, the pilot team encouraged family visits and his mother began participating in his CFT meetings, as well as working closely with a wraparound parent partner. The mother was granted a reinstatement of family reunification services, and AP has participated in extended weekend visits with his mother and sibling. Since these visits have continued to go well, DCFS will be recommending at his upcoming court hearing that AP be released to his mother under Voluntary Family Maintenance Services.

GOAL 4: WELL-BEING *Ensure that system-involved youth achieve the physical, emotional, and social health needed to be successful.*

Efforts to Improve School Stability

- Continuing to partner with DCFS, Los Angeles County school districts, and LACOE to implement the foster-youth school-stability provisions included in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)
 - ✧ To date, 39 school districts have signed the long-term ESSA transportation memorandum of understanding (MOU)—Alhambra Unified, Antelope Valley Unified, Azusa, Basset Unified, Beverly Hills, Burbank, Centinela Valley Union High School District, Charter Oak, Claremont, Compton, Culver City, Duarte, El Monte City, El Monte Union High School District, El Rancho Unified, Glendale Unified, Hacienda La Puente, Inglewood, Lancaster, Lennox, Long Beach Unified, Los Angeles Unified School District (*which serves approximately 40% of the County's foster youth*), Monrovia, Montebello, Mountain View Elementary, Norwalk La Mirada, Palmdale, Paramount, Pasadena, Rosemead, San Marino, South Pasadena, South Whittier, Torrance, Walnut Valley, West Covina, Westside, Whittier Union High School District, and William S. Hart.

- The 39 districts whose school boards have signed the MOU serve approximately 80% of the County's foster youth.
- ✧ The ECC is also working with partners to secure sustainable state funding to cover foster-youth school-stability transportation costs for DCFS and school districts.
 - The ECC partnered with the UCLA Center for the Transformation of Schools to draft a white paper outlining "lessons learned," data, stories, and the importance of sustainable funding for school-stability transportation. The ECC secured \$25,000 from Great Public Schools Now to support the development of the white paper and is also coordinating with the Center for Strategic Partnerships to seek additional funding for this effort.

School-Based Healing-Informed Arts Education

- Working with the Los Angeles County Department of Arts and Culture (DAC), DMH, and the Arts for Healing and Justice Network (AHJN) to implement a healing-informed arts education pilot for middle and high schools with high numbers of foster and probation youth. The program helps youth build protective factors through the arts and develops local networks of mental-health clinicians, artists, teachers, and other stakeholders within schools and their surrounding communities.
 - ✧ Due to school closures during COVID-19, the Creative Wellbeing Team (DAC, AHJN, DMH, and the ECC) pivoted programming to online.
 - Secured Arts for Justice funds to support an additional 29 "self-care space" workshops for educators, parents, caregivers, and County staff who support marginalized young people. The goal for these workshops is to provide adults with self-care practices—for themselves and to share with the youth they serve—and to demonstrate strategies for using culturally relevant healing-informed arts approaches to prioritize health equity and well-being for all students.
 - The Creative Wellbeing team is working with DCFS to schedule four self-care workshops for STRTP staff in May 2021.
 - An open-session series of 3 workshops was made available to a new cohort of schools from struggling and precarious Los Angeles communities participating in LACOE's Technology Enhanced Arts Learning (TEAL) and the LACOE/DMH Suicide Prevention Ongoing Resiliency Training (SPORT) programs, and Arts Ed Collective partner districts. The series was also shared with the Community Schools initiative.
 - DAC worked with Pasadena Unified to implement a new parent/caregiver series (8 workshops) that were folded into the district's English Learning Advisory Committee.

- DAC and AHJN are working with partner districts (including Pomona Unified, Pasadena Unified, and Whittier City) to embed healing-informed arts workshops into regularly scheduled time for educator professional development. This should be completed by early May.
- Working to secure funds for the 2021–22 academic year to fund full program implementation at three districts, two STRTPs, and additional professional development and self-care spaces for County departments, community-based organizations, and schools who interact with systems-affected youth. DAC anticipates completing an implementation plan by June 30, 2021.

Educational Equity

- Created a workgroup with DCFS and LACOE partners to focus on the issue of equity in education for system-involved youth.
 - ✧ Working with the DCFS Office of Equity to examine the race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation/gender identity and expression (SOGIE) federal and state indicators used in DCFS’s electronic case-management system, CWS/CMS. The ECC will work with DCFS on a plan to approach the state about clarifying and updating these indicators so the categories are more inclusive and better represent Los Angeles County’s youth. The group will also ensure that service providers are trained on the importance of engaging youth around these indicators, and will emphasize the need to record clean/consistent demographic data.

Increasing Access to Higher Education

- Working with John Burton Advocates for Youth (JBAY), LACOE, relevant County departments, and community-based organizations to facilitate enhanced support for post-secondary educational attainment for youth in the child-welfare and juvenile-justice systems, and to implement SB 12 provisions
 - ✧ DCFS, Probation, and LACOE are participating in the 2020–2021 California Foster Youth FAFSA® Challenge (Free Application for Federal Student Aid), designed to increase system-involved youths’ access to financial aid for college by increasing FAFSA completion rates.
 - ✧ As of March 2021, 47% of eligible system-involved youth in Los Angeles County had completed their FAFSA applications.
 - ✧ Working with JBAY, DCFS, Probation, LACOE, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), and the Department of Workforce Development, Aging and Community Services (WDACS) to develop creative solutions for reaching out to system-involved youth to virtually support their completing the FAFSA.
 - To incentivize completion, JBAY donated \$10,000 in gift cards to LACOE for youth who complete their FAFSA after the March 2nd priority deadline.

- Probation hosted a Virtual College Summit in February with 23 youth in attendance, 13 of whom completed their FAFSA applications during the event.
- LACOE and JBAY partnered to host a “FAFSA How-To” webinar in March for Los Angeles County’s America’s Job Centers of California (AJCCs) served by WDACS plus those in the other 6 workforce areas; a total of 53 individuals attended.
- WDACS added a field within its internal database to track FAFSA completion by foster youth through the AJCCs.
- LACOE created a FAFSA Resource Padlet allowing DCFS, Probation, and LACOE to share FAFSA resources and events for youth, caregivers, and professionals.
- Workgroup partners advocated to the California Department of Social Services to amend the Transition to Independent Living Plan (TILP) form to include information related to SB 12 to support that legislation’s implementation—adding to the case plans of foster youth age 16 years or older, and of non-minor dependents, a formal identification of the person or persons responsible for assisting the child or non-minor dependent with applications for postsecondary education and related financial aid.

Workforce Development

- Over 400 youth were placed into Virtual Career Exploration through WDACS’ Career EDGE virtual work-experience platform, allowing youth to participate in 100 hours of subsidized career-related exercises and activities to develop competencies and relevant job skills for a long-term career.
- Under the Countywide Youth Bridges Program, WDACS has enrolled over 300 Youth@Work participants to help with the Department of Parks and Recreation’s Every Body Plays program. They will assist at 55 parks with recreational activities, youth educational assistance, and other parks programs.
- Through a partnership with Los Angeles Cleantech Incubator, 168 Youth@Work participants have assembled over 40,000 face shields as part of providing personal protective equipment to essential healthcare workers.
- WDACS has implemented a program and partnership in the Antelope Valley to target foster youth with an interest in social services. Under this career pathway program, youth receive weekly peer support and can participate in up to 700 hours of work experience to develop their skills and knowledge in this area. WDACS and its partners have placed five youth into the first cohort of this program. WDACS began recruitment for the second cohort the week of April 19, 2021, and is again targeting youth in the Antelope Valley and Santa Clarita area.

Short-Term Residential Therapeutic Program (STRTP) Task Force

- Following a fatal incident at the Wayfinder Family Services STRTP in January 2021, the directors of DCFS and DMH asked the OCP to coordinate the creation of a short-term workgroup composed of health and human services department heads, judicial personnel, law-enforcement leadership, community partners, commissioners, advocates, youth, community members, and providers to focus on:
 - Understanding all the dynamics involved in the Wayfinder tragedy
 - Analyzing data to identify other facilities experiencing challenges
 - Analyzing the placement continuum across child welfare and juvenile justice to identify gaps in service provision or other areas of challenge
 - Exploring all potential solutions
 - Formulating a comprehensive set of recommendations to the Board of Supervisors regarding needed systemic improvements
- To date, the STRTP Task Force has:
 - ✧ Convened listening sessions with multiple stakeholders to gather feedback on the needs of youth currently served in STRTPs, what is working well with the STRTP model, what needs improvement, and other recommendations for improving the continuum of care in Los Angeles County. Listening sessions have been held with:
 - STRTP providers (including smaller agencies) and their staff, such as mental-health clinicians and direct-care and supervision staff
 - Community stakeholders who live near STRTPs
 - Youth who have been placed in group homes or STRTPs
 - DMH staff who work with STRTP providers and/or youth placed in STRTPs
 - DCFS children’s social workers and the Probation Department’s deputy probation officers
 - Parents whose children have been placed in STRTPs
 - Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) providers, as this placement is often seen as a “step-down” option from STRTPs
 - Dependency and delinquency court stakeholders, including bench officers, minors’ attorneys, parents’ attorneys, and County Counsel
 - ✧ Scheduled additional listening sessions with community stakeholders and law-enforcement agencies
 - ✧ Convened a subgroup of the Task Force, led by DCFS, DMH, and the OCP, to identify potential solutions and draft recommendations for the Task Force to consider. The subgroup has been meeting weekly, and, through topic-specific small groups of subject-matter experts and stakeholders, has drafted some potential solutions across a number of areas, including:

- Expanding youth supports and services
 - Improving interagency and provider collaboration
 - Streamlining STRTP programmatic and administrative issues
 - Expanding the continuum of placements
- The Task Force is currently scheduled to meet through July 2021 before submitting its report to the Board.

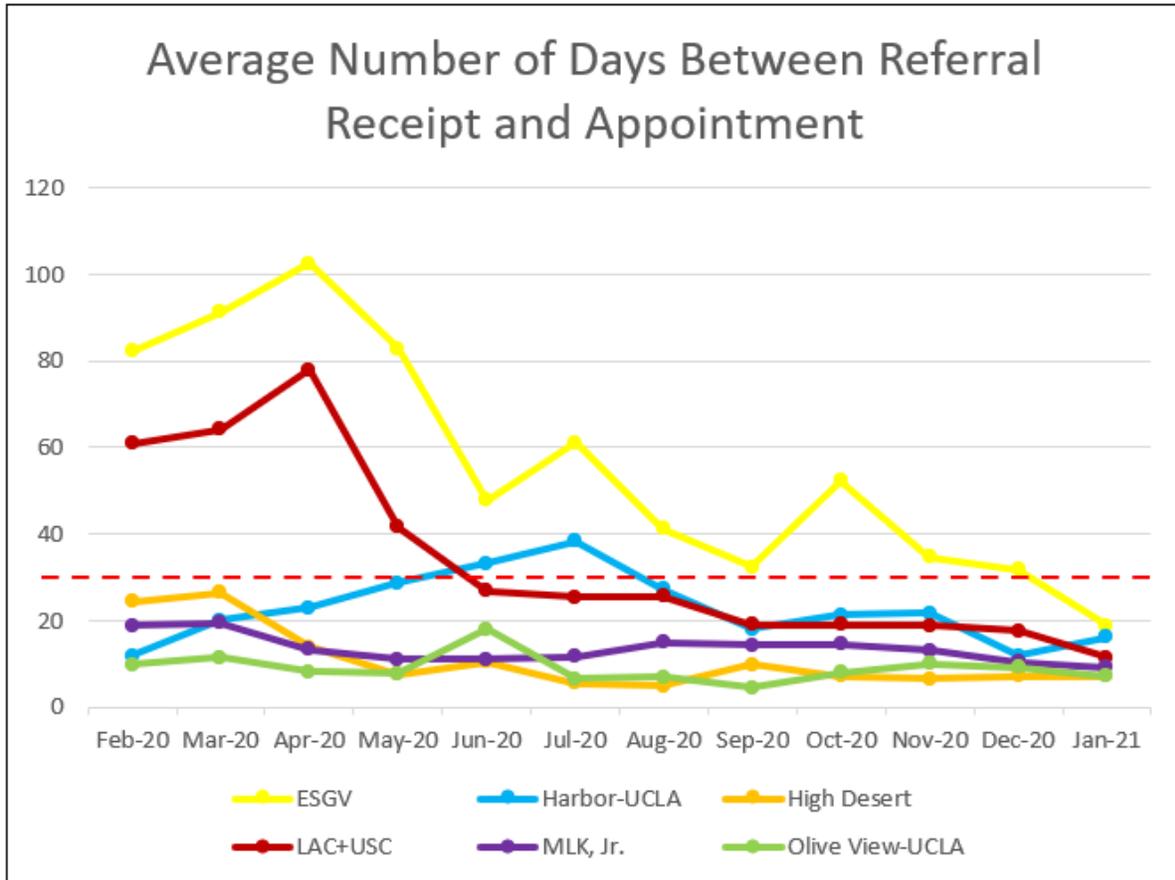
County Medical Hubs

- Working with DHS, DCFS, DMH, and DPH to implement a detailed workplan to improve the overall Hub system, focusing on timely access to forensic exams and initial medical exams (IMEs) in the short term (Phase I) and potentially broadening Hub services in the longer term (Phase II). Examples of recent improvements include:
 - ✧ DCFS, DHS, and County Counsel are updating department policies on hospital holds for children who may be under investigation for suspected child abuse and/or neglect, as well as developing training and communications for DCFS social workers on this policy plus hospital-discharge policies and timelines that may affect their investigations. DCFS and DHS will also engage law-enforcement agencies to align and/or coordinate with their police-hold policies.
 - ✧ DHS continues to improve the availability of forensic and IME appointments at each Medical Hub. Recent data shows that across the Hubs, IME appointments are available within two days and forensic evaluation appointments are available same-day. Figure 1 on page 20 illustrates the average number of days between IME referrals and IME completion date for newly detained children over the last year. While referrals to the Hubs continue to be down because of the pandemic, average IME completion timelines have been improving as a result of operational improvements and staff additions, with all six Hubs' IME completion timelines now averaging under the target of 30 days.

Dental Screenings and Exams

- Working with DCFS, DPH, DHS, and UCLA to develop a plan to increase the number of foster youth receiving dental screenings and exams, when needed, within policy timeframes.
 - ✧ The training that the California Community College Chancellor's Foster and Kinship Care Education (FKCE) program and the OCP launched for social workers and caregivers—covering keys to good oral health for children and youth, establishing a dental home, and information on community resources—was converted to a virtual platform. As of this month, 162 CSWs/SCSWs and 7 caregivers have completed the training. The OCP will continue to work with DCFS and FKCE to inform more caregivers about this training.

Figure 1



Source: EmHub/Saga

*Data reflect only those referrals where a scheduled appointment was made.

*Data include calculations for "appointments completed within 60 days," therefore data lag 60 days.

Mental Health Coordination

- Working with DCFS and DMH to implement an independent evaluation of the Multi-disciplinary Assessment Team (MAT) and the overall front-end assessment process to help inform how mental health services can be streamlined for DCFS-involved youth. DCFS and DMH are jointly funding the evaluation, and the OCP is managing the independent contractor implementing the evaluation, the California Institute for Behavioral Health Solutions (CIBHS).
 - ✧ CIBHS is completing final analyses of DCFS/DMH administrative and case data from the retrospective study period (January through June 2019) and the prospective study period (July through September 2020). CIBHS is scheduling interviews with bench officers, minors; counsel, DCFS social workers, and mental health treatment providers to gather additional feedback and context. A draft evaluation report is anticipated in May.

Addressing Psychotropic Medication Use in Child Welfare

- Monthly meetings of the Psychotropic Medication Workgroup continue, overseeing the implementation of all protocols related to the use of psychotropic medications for youth in out-of-home care in both the child-welfare and juvenile-justice systems.
- ✧ Quarterly updates of psychotropic medication data were received from DCFS and Probation.
 - DCFS data as of March 31, 2021, indicate that:
 - 1,569 children are being administered psychotropic medications, which is 8.48% of Los Angeles County foster children
 - 322 children are being administered anti-psychotic medications, which is 20.52% of foster children on medications
 - 766 children are being administered two or more medications, which 48.82% of foster children on medications
 - Probation data as of March 31, 2021, indicate that:
 - 47 youth who are suitably placed are being administered psychotropic medications, which is 12% of those in suitable placement
 - 4 youth in suitable placement are being administered anti-psychotic medications, which is less than 1% of that population
 - 15 youth in suitable placement are being administered more than one medication, which is 5% of that population
 - 21 youth placed at Dorothy Kirby Center are being administered psychotropic medications, which is 65.63% of that population; 9 of those youth were on more than one medication
 - 126 youth in juvenile halls are being administered psychotropic medications, which is 45.28% of that population; 55 of those youth were on more than one medication
 - 40 youth in probation camps are being administered psychotropic medications, which is 36.70% of that population; 10 of those youth are on more than one medication
- ✧ The Psychotropic Medication Youth Engagement Worksheet (YEW) is being administered in both systems. Probation continues to file 25 to 30 each month, while PHNs from DPH's Child Welfare Public Health Nurse unit have, from the program's start through March 2021, initiated 1,344 YEWs with 777 completions. Personnel from both systems have found the information in the worksheets to benefit the involved youth.

- ✧ DMH's Juvenile Court Mental Health Unit continues to report that prescribing physicians are, in most cases, providing information on lab tests conducted on youth being administered psychotropic medication via the *JV-220(A)–Physician's Statement–Attachment* form. Workgroup monitoring of this information continues.

California Opioid and Stimulant Learning Collaborative

With support from DCFS, Probation, DMH, DPH, the Juvenile Court, the Children's Law Center, Los Angeles Dependency Lawyers, Inc., and others, the OCP, as lead, applied in December 2020 to participate in a new statewide effort managed by the California Department of Health Care Services, California Health Policy Strategies, LLC, and Health Management Associates to establish regional learning collaboratives—"Effective Child Welfare and Justice Systems for Families Impacted by Opioid and Stimulant Use."

Los Angeles was selected as one of the 13 participating counties for this project; meetings began in February and will last through August 2022. The learning collaborative's overall goal is, "Sustainable, family-centered, evidence-based, integrated practices across local justice, child-welfare and behavioral health systems for families and children impacted by opioid use disorder (OUD) and stimulant use."

Specific areas to be addressed by the Los Angeles team include:

- Developing a systemwide understanding and utilization of Plans of Safe Care, which federal law requires for newborns prenatally exposed to substances
- Advocacy for implementation of the Family First Prevention Services Act (FFPSA)
- Educating stakeholders on the neuroscience of addiction and medication-assisted treatment
- Training for system personnel on how this work fits within various legal requirements such as "reasonable efforts"

GOAL 5: CROSS-CUTTING STRATEGIES *Rethink structures, programs, and processes, on an ongoing basis, that impact multiple entities, to take advantage of new thinking and learning that meaningfully improves our child protection system.*

Dual-Status Youth Motion

- Pursuant to the Board motion of March 20, 2018, the OCP, in collaboration with multiple County stakeholders and others, continues activity through its Dual-Status Youth Workgroup's two subcommittees—Delinquency Prevention and WIC 241.1 Multidisciplinary Team (MDT).
 - ✧ The Delinquency Prevention Subcommittee, led by Professor Denise Herz of California State University Los Angeles, has completed its draft recommendations on delinquency prevention. The group met on April 16, 2021, to review the report one last time. Minor changes are being incorporated and the report is expected to be finalized and filed with the Board within the week.

- ✧ A complete redraft of the WIC 241.1 protocol was sent to the Juvenile Court's Presiding Judge, Victor Greenberg, in February 2020. To date, it has not been approved nor implemented by the court and further action is being awaited.

Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children and Youth

- In the recently released evaluation [*Commercially Sexually Exploited Girls and Young Women Involved in Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice in Los Angeles County: An Exploration and Evaluation of Placement Experiences and Services Received*](#),² two recommendations out of a total of eight were identified as short-term fixes that would help improve CSEC placement stability.

The first recommendation was to ensure that all service providers are properly trained on issues facing CSEC, such as non-judgmental communication skills, trauma and mental health, and recognizing signs of AWOL (absence without leave). The second supports a youth preference for placements in the most homelike environment possible, given the finding that CSEC placed in foster-family agency homes stayed significantly longer in those placements when specialized services were also provided to them.

- ✧ The Request for Proposal process for a CSEC training entity is complete and the new training contract is expected to be executed on May 1, 2021.
- ✧ The revised CSEC housing statement of work that consolidates Foster Family Agency (FFA) and Intensive Services Foster Care (ISFC) requirements will be distributed for its third review shortly. The sample contract—which also will need to incorporate FFA- and ISFC-required language—is in development.

Additional OCP Activities

Recent Specialized Efforts

- Panelist to discuss countywide prevention efforts with the County's Commission for Children and Families' Racial Justice Committee on February 22, 2021
- Panelist for a presentation to the County's Commission for Children and Families on April 4, 2021, on the *Thriving Families, Safer Children* initiative
- Participated in an interview on April 23, 2021, to provide input into the development of the Association of Community Human Service Agencies' (ACHSA's) strategic plan

² https://youthlaw.org/publication/csec_la_childwelfare_juvenilejustice/

Ongoing Collaborative Efforts

- Participate in DCFS's and DMH's workgroup to implement the County's Family Urgent Response System (FURS)
- Participate in the UCLA Pritzker Center's collaborative on Racial Equity Child Welfare Efforts in Los Angeles County
- Participate on the Domestic Violence Child Welfare Policy subcommittee
- Participate on DCFS' and LACOE's Partnership Workgroup to ensure child safety during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Participate on the advisory board for DCFS's *Invest LA* initiative
- Participate on DCFS' leadership, advisory, and identification of evidence-based practices teams for Family First Prevention Services Act plan development
- Participate in the now-suspended steering committee to establish a family treatment court in Los Angeles
- Participate on DCFS' Eliminating Racial Disproportionality and Disparity (ERDD) workgroup
- Participate on the Project ABC Governance Board on serving young children and their families
- Participate on DPH's Office of Violence Prevention leadership committee
- Participate on the CIO's Business Management Committee and on its Information Management Committee for Countywide data-sharing
- Participate on DCFS's Structured Decision-Making Core Team
- Participate in DCFS's Administrative Review Round Tables (AART) and Child Fatality Roundtables

In summary, the OCP is working hard to accomplish its goals, as are the relevant County departments and a host of key community partners. We look forward to reporting further progress in our next quarterly update.

Each Supervisor
April 30, 2021
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If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact me via e-mail at mnash@ocp.lacounty.gov, or your staff may contact Carrie Miller at cmiller@ocp.lacounty.gov.

MN:eih

c: Chief Executive Office
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Child Support Services
Chief Information Office
Children and Family Services
County Counsel
District Attorney
Fire
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Mental Health
Parks and Recreation
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