

# OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN



## FISCAL YEAR 2010/2011 ANNUAL REPORT



STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

“WE BELIEVE THAT AN OMBUDSMAN OFFICE, PROPERLY STAFFED AND FUNDED AND WITH CLEARLY ENUMERATED RESPONSIBILITIES AND AUTHORITY, CAN PRESENT ONE OF THE BEST OPTIONS FOR ADVOCATES AT THE STATE AND LOCAL LEVELS WHO ARE SEEKING NEW AND EFFECTIVE MECHANISM TO ASSURE THAT CHILDREN AND YOUTH ARE PROPERLY SERVED BY GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SECTOR PROVIDERS.”

DAVIDSON, H. ESTABLISHING OMBUDSMAN PROGRAMS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH.

WASHINGTON, D.C. AMERICAN BAR ASS., 1993

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# MESSAGE FROM THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN:

As the California Foster Care Ombudsman, I am extremely proud of the years of service to California's children, youth and families by the staff of the Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO). Since the office opened on May 2, 2000, the FCO has received more than 26,000 requests for investigations and information regarding children and youth in foster care. The people who contact the FCO include biological parents and relatives; foster parents; community members; social workers and other professionals; as well as children and youth who are advocating for themselves.

As an autonomous office in the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), the FCO is uniquely positioned to see problems from a number of perspectives and collaborate with stakeholders engaged in various aspects of the child welfare system. These stakeholders include social workers, attorneys, judges, therapists, the families whose children have been removed, and especially the children. They all view the child welfare process from different vantage points, all of which need to be considered objectively by the FCO.

The FCO realizes that our office only receives complaints, and thus we do not hear about the excellent work of many foster parents, group home staff and social workers. However, we do think that it is important to value the feedback from those who do not feel that the child welfare system is meeting the needs of foster children and youth.

Because of our objective position, the FCO can help all parties appreciate each other's perspectives and explore ways to resolve both individual problems and systemic issues. The FCO role is to conduct impartial investigations to insure the child welfare system is both fair and helpful. Because of the complaints the FCO receives, it can identify strengths and weaknesses of this complex child welfare system and make recommendations for changes to improve services and accountability.

The California child welfare system is administered at the county level with State oversight. The system is incredibly complex, and involves the Juvenile Dependency Courts, attorneys, social workers, law enforcement, therapists, non-profit service providers, foster parents, group home providers and others. Children and families are either helped or harmed by the interventions of this system. When the fabric that holds a family together becomes so frayed that intervention is necessary, the family members often are too traumatized to understand what is happening to them and how the child welfare system can help. The FCO often receives requests from overwrought families, and acts as an objective liaison or interpreter to help them find their way through the system and on to family reunification or other permanency plan.

California's 2011 decision to realign child welfare services to the counties has created a need for enhanced State oversight to prevent loss of Federal child welfare funding if successful outcomes fall below Federal mandates.

The California child welfare system is facing a new chapter with the realignment of many of the programs to county administration. However, CDSS has an important role to play as the single state agency in providing oversight and accountability. The CDSS also has the exciting role of encouraging counties to implement promising practices. It is our hope that CDSS, child welfare advocates and our elected officials will seriously consider the information and recommendations in this FCO report to improve the care of our foster children/youth. The FCO will continue to provide assistance to foster children and youth and their families as well as report on county specific and statewide systemic and practice issues to ensure that California remains a national leader in the child welfare arena.



This 2010/2011 Annual Report contains special reports written by the FCO staff that presents the voices and concerns of many of the people who contact the FCO: birth parents, relatives, youth and foster parents. Also in this FCO Annual Report is a the "Foster Care ombudsman Group Home Report Card" which explores the concerns and challenges regarding congregate care. Each of these special reports also contains possible solutions and recommendations to improve the foster care system in California. Additionally in this report FCO staff present their own unique perspectives on the foster care system. This report has been a collaborative effort that reflects the FCO's commitment to team work, objective inquiries, and collaborative problem solving.

The FCO staff would like to acknowledge the invaluable role of the many excellent social workers, attorneys, caregivers and advocates who have dedicated themselves to providing excellent services and support for California's foster children and their families.

Sincerely,  
**Karen Grace-Kaho**  
California State Foster Care Ombudsman  
[Karen.Grace-Kaho@dss.ca.gov](mailto:Karen.Grace-Kaho@dss.ca.gov)  
(916) 653-4296



# CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Office of the California Foster Care Ombudsman (FCO) has a unique purpose, and position within the foster care system. The FCO is an autonomous entity within the CDSS that is empowered to investigate and attempt to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care, related to their care, placement, or services. The FCO acts as a fact finder to provide families, citizens, and other stakeholders with an avenue for independent review of their concerns. In order to effectively conduct investigations, the FCO has access to any record of a state or local agency that is necessary to carry out the responsibilities of the office, and may meet or communicate with any foster child in the child's placement or elsewhere.

The FCO conducts fact-finding, data collection, consultation and interviews to resolve complaints. After the investigation is completed the FCO makes recommendations or refers the issues to the appropriate agency for resolution. However, the FCO does not have authority to independently challenge court decisions; change case plans; pursue local administrative personnel actions or pursue discrimination complaints. (See Appendix A, B, C, D for additional explanations regarding the FCO's purpose, authority and complaint process.)

During the State fiscal year (FY) 2010/2011, the FCO received 2,302 initial contacts, which included 1,110 complaints; 1,022 requests for information; 112 requests for publications; and 58 presentation requests. Each contact to the FCO provides an opportunity to take action, educate, provide resources and identify recurring problems in California's child welfare system. The FCO staff conducted 58 presentations on the foster youth rights and the services of the FCO office. The FCO identified that 388 complaints were received from birth parents; 267 complaints from relatives; 235 complaints from current and former foster youth and 97 complaints from foster parents.

The most frequently received complaint issues included: 264 complaints concerning child welfare practices; 247 reported violations of foster youth personal rights; 124 issues involving relative placement; 117 issues involving placement disruption, and 115 complaints regarding reunification.

In this 2010/2011 Annual Report the FCO has focused analysis and special reports regarding the specific issues of those contacting us; birth parents, relatives, current and former foster youth, and foster parents. These are the people whom the child welfare system impacts and we hope that their voices and concerns will be considered in case-specific decisions and child welfare policy development.

### PARENTS

Parents reported feeling overwhelmed and did not fully understand the complex child welfare and juvenile dependency court process. They complained about certain child welfare practices including insensitive social workers; generic and unrealistic case plans; lack of readily available services; and unforgiving judicial time frames.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Expand the use of Cultural Brokers
- ▶ Expand the use of Parent Partners
- ▶ Utilize the lessons learned from the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP)



## RELATIVES

Relatives, including grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives, complained about the difficulty they were having applying for and receiving placement of their grandchildren, nieces, nephews, and cousins in the foster care system. Many were confused by the child welfare assessment and approval process.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Ensure implementation of the relative notification provision of AB 938 (Chapter 261, Statutes of 2009)
- ▶ Expand the utilization of family finding efforts statewide
- ▶ Expand the utilization of family conferencing

## YOUTH

Youth complained about violations of their foster youth rights; not being treated with respect; not receiving allowances; lack of appropriate clothes; and inadequate and unhealthy food. They also report that they were not provided with needed services to prepare them for emancipation; their concerns were not being heard.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Continue to outreach to foster youth regarding the After 18 Campaign - Assembly Bill (AB) 12 California Fostering Connections to Success Act
- ▶ Review case files of foster children and youth to ensure that they have their birth certificates far in advance of their emancipation date
- ▶ Ensure that foster children and youth who are born out of the country have their special immigrant juvenile status
- ▶ Ensure that foster youth emancipate with clean credit
- ▶ Expand campus support programs at all publicly bonded California colleges, universities and community colleges
- ▶ Ensure the academic achievement of foster children and youth

## CAREGIVERS

Caregivers complained about numerous and inappropriate placement disruptions and were concerned about how the placement changes can be traumatic to foster children. They often reported that if they requested additional services for their foster children, social workers assumed that the caregivers were not capable of effectively caring for the children and used removal of the children as their solution to the problem. They complained about the shortage of services the counties made available for their foster children and the lack of appropriate support services for foster parents.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Expand the Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)
- ▶ Expand caregiver advocacy programs



## THE FCO GROUP HOME REPORT CARD

The FCO usually only visits and investigates the group homes that are the subject of complaints we have received. We decided to also visit group homes that were reputed to have good programs. The FCO Group Home Project involved visiting 42 group homes and identified the common denominators which indicate the quality of different group homes. The “Group Home Report Card” is the outcome of that project.

Recommendations include:

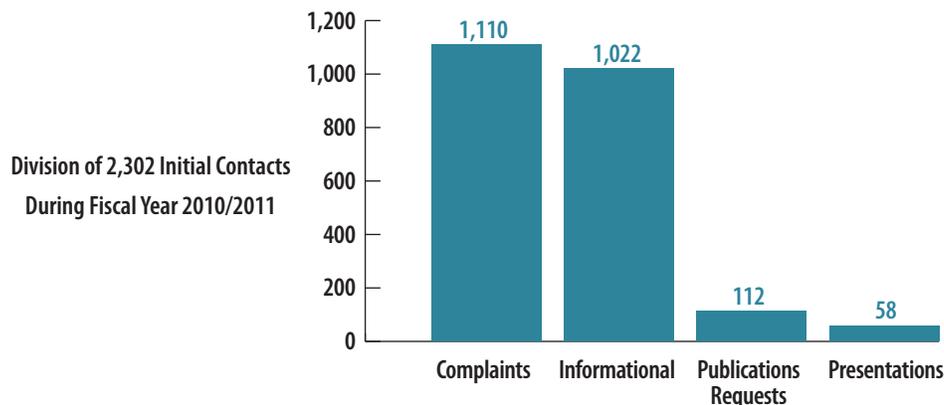
- ▶ Compile data on youth satisfaction and youth perspective as part of the oversight process
- ▶ Create a process to improve group home licensing and program quality assessment
- ▶ Recommend group home accreditation
- ▶ Implement performance based contracting
- ▶ Mandate minimum employment requirements for group home staff
- ▶ Mandate a state-wide training curriculum for group home staff
- ▶ Develop an alternative funding model
- ▶ Reduce use of restraints
- ▶ Make Community Care Licensing (CCL) complaints regarding group homes public record
- ▶ Require child focused evidence based assessment of foster children and youth



# OMBUDSMAN DATA SUMMARY

## FISCAL YEAR 2010/ 2011 DATA SUMMARY

The FCO received 2,302 initial contacts during FY 2010/2011. Each contact is an opportunity for the FCO to respond to the concerns impacting the foster care population and gather information to identify recurring issues in California's foster care system.

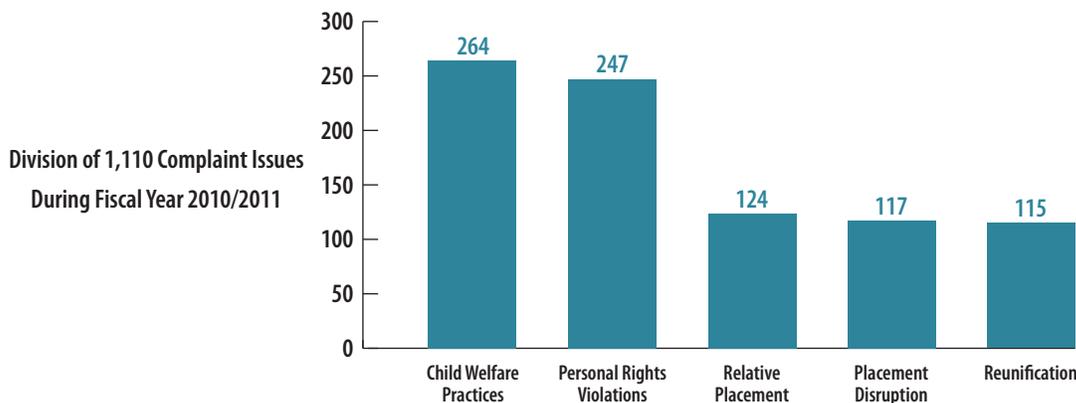


## METHODS OF INITIAL CONTACT

Telephone calls and emails are the predominant means of contacting the FCO. During FY 2010/2011, the FCO received 1,563 telephone calls, 446 emails, 151 letters, 129 faxes and 13 face-to-face inquiries.

## MOST FREQUENTLY RECEIVED COMPLAINT ISSUES

Throughout FY 2010/2011 the FCO received 1,110 complaints. The five most frequent complaint issues were related to Child Welfare Practices, Personal Rights Violations, Relative Placement, Placement Disruption, and Reunification.

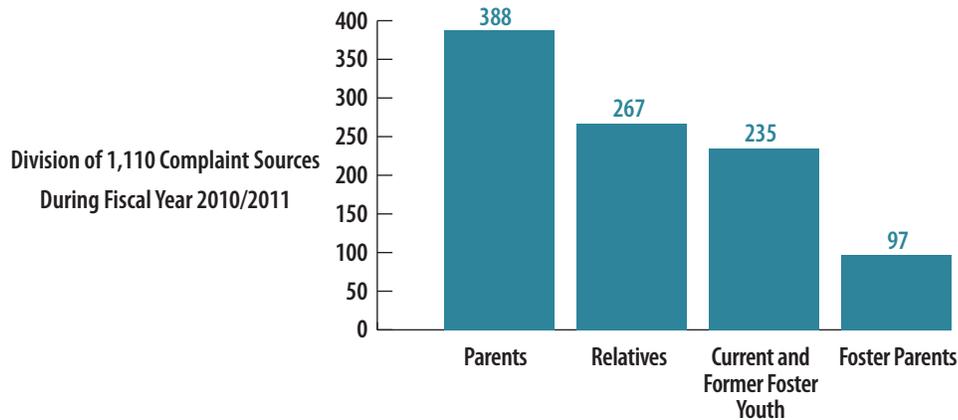


Other issues include: Visitation (55), Foster care payments (31), Emancipation (19), Non-foster care (15), Medical and dental (16), Removal (13), Licensing (14), Adoptions (12), ICPC (12), Foster/kin care services (12), Discrimination (5), ICWA (5), Homelessness (6), Attorneys (4), Mental health (5), Higher education (4), Immigration (3), Criminal background exemptions (3), Runaways (3), Courts (2), ILP (2), Family finding (1), CWS background check (1). (See Appendix E for Issue definitions.)



## SOURCE OF COMPLAINTS

Of the 1,110 complaints received by the FCO during FY 2010/2011, the chart below identifies the caller's relationship to the children and youth in the foster care system.



Other complaints came from: Community members (63), Professionals (31), CWS Staff (11), Attorneys (7), Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) (6), Foster family agency staff (3), Group home staff (1), and Legislative staff (1).

## 292 REFERRALS

In FY 2010/2011 the FCO made 292 referrals. The FCO refers some complaints and information requests to other agencies and departments such as: county ombudsmen, CCL, CDSS Adoptions Services Bureau (Adoptions), and CPS. When complaints are referred to a county for investigation the referred agency responds back to the FCO regarding their investigation outcome. Upon receipt of the information from the county, the FCO contacts the complainant to see whether the matter has been resolved or further investigation is necessary.

## 1,022 REQUESTS FOR INFORMATION

During FY 2010/2011 the FCO received 1,022 requests for information on a large variety of subjects. Many requests for information are received by email through various CDSS websites. All callers are provided with appropriate information and referrals to other agencies. The FCO provides the highest level of customer service possible.

## 58 FCO CONDUCTED TRAININGS

During FY 2010/2011, representatives from the FCO provided trainings on the foster youth rights and the services of the FCO at conferences and other stakeholder gatherings including: 1 nationwide audience, 24 statewide audiences, and 33 additional trainings to the following 19 counties: Alameda, Butte, Contra Costa, Los Angeles, Nevada, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Diego, San Francisco, San Joaquin, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, Santa Cruz, Solano, Sonoma, Yolo, and Yuba.

## 37,936 PUBLICATIONS DISTRIBUTED

During FY 2010/2011, the FCO received 112 requests for publications and distributed more than 37,936 publications. The FCO receives calls requesting publications and materials that educate the statewide community regarding the rights of children in out-of-home care, the child welfare system and the supportive services and resources available for foster children, youth, their families and caretakers.



Publications disseminated by the FCO include brochures on the FCO, Foster Youth Rights (in English and Spanish), College Financial Aid, FCO Help-Line Cards; and Foster Youth Rights posters (in English and Spanish). In addition to these publications, the FCO distributes a Resource Directory and information packets.



**FOSTER CARE  
HELP-LINE**

toll-free  
**1-877-846-1602**

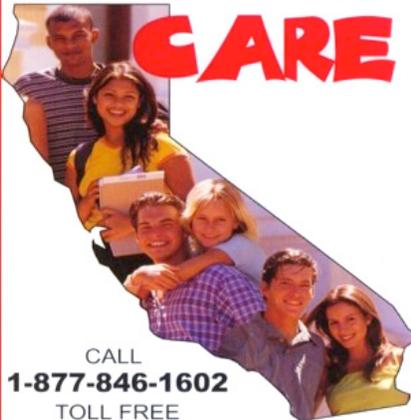
Website: [www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov](http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov)  
California State Office of the Foster Care Ombudsman

**YOU have  
RIGHTS  
too!**



**T**his brochure is for youth  
in out-of-home care.  
It explains your rights!

*California State*  
Office  
of the  
**OMBUDSMAN**  
for  
**FOSTER  
CARE**



CALL  
**1-877-846-1602**  
TOLL FREE

*An independent resource for  
reviewing issues concerning  
foster care youth*



# FOSTER YOUTH WEB SITE

An innovative and exciting aspect of the FCO is its website: [www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov](http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov). This website was designed by former foster youth to appeal to current and former foster youth.

The FCO has received correspondence and telephone calls from people as far away as Africa who found the information on the website valuable. Utilizing colors and graphics that appeal to youth, the site offers a wealth of information for foster youth ranging from how to obtain college scholarships to how to approach a dependency court judge.

Not only is the website a resource for children and youth in the child welfare system, but it is used as a resource by many non-foster youth, county child welfare staff, attorneys, foster parents, relatives, researchers, and educational institutions.

The site provides information and links regarding a broad range of foster care related subjects, including: the court system, CASA, mentoring programs, employment, housing, licensing, California Youth Connection (CYC), Medi-Cal, public health nurses, scholarships, teen suicide crisis and runaway hot lines, social security cards, birth certificates, and immigration status. Additionally, it includes a complaint form which can be emailed to the FCO directly from the website.



# ANALYSIS OF COMPLAINTS BY COMPLAINANTS

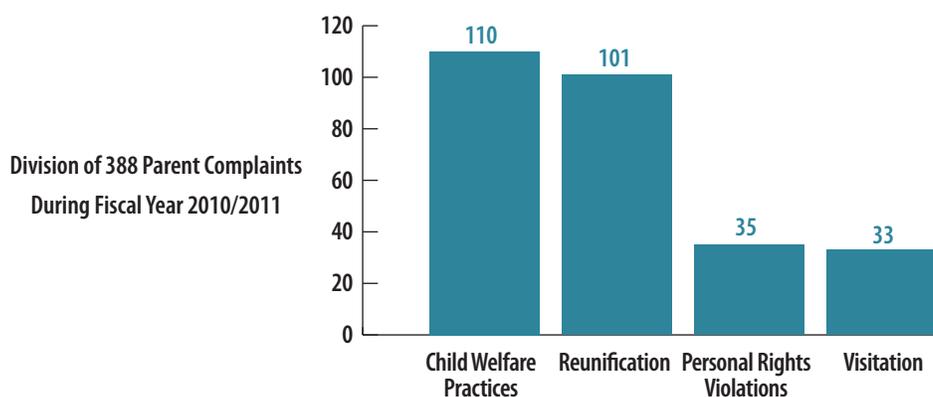
## PARENTS' COMPLAINTS

By Denise Cooper, FCO Manager

During FY 2010/2011 the FCO received 388 complaints from the parents of children involved in the foster care system. The complaints documented by the FCO indicate practice improvements are needed to engage parents in developing their case plan, meeting their goals, helping them navigate systems, and mentoring them.

The 2008 Federal Child and Family Services Review indicated some practices intended to achieve permanent, stable homes for children and youth are not always used throughout the life of a case. Specifically, reviewers raised concerns regarding inconsistent practices in concurrent planning and reunification efforts.

The FCO identified the four most frequent parent complaint issues: Child Welfare Practices, Reunification, Personal Rights Violations, and Visitation.



Other Parent Issues include: CPS Reports (26), Relative Placement (19), Placement Disruption (15), Removal (10), Non Foster Care (7), Adoption (6), ICPC (5), Discrimination (3), Mental Health (3), Foster/Kin care Services (2), ICWA (2), Runaway (2), Criminal Background Exemption (1), Court (1), Payments (1), Emancipation (1), Licensing (1), Family Finding (1), Attorney (1), Higher Education (1), and Information (1). (See Appendix E for Issue definitions.)

### CHILD WELFARE PRACTICES (110 COMPLAINTS)

The Child Welfare Practices complaints received by the FCO during FY 2010/2011 involved allegations that some counties' policies, practices, and/or individual actions of county social workers were inconsistent and ineffective. Parents explained to the FCO that they often felt helpless, angry, and isolated not knowing what was going to happen; hearing terminology that they did not understand; and were unaware of services that could have been helpful. Some parents reported that social workers did not return phone calls, were insensitive, rude,

A mother stated she left voice messages for her social worker regarding her disability and requested that the county provide reasonable transportation accommodations so that she could attend court ordered classes. The mother reported that the social worker had not responded in a timely fashion to her calls and the worker was insensitive to the mother's needs. As a result of the FCO's intervention, the mother was assigned a new social worker. In addition, the court-ordered six more months of reunification services. The new social worker arranged for transportation for the mother so that she was able to attend court-ordered classes and visitation.



inappropriate in their actions, and submitted court reports that were inaccurate and dismissive. Many of the child welfare practice complaints were that the parents felt that the social workers did not treat them with respect, and also were not sensitive to their culture.

## REUNIFICATION (101 COMPLAINTS)

The reunification complaints from parents included allegations that the counties:

- ▶ Failed to engage the parents throughout the development and implementation of their case plans;
- ▶ Failed to help parents successfully navigate the child welfare system to meet case plan goals by key decision points;
- ▶ Failed to help the parent access services;
- ▶ Failed to treat parents in a way that demonstrated successful reunification was indeed possible.

A father stated he had left telephone messages for his social worker regarding his need for referrals to complete his court ordered reunification services but the social worker did not return his calls. As a result of the FCO's intervention the father received timely referrals for the court ordered reunification services.

There is wide recognition that engagement with families is an essential factor in achieving positive outcomes.

A mother contacted the FCO to report that the social worker was not responding to her complaint that her six year old son was being abused by the foster parent. Her son reported to her that his foster mother grabbed him several times around the neck and choked him. He also had a bruise on his right leg and stated that the foster parent takes his sheets off his bed at night. The FCO staff contacted the county social worker, CCL, and the child's attorney. Investigations were conducted and the foster child was moved to another placement.

## PERSONAL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (35 COMPLAINTS)

Parents complained that the social workers did not respond or take seriously their reports of personal rights violations by the caregiver of their children. Some parents reported that their children were being neglected or abused in placement, not allowed to make phone calls, attend the church of their choice, or receive appropriate and timely medical attention. When the FCO receives complaints about Personal Rights Violations they report the problem to the county, CCL, and the child's attorney. Through statewide outreach and training the FCO informs stakeholders of the rights of children/youth in foster care.

## VISITATION (33 COMPLAINTS)

Visitation complaints included allegations by some parents that their children were being denied contact with people who were important to them including: parents, siblings, relatives, family friends, and/or contact with people who were not in the foster care system (such as classmates, church members, teachers, and others). Visitation is a critical component of a successful reunification plan. Therefore, it is imperative for the parents to be actively engaged in visitation planning and that the counties consistently address issues that create obstacles to visitation. In addition, every foster youth has a right to communicate and visit with his or her relatives and those outside the foster care community unless prohibited by court order. Denial of family visits is sometimes used by caregivers to punish foster children for misbehavior.

A mother reported she wanted to be reunified with her 12-year old daughter. She had completed all the components of her case plan but she had not seen her daughter for several months because the child's caregiver quit monitoring their visits. The FCO staff contacted the county ombudsman and the child's attorney. The county arranged for regular visits to occur. Also the county referred the mother and her daughter to family therapy with the goal of reunification.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Expand the use of Cultural Brokers

Cultural Brokers are of the same culture as the families involved in the child welfare system or they have an extensive knowledge base of the family's culture. They advocate for families to ensure that they receive effective and appropriate services. Cultural Brokers also have knowledge of specialized topic areas such as substance abuse, domestic violence, ICWA, or immigration status. Cultural Brokers may be foster care alumni or parents who successfully reunified with their children. Cultural Brokers receive extensive training on the child welfare system, child welfare program activities and purposes, child welfare mandates, and the juvenile court. California Counties that have implemented the program are: Fresno, San Diego, Calaveras, Los Angeles, and Placer. Orange County is at the planning stage of bringing the program to their county.

### Expand the Use of Parent Partners

Parent Partners are a supportive resource to help parents access services and successfully navigate the complex child welfare system and meet case plan goals. Parent Partners have personal experience with the child welfare system. They are usually parents who have experienced removal of a child, received child welfare services, and successfully reunified with their children. The Parent Partners are able to engage families throughout the development and implementation of their case plans. The counties with Parent Partners are: Butte, Fresno, Humboldt, Los Angeles, Orange, Placer, Riverside, Sacramento, San Bernardino, San Francisco, Sonoma, and Tehama.

### Utilize the Lessons Learned From the pilot Counties Involved in the California Partners for Permanency (CAPP)

The goal of CAPP during its five years of Federal funding is to improve permanency outcomes for African American and American Indian foster children in foster care by implementing a Child and Family Practice Model that includes: culturally-sensitive engagement; empowerment of family, tribal and community networks; and use of culturally-based healing practices and practice adaptations.

Current child welfare system practice and policy does not adequately understand, engage, or value the strengths and resources of African American and American Indian families, communities, and Tribes due to mutual mistrust (at both the individual and system levels) and a lack of understanding of the differences in the lived experience of each population. The CAPP model states that we can most effectively address disparities in outcomes and thereby achieve positive permanency outcomes for all children when we:

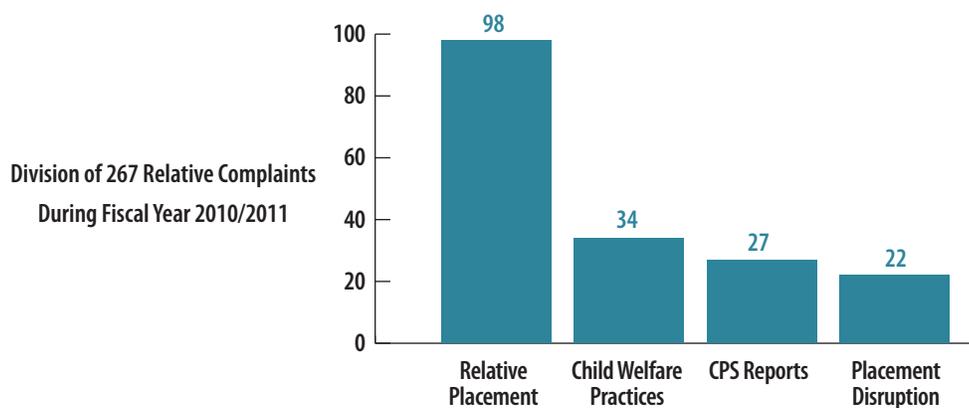
- ▶ Acknowledge the history of racism and discrimination in our community; recognize its impact on institutions, communities, Tribes, families and children; and
- ▶ Move from a medical/professionally-driven model of helping, to one that recognizes the parents, child, youth, family, Tribes and community as true partners in developing solutions.



## RELATIVES' COMPLAINTS

by Bonnie Rivero, FCO Analyst

During FY 2010/2011, the FCO received 267 complaints from relatives regarding related children placed in the child welfare system or at risk of being abused or neglected. In recent years Federal and State legislation has supported giving priority placement to relatives. While many counties have readily refocused their attention to relative placement, others have not adjusted so quickly to the practice. Some social workers still believe that dysfunctional families are multi-generational and thus are hesitant to place children with their relatives.



Other relative complaints include: Personal Rights Violation (18), Visitation (17), Payments (16), Reunification (9), Foster/Kin care Services (7), ICPC (7), ICWA (3), Emancipation (2), Medical and Dental (2), Removal (1), Non Foster Care (2), Mental Health (1), Criminal Background Exemption (1). (See Appendix E for Issue definition)

In order to assist all parties to reach a resolution to relative complaints that is in the best interest of children and youth the FCO may:

- Discuss the situation with the county ombudsman, the county point-of-contact, and/or the children's social worker,
- Contact the children's attorney,
- Recommend re-assessment of placement,
- Encourage family conferencing, and/or
- Encourage Team Decision Making (TDM) meetings.

### RELATIVE PLACEMENT (98 COMPLAINTS)

The FCO received complaints from relatives who stated that the county refused to place their related children with them at the time of removal/detention. The FCO's investigation of complaints by relatives revealed that various counties have inconsistent policies and practices regarding relative placement. Some counties stated that they could not place children with relatives until the criminal background check and the relative approval process was completed, which could take several months.

A grandfather stated he had left telephone messages for the social worker to discuss placing his grandchildren with him and his wife, but the social worker did not return his calls. As a result of the FCO's intervention, the grandfather was being assessed for placement.



However, other counties have developed an emergency placement process whereby children can be placed with relatives in a matter of hours.

Because of the delay in the background check and relative assessment and approval process, children may remain with non-related caregivers for an extended period of time. Consequently, some social workers reported to the court that even though the relative was approved for placement the children were bonded with the foster parents and should not be up-rooted to be placed with relatives. Because relatives do not have standing in dependency court proceedings their voice is seldom heard. The FCO's intervention in these complaints includes informing counties about new Federal legislation that requires relatives to be notified within 30 days after children are removed from their families, the use of family finding technology, and family engagement tools for social workers so that more foster children will have an opportunity to be placed with relatives.

A grandmother contacted the FCO to complain because the county was not providing mental health services for her grandchildren, ages four, nine and eleven-years old. The FCO staff informed the county and the children's attorney of the grandmother's concerns. Consequently, the county referred the children to a therapeutic mental health program.

### CHILD WELFARE PRACTICES (34 COMPLAINTS)

Some relatives complained to the FCO that county social workers were not responding to their telephone calls and did not treat the relatives with respect. The FCO received complaints from relatives who had placement of their relative children that the county was not providing needed services for the children. Other relative caregivers complained about untimely and inadequate foster care payments.

### CPS REPORTS (27 COMPLAINTS)

The FCO received complaints from relatives that CPS had not properly investigated an allegation of child abuse and neglect involving relative children, or they were dissatisfied with the outcome of CPS investigations. Relatives reported that county social workers had not taken their concerns seriously; had not conducted private interviews of abused and neglected children away from their alleged perpetrators, had not interviewed relatives and neighbors; and had not conducted objective and thorough CPS investigations.

### PLACEMENT DISRUPTION (22 COMPLAINTS)

The FCO received complaints from relatives that counties were unjustly moving relative children from their home. Other relatives alleged that social workers falsely accused them of abuse or neglect. A number of relatives complained that social workers removed children due to the relative caregiver's past CPS or criminal history that took place many years before. Relatives complained that they initially passed the requirements for foster/relative care placement and the children lived with them for months or years but the children were removed without notice from their home to be adopted by strangers. Some relatives complained that although their home was suitable for foster care placement they did not pass the adoption home-study so the children were removed. A number of relatives said children were removed because they requested guardianship rather than adoption of the children.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Ensure implementation of the Relative Notification Statutes

The CDSS should ensure that counties have implemented AB 938 (Chapter 261, Statutes of 2009), which amended W&IC sections 309, 628. These sections require counties, within 30 days of a child's removal from the home, to exercise due diligence to identify and locate all grandparents, adult siblings and other adult relatives including those suggested by the parents and provide them written notification that willing and appropriate relatives can apply for placement of the children. (All county letter ACL-09-86)



### **Expand the Utilization of Family Finding Efforts Statewide**

Family finding efforts is an intensive search method to locate the relatives of children and youth in foster care. The ultimate goal of family finding is to engage relatives for long-term, caring, permanent connections and relationships for children and youth in foster care. The other key goal of family finding is to establish a long-term emotional support network with family members and other adults who may not be able to take the child into their home but who want to stay connected with the child and may be able to provide other types of support.

### **Expand the Utilization of Family Conferencing**

Some counties facilitate family conferencing meetings where, in a group setting, family members explore placement options for their relative children in the foster care system. The extended family has resources among them that can be utilized to support the children and their parents during their involvement in the child welfare system. Because relatives oftentimes have a keener understanding of the strengths and weakness of family members, family conferencing has been a successful way to provide support and to problem-solve placement issues and should be expanded to every county.



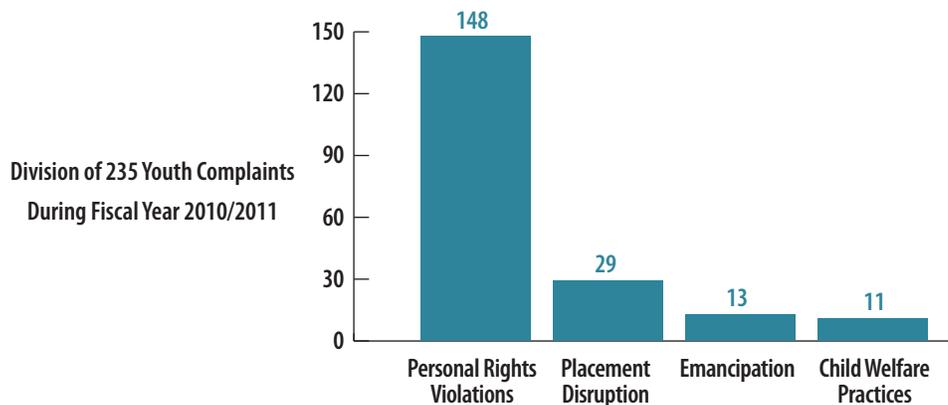
## YOUTH COMPLAINTS

by Regina Mauldin, FCO Analyst

During FY 2010/2011, the FCO received 235 complaints from youth placed in the California foster care system. The complaint data compiled by the FCO demonstrates that reform is needed in order to improve the practices, the relationships, and the quality of care that California is providing to our foster children.

The top four complaints reported by youth are:

- Personal Rights Violations
- Placement Disruption
- Emancipation
- Child Welfare Practices



Other youth complaints: Medical/Dental (7), Homelessness (5), Relative Placement (4), Visitation (4), Attorney (3), Higher Education (2), Immigration (2), Reunification (2), Court (1), CPS Reports (1), ILP (1), Mental Health (1), and Payments (1). (See Appendix E for Issue definitions.)

### PERSONAL RIGHTS VIOLATIONS (148 COMPLAINTS)

The most common Personal Rights Violation reported by foster youth during FY 2010/2011 was that they were not treated with respect by their caregivers and social workers. Many youth reported they suffered verbal and emotional abuse at the hands of caregivers and group home staff who cursed and yelled at them.

Youth stated that caregivers and social workers were supposed to be good role models, but that was not always the case. Some foster youth stated to the FCO, during private face-to-face and telephone interviews, that they felt as though no one listened to their concerns, complaints, and feelings. During follow-up interviews with social workers and CCL, the FCO discovered that in many instances youth complaints were dismissed and determined to be “unfounded” or “inconclusive” because the adults in question denied the accusations and there were no witnesses. Consequently, many youth felt de-valued and disrespected.

A number of youth complained that they are treated as “criminals” instead of victims of child abuse and neglect. Some youth reported feeling unsafe and afraid in their placements because caregivers were hesitant to de-escalate angry outbursts from other youth or intervene when group dynamics turned hostile. Youth reported that caregivers were untrained, punitive, and often unconcerned about the safety of the youth in their care.



A 17 year old reported that a group home staff physically assaulted and slammed him against a door. The FCO reported the incident to the local CPS, the youth's social worker and attorney, and CCL. The CCL confirmed the allegation and reported to the FCO that the group home staff person was immediately terminated from his employment at the group home.

The matter of personal belongings is another very important issue related to treating youth with respect. Personal items are very important to children and youth in foster care because these items represent the youth's identity and may have been a gift from a friend or family member. Many times youth complained that their belongings were lost in the shuffle due to moving from placement to placement and they were left to survive with few possessions.

Sometimes the personal items were stolen by caregivers or

other foster youth and no one investigates the thefts. Youth were left with no compensation for their missing valuables. The FCO works with caregivers, social workers, attorneys, and CASAs to help youth recover their personal belongings.

Some youth reported that they did not receive enough food or the food was "horrible". Other youth reported that caregivers withheld food as a form of punishment. That form of discipline is unlawful as is any type of discipline

that violates personal rights of children and youth in

foster care. A number of youth reported that the food they received was not healthy, not adequately cooked, and the bulk of their diet consisted of highly processed foods such as instant soups, frozen meals, frozen burritos, and frozen pizzas.

A youth living in a foster home called the FCO to ask whether she had the right to have clean clothes. The youth stated her foster mother did not give her money to wash her clothes, they did not eat healthy food, and there was no heat at night. Because of the FCO's intervention, the youth was moved to a supportive home.

A 15 year-old caller was upset because his previous group home never returned all his clothing when he was placed in a new home two months earlier. Staff of the FCO reviewed the inventory list which had been completed by the youth when he entered the program with the group home administrator. The administrator agreed that there were many missing items and gave the youth \$200 to compensate him for the missing clothing.

Clothing complaints reported by children and youth included the following:

- Not having clean clothes,
- Not having proper clothes for the weather,
- Caregivers not purchasing clothes with their clothing allowance,
- Being forced to wear clothes and/or shoes that were tattered, did not fit properly, or were purchased at used clothing stores.

Youth in group homes have a right to allowances unless their case plan states otherwise (W&IC Section 16001.9 (a)(3)). There is not a clear right to an allowance for youth in foster homes however it is considered a good parenting practice. Group and foster homes (if foster parent provides an allowance) can keep money in a safe place for the youth.

Some youth complained that:

- Caregivers did not provide the youth with their allowance in compliance with the caregiver's own house rules.
- Caregivers took away entire allowances as a form of punishment,
- Gift cards or monetary incentives issued to youth by ILP were not given to them by their caregivers.

## PLACEMENT DISRUPTION

Some youth contacted the FCO because they wanted a change of placement and their social workers were unresponsive to their requests. Others contacted the FCO because their social workers were moving them



to different placements against their will. In some cases these youth were high school seniors and placement changes would interfere with their ability to graduate.

One teen youth specifically wanted to move to a “whole-family placement” where she and her infant could be placed together with a foster family. The FCO contacted the youth’s social worker and attorney and a whole-family placement was found for the mother and baby.

## EMANCIPATION

The FCO received 13 complaints from former foster youth who emancipated from the California foster care system without resources. Former foster youth complained about being homeless, without necessary documents or supportive resources. They reported needing help to get their lives on track with housing, employment and education. Leaving foster care for a life of independence is a daunting task and the FCO works closely with former foster youth to connect them to local county ILP and the after-care programs and services that will assist them. Although this number is small, these 13 complaints illustrate the serious issues faced by the thousands of foster youth emancipating each year.

## CHILD WELFARE PRACTICES (11 COMPLAINTS)

Some youth reported to the FCO that their social workers did not care, did not listen, and did not help them deal with their emotional needs. Youth often reported that because social workers only visited once a month, they were detached and did not know what was happening in the lives of the youth they served. Youth were very articulate about their need for their social workers to pay attention to and demonstrate concern for them. The child welfare system could benefit from listening to foster youth to understand the real issues that impact their lives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Continue to Outreach to foster Youth Regarding the After 18 Campaign (Assembly Bill AB 12 California Fostering Connections to Success Act)



Ensure that all eligible youth are aware of the After 18 Campaign. In 2010, the California legislature passed matching legislation, AB 12, the California Fostering Connections to Success Act (Chapter 559, Statutes of 2010) which provides funding for foster youth until they are twenty years old. This initiative is now known as the After 18 Campaign. Foster youth now can decide to remain in foster care and receive services and supports until age 20. The additional time will help foster youth prepare for their futures through additional educational and employment training opportunities, find and secure consistent and safe housing, and build permanent connections with caring adults, and community members. There are many types of living arrangements available to these youth. More information is available at the following Websites:

[www.fosteringconnections.org/california](http://www.fosteringconnections.org/california) and [www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov](http://www.fosteryouthhelp.ca.gov) and [www.after18.org](http://www.after18.org)



### **Review Case Files for Foster Children and Youth to Ensure That They Have Their Birth Certificates**

The CDSS should make sure counties are implementing the provisions of AB 791 (Chapter 59, Statutes of 2011). This bill clarifies existing law by initiating the process of obtaining and providing a foster youth's birth certificate when the court denies the order for reunification services or orders the termination of reunification services for a foster youth. Many youth age out of the child welfare system and are not provided with their correct and certified birth certificate. Ensuring the birth certificate is received in a time appropriate manner allows the social worker, caregiver and youth enough time to engage in the process for correcting inaccuracies on the birth certificate.

### **Ensure That Foster Children and Youth Who Are Born Out of the Country Have Their Special Immigrant Juvenile Status**

Federal law, 8 USC 1101(a)(27)(j), and federal regulations 8 CFR204.11 govern Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS). Foster youth who are not United States (U.S.) citizens or lawful permanent residents of the U.S., or have some other kind of temporary lawful immigration status are considered undocumented persons. Being undocumented presents a host of problems for foster youth: they cannot work legally, obtain Social Security Cards, driver licenses, or bank accounts, and after termination of dependency they can be deported to a country with which they have no ties nor speak the language. It is crucial that youth emancipating from the juvenile court system, obtain SIJS before their juvenile court case is closed.

### **Ensure That Foster Children and Youth Emancipate With Clean Credit**

Many foster children and youth are victims of identity theft by family members and foster parents. The CDSS should ensure that counties are implementing the provisions of AB 2985 (Chapter 387, bills of 2006) which requires county welfare departments to request credit checks for foster youth who are 16 or older and provide referrals to credit counseling organizations if the credit check discloses any negative information.

### **Expand Campus Support Programs at All Publicly Funded California Colleges**

Expand campus support programs for former foster youth to all publicly funded California colleges, universities, and community colleges. Programs such as the Guardian Scholars program provide a comprehensive range of support services including: financial assistance; priority for campus housing and availability of year-round housing; academic advisement, counseling and tutoring; and employment and career services.



## CAREGIVER COMPLAINTS

by Linda Lavin, FCO Analyst

During FY 2010-2011, the FCO received 97 complaints from caregivers. Caregivers have articulated their need for additional support and improved communication with social workers and to become an acknowledged member of the team to address the needs of the foster children in their care. The chart below indicates the top three reasons caregivers contact the FCO: regarding placement disruption, child welfare practices and payment delays.



Other caregiver complaints include Licensing (9), Personal Rights Violations (9), Adoption (5), Medical and Dental (3), Emancipation (2), Reunification (2), Relative Placement (1), Removal (1), Visitation (1) Runaway (1) and Discrimination (1).(See Appendix E for Issue definitions)

### PLACEMENT DISRUPTION (34 COMPLAINTS)

The majority of complaints from foster parents during FY 2010/2011 were about placement disruptions. Regulations require that, unless there is a possibility of immediate danger, county child welfare services must provide seven days notice to a foster family before a foster child is removed from their care. However, in practice, this does not always happen.

Caregivers reported a number of causes of placement disruptions including the following:

- Caregivers requested additional services for children, but social workers removed the children instead.
- Children were removed due to unsubstantiated and improperly investigated allegations of caregiver abuse and neglect.

### CHILD WELFARE PRACTICES (18 COMPLAINTS)

Complaints regarding Child Welfare Practices took many forms. These complaints ranged from rude social workers, social workers not returning calls, to allegations that social workers were making false statements to the court about the caregivers. Some caregivers also complained about the lack of support from social workers, lack of services for foster children, missing Medi-Cal cards, lack of information about children's physical and mental health needs or history, and foster children's missing birth records.

A foster parent called the Ombudsman office because her two foster children, ages one and two-years old, were removed from her home without explanation. The Ombudsman staff contacted the children's attorney and the social worker's supervisor to inquire as to why the children were removed. The supervisor stated that the matter was under investigation but that the removal occurred because the social worker was concerned about the foster parent's ability to meet the children's medical needs. The Ombudsman staff informed the foster parent that this case was under investigation and advised her of the county grievance review process. The Ombudsman staff also gave the foster parent the contact information for the CDSS State Hearing Support section so that she could request a state hearing.



Some caregivers reported that they were troubled by the lack of training and support to lessen the negative impact visits with parents sometimes had on children in their care. The FCO received complaints from caregivers who were required to monitor parent/child visits although they had no training and parents were unfriendly. Caregivers also called the FCO for help getting siblings placed together in their home.

## PAYMENTS (10 COMPLAINTS)

Of concern to caregivers were untimely payments and lack of reimbursement for such things as medical co-payments that they expended when foster children were placed in their care. The FCO has been able to facilitate reimbursement and prevent payment delays so that caregivers can continue caring for California's foster children.

A foster parent called the FCO to complain about a delay in their foster care payments. The FCO facilitated the payment of the monies owed to the foster parent.

To provide additional support to caregivers, the FCO continues to be an active participant and partner with the California Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI) and

facilitated the establishment of the Caregiver Advocacy Network (CAN). Additionally the FCO is launching a web-site for foster caregivers statewide that will provide centrally located links to much needed caregiver resources and information.

A foster parent contacted the FCO because the foster family agency social worker was not returning his calls and he needed assistance with scheduling a cardiology appointment for his five-day old foster child who did not have a Medi-Cal card number. The FCO staff contacted the social worker regarding their procedures for responding to foster parents and the foster child's medical needs. The FCO confirmed with the foster parents that they were able to schedule an appointment for the infant; and the foster parents felt that they now had the appropriate information to meet the child's ongoing medical needs.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Expand the Quality Parenting Initiative

To improve the quality of foster family homes, CDSS should encourage all counties to implement the QPI. The QPI is a collaborative effort with the CDSS, County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA) and the Youth Law Center. The QPI has developed a statewide approach to recruiting and retaining high quality caregivers to provide excellent care to children in California's child welfare system. It is recognized that attracting and retaining high quality caregivers is critical to the success of all child welfare improvement efforts. The project presents a unique opportunity to strengthen efforts on a statewide basis in the recruitment and retention of quality caregivers. Advisors to the project include county and state staff, caregivers, biological parents, community partners and private agencies. The following California counties have begun to implement this approach: Fresno, Santa Clara, Humboldt, Sonoma, Kern, Santa Barbara, Ventura, San Luis Obispo, and Nevada.

### Expand Caregiver Advocacy Programs

Several counties have caregiver advocate programs that could be duplicated.

- ▶ Santa Clara County has a paid Caregiver Advocate position to support both relative and foster caregivers. The Caregiver Advocate resolves specific problems regarding case decisions and helps address the needs for additional support services. A support team of peer mentors meet individually with caregivers once a month, and help to provide needed support and information.
- ▶ Yolo County has a grant from First Five and created a Caregiver Taskforce which meets once a month with the Director of Yolo County Department of Social Service to discuss caregiver issues. Caregiver-Peer-Mentors receive a stipend.
- ▶ San Diego County contracts with their local community college to provide Caregiver Mentors (AB 2129) who receive stipends.



- ▶ The Kinship Advocacy Network sponsored by Casey Family programs in some counties provides support, advocacy and services for relative caregivers.
- ▶ The FCO facilitates the CAN which meets quarterly to discuss and problem solve caregiver issues.



# FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN OFFICE STAFF PERSPECTIVES, ACTIVITIES, AND RECOGNITIONS

## FOSTER YOUTH TO RELATIVE CAREGIVER

by Walika Cox, former FCO Student Assistant

I am a former foster youth and here is my story:

Both of my unmarried parents were crack cocaine users and alcohol abusers so neither was able to parent effectively. My seven siblings, my mother and I lived with my maternal grandparents. My grandmother had two full time jobs and took care of all of us including my ailing grandfather. Because I was the oldest sibling, I took on the role of caretaker along with my grandmother. Due to this, I seldom attended school which meant low test scores and bad grades. Eventually my siblings and I were removed from my mother's custody and my grandmother's home.

When I was 14-years old, my siblings and I entered the foster care system and my life totally changed. We were placed with an uncle. We had no idea of the adventure that we were about to embark upon while becoming a part of the "system". Although there were many challenges with being in the system and placed with a relative, I tried to make the best of my situation.

I became very active with other foster youth through CYC. I graduated from high school, began working at age sixteen, married when I was 23, had two children, attended college and eventually my husband and I received guardianship of four of my siblings.

I find being a relative caregiver a very rewarding experience. It is now my turn to "give back" and I am grateful to have my siblings in my care. Because I was raised by a relative caregiver, I believe that I have a better understanding of the system as well as how my siblings might be feeling. I definitely believe that foster care is much easier on minors who are placed with family members rather than those placed in a foster home with complete strangers. I cannot imagine life without my siblings and the thought that they might have been totally removed from our family is unthinkable.

My husband and I are able to maintain a safe and stable environment for our family. We work with all of them to build their self-esteem and strengthen the family unit.

While we take good care of my siblings we still allow them to maintain a strong connection with their biological parents.

I know that I have been blessed and have accomplished more than I could imagine.



## FORMER FOSTER YOUTH, MY STORY

by Matthew Lopez, FCO Student Assistant

I was in the foster care system for most of my childhood so I have a real understanding of what foster children go through. I was fortunate because I was placed with a relative and was able to maintain relationships with all my siblings and family.

Looking back at the foster care system there are many dysfunctions. Growing up through the system can leave young people feeling hopeless, worthless and unwanted. Because of my involvement with the FCO and the CYC, I speak regularly with hundreds of youth in care and hear many stories of young people bouncing around placement to placement, school to school. In all the chaos of instability, many of them feel like they have no direction and no future.

Currently I am enrolled in college and also participating in many community organizations that support foster youth and endeavor to improve the child welfare system.

I have worked with the FCO for three years. As a student assistant I work in the office answering calls from youth and others in the community. It is important that foster youth feel comfortable talking to someone who has had similar experiences. I also give presentations on the foster youth rights to youth in group homes, detention centers, ILP classes, schools and many other places.

Working in the FCO has given me the opportunity to expand my public speaking skills and to set higher goals for myself. I have seen how the presentations about the foster care rights have empowered and encouraged youth. Hearing from someone who has walked in their shoes and been in their situation and who has overcome many of the obstacles that are set before kids in care is valuable!

## MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE AS A FOSTER PARENT

by Deana Williams, FCO Secretary

Becoming a foster parent is something I always wanted to do. My husband and I have only one child of our own so we both felt we had a little extra to give.

Once licensed, we excitedly awaited our first placement. After welcoming the 16-year old youth to our home, we made every attempt to make him feel comfortable and were ready to make a difference. We soon found out that it was much more involved than we could have ever imagined. This youth had a history of being moved from placement to placement and felt our home was just another stop-in and exit situation. The social worker did not respond to our requests for supportive services and training so that we could provide stability for the youth. After giving it our best effort, we soon came to realize that helping this youth was more than we were able to do. After two months he was removed.

Our next placement was a six-year old boy. Initially he seemed to be the perfect little boy doing boy things. That quickly changed. Unbeknownst to us, this six-year old boy was suicidal and had a history of bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, uncontrollable violent outbursts, and multiple mental health related hospitalizations. We could have never imagined the depth of his mental health issues until we dealt with them personally. Although the social worker knew about his problems we were left uninformed and unprepared. He was finally hospitalized again where he could receive the intensive assistance he needed.

Not long after, we accepted another placement and continued in our attempts to make a difference in the lives of foster children. After taking in many children, some short term and some long, we found that in many cases, foster parents are not informed about the problems children have and are not provided needed services once the placement is made. I believe there would be a better chance of more long-term placements if foster parents are provided with the physical and mental health history of the children they receive into their homes.



Foster parents should be given the option to decide whether they are capable of really benefiting children with special needs. Once children who require more care are placed in homes, counties and foster family agencies should make sure foster families are fully supported with services to allow the placements to work and last. In some cases the support was there but with others many things seemed to have slipped through the cracks.

With every placement we accepted, we did our best to take care of the children as if they were our own. We did our best to meet the needs of each child but realized that to do so successfully it has to be a team effort where social workers and foster parents work hand-in-hand.

## **SACRAMENTO COUNTY FOSTER YOUTH FASHION SHOW FUND-RAISER**

The California Foster Care Ombudsman and FCO staff volunteer each year with the Foster Youth Education Fund (FYEF) 10th Annual Fashion Show and Tea to help to raise funds for Sacramento County foster youth to stay in college. This event raises tens of thousands of dollars to provide funding for college scholarships to individual former foster youth. In addition, a portion of those funds help to support the Guardian Scholars program at California State University, Sacramento. This is one of several campuses in the state that provides critical on-campus supports to former foster youth, including mentoring, financial-aid coordination and temporary housing during school holidays and breaks. Many of these former foster youth do not have family or other safety nets to help them attend college. The FYEF provides the needed support for our foster youth to successfully attend college.

The Foster Youth Fashion Show is truly a magical event. It is created each year by an all-volunteer community effort that includes many current and previous employees of the CDSS. Especially engaged in the project are volunteers from the CDSS. Volunteers build the runway, design the set; decorate the ballroom, prepare the refreshments and work for months in advance of the event to obtain donations for the silent auction and raffle.

The business community also volunteers their expertise and merchandise. Fashions featured in this year's show were from Macy's Sunrise, and local stylists volunteered their time and talents to provide professional hair and makeup. Professional photographers and video photographers also donated their expertise.

Each model received a DVD of the Fashion Show and a "glamour" portrait of themselves. Major corporate sponsors included Accenture, CGI and Deloitte. Additionally, a Casino Night Gala event was held to celebrate the FYEF's 10th Year Anniversary. Making appearances at the event were CDSS Director Will Lightbourne and Deputy Director Greg Rose.

## **FCO STAFF WINS CASEY FAMILY PROGRAM'S RUTH MASSINGA AWARD**

Walika Cox, FCO student assistant, won the 2011 Casey Family Program's Ruth Massinga Award for the Kinship Caregiver category. This is a national award that "acknowledges distinguished professional work, exceptional leadership and relentless dedication on behalf of constituents of the foster care system."

She was nominated for this award because of her dedication to raising her siblings and her consistent commitment to improving the lives of foster children and youth. Walika was placed in foster care in 1996 at the age of 14, then at age 23 Walika married and became the caregiver to her three younger siblings, and also her own two biological children.

Walika has a wide-range of professional experiences with the child welfare system. She was involved with the CYC for five years. She served as a youth consultant for the Child Welfare League of America and as an associate for the California Partnership for Children.

Walika also serves as a consultant for the Residentially Based Services Reform pilots. She is a full time student, with the goal of becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW). Walika is truly an exceptional



young woman, who describes herself as having a “passion for reaching out to help foster children and youth realize their unique potential.”

### **CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN RECEIVES YOUTH LAW CENTER LOREN WARBOYS UNSUNG HERO AWARD**

Each year the Youth Law Center presents the Loren Warboys Unsung Hero Award to individuals who have made exemplary contributions to improve the lives of at-risk youth in the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. In 2010 they honored four people who have helped improve the lives of teens involved in the nation’s foster care and juvenile justice systems.

Among the four honorees was Karen Grace-Kaho, California State Ombudsman for Foster Care, for her leadership in resolving complaints by, and on behalf of, children and youth in foster care regarding their placement, care, and services, and for advancing the rights and elevating the experiences of and issues faced by foster youth across California.



# THE FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

## GROUP HOME REPORT CARD

### A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF 42 CALIFORNIA GROUP HOMES

This Group Home Project was undertaken because the Foster Care Ombudsman became concerned about the quality of California group homes. Foster children and youth are usually placed in group homes because they have experienced multiple emotional traumas and require specialized therapeutic services beyond what foster family homes can provide. However, the FCO has discovered through the investigations of complaints that some group homes are not providing the needed services for our foster children and youth. Group home complaints have included serious reports of abuse, lack of appropriate supervision, disrespectful treatment, inadequate food, lack of appropriate clothing, not receiving allowances and not providing therapeutic services. As part of the complaint investigation process, the FCO visited the group homes and witnessed first-hand the validity of many of the complaints.

Having only visited “problem” group homes, the FCO wanted to learn if there were group homes that were providing good services and a good overall program. The FCO asked youth and child welfare professionals for recommendations of good group homes. The FCO then visited those with good programs and continued to visit the group homes that have been complained about to see if there were significant differences.

The FCO explored the factors that enable group homes to provide a nurturing, therapeutic and home-like atmosphere that truly meets the needs of each individual youth. Also the FCO researched how California could create an oversight and accountability system that evaluates the quality of group homes.

The FCO developed interview questions and rating criteria. (A sample of the interview questions and the rating criteria are available at the end of this article.) We visited 42 group homes across California. At each of the group homes the youth were interviewed individually, group home staff was interviewed, as well as the program director. Any violations of the foster youth rights or other complaints that surfaced were reported to CCL and the child/youth’s attorney. The group homes visited ranged in size, location, program, rate classification level (RCL), and client population. Our findings indicate that the location, size of the facility and RCL rate level did not determine the quality of the program.

The variables that were consistently demonstrated in the group homes with positive reputations were:

- ▶ Professional leadership,
- ▶ Youth focus and youth feedback
- ▶ Well-trained and committed staff
- ▶ A “home-like” atmosphere and attractive environment
- ▶ An effective and professional therapeutic program.

The following preliminary report is an overview of the FCO’s observations during visits to the group homes. This is a “qualitative analysis” of the group homes visited and is not a quantitative study of all California group homes. The FCO plans to publish a complete group home project report after visiting additional group homes and compiling comparative data. The FCO plans to work with CCL and the CDSS Research Services Branch to compare and analyze data from the complaints received on each group home and information from other states regarding their assessment of the quality of group home programs.



Based on the variables that came to light during our group home visits, the quality of the group homes could be broadly described as either Good, Average, or Unsatisfactory.

Of the 42 group homes visited, we determined that:

- 16 were Good,
- 10 were Average
- 16 were Unsatisfactory.

## GOOD GROUP HOME PROGRAMS

### Leadership

One of the variables identified was whether the facility had high quality leadership. In the Good programs the leadership had clear values, vision and purpose which was understood and practiced by staff and youth. These group homes practiced what they preached. The focus of the leadership was on providing excellent services to the children and families in their program and to discover new opportunities for improvement. We found the directors of these Good programs to be committed to their work and often described it as their “life’s work”. They also had years of professional experience in administrating therapeutic programs. These directors were exceptionally knowledgeable and innovative.

One program was located in a rural area. The core staff has been working together for over 20 years. They have weekly staff-training where they go over cases and present new and better ways to relate to children. They have a relationship-based philosophy and have developed well-articulated values based on love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. The staff and the children operate from these standards. The program teaches youth to resolve conflicts peacefully and quickly. The grounds are beautifully landscaped with flowers and foliage. Each of the youth is responsible for a part of the property and proud of his or her efforts. They have a professionally trained chef who prepares delicious and nutritious meals for the youth and staff. The youth are encouraged to hone their cooking skills along side the chef and wear similar white cooking attire. They help the youth find volunteer positions which, for a number of youth, has led to full-time employment.

### Child/Youth Focus

In the Good programs the youths’ perspectives was not only sought-out and valued but those programs had a system to incorporate youth feedback as an important component of program improvement. In some programs youth evaluated the staff. These evaluations were taken seriously by the group home administrator and were used to enhance training and supervision to improve staff/ youth relationships.

### Staff

Another variable that we found consistently in the Good group homes was the quality of the staff. The staff were well trained on the values and purpose of the program and actually modeled those values. The staff demonstrated that they enjoyed working with children, youth, and families and practiced appropriate therapeutic interventions. The staff were mature and professional and excellent role models for the youth. In most of these programs there was low staff turn-over, and some of the staff

had been with the program for many years. There was a stable staff culture, and opportunities for career advancement.

### Home-Like Facility

The facility itself also impacted the quality of the program. In the Good programs there is a home-like atmosphere and a concern for aesthetics. The living areas were comfortable and inviting. The youth decorate their bedrooms with posters and personal pictures and other personal items. The landscaping and outdoor area is well maintained. In several of the Good programs the youth had the opportunity to create gardens and care for animals.

One group home collaborated with a contractor who trained the youth in carpentry and construction. Youth built the facility’s transitional housing units and even installed crown-molding in the living rooms. This program stressed teaching the youth marketable skills. In that facility core-staff had been there for over 25-years which created cohesiveness, stability, and a staff-wide understanding of the program’s goals and core values.

In the group homes that we identified as Good, all the youth made statements like, “This was the first time I have ever been around people who really care about me.”...

“The staff are really patient.” ...

“I feel safe and happy here.

One Good group home was in a residential neighborhood. The youth and the staff took on a creative project of re-landscaping the front yard. They built curbs, planted trees, and laid sod. The youth were very proud of their efforts and stated that they were planning on renovating the kitchen next. The youth grew their own vegetables. They had a learning-center where the youth had therapy. The learning-center included an equestrian facility where the youth learned to care for and develop relationships with horses.



## Program

The Good group home programs had well-defined therapeutic programs that were understood by the staff and the youth. These programs focused on the needs of the children and families, were congruent with child/youth development, and utilized qualified therapists. The good programs also were “relationship-based” and thus focused on the quality of the relationship between everyone interacting in the program, youth, staff, therapists, families and others. The staff provided appropriate supervision and the rules were relevant and

**One successful program is based upon a no-fail any child approach. Their core values embody unconditional care. Their program has become an inspiration for care-givers nation-wide.**

understood by the youth. These programs also were educationally focused and provided additional educational and tutorial support when needed, and encouraged youth employment or volunteer work. These good programs also encouraged and facilitated creative activities. Several of the Good group home gave special rewards and recognition to youth for their accomplishments.

**One Good group home is located in a very isolated area. Its residents are youth who were sexual predators. The youth said it was the first time in their lives they felt safe.**

## AVERAGE GROUP HOME PROGRAMS

In the group homes that the FCO determined to be Average, the largest number of complaints was that the youth were not treated respectfully. In interviews with the leadership it was evident that they did not have a clear understanding of their therapeutic program.

The leadership and the staff did not value youth feedback and were not open to improving the program. Both staff and youth were unclear about the purpose of the “program.” Group home staff was not appropriately trained and there was high staff turn-over. The staff operated from a “Power-and-Control” Philosophy. These programs often had unnecessary rules which were not understood by the youth. The programs most often focused on controlling behavior rather than therapeutic interventions. Group home staff was not appropriately trained and there was high staff turn-over. The leadership and the staff most often did not value the youth feedback and were not open to program improvement.

**In one Average facility, when the Foster Care Ombudsman asked a staff member what the program values were he said, “We only have rules thats all!”**

## UNSATISFACTORY GROUP HOME PROGRAMS

**In one Unsatisfactory program a small eight-year old boy voiced, as his goal, to be free from restraints. When asked what was meant by that, he threw himself at a door with his left arm stretched high above his head and his right arm twisted behind his back. He said they either do it this way or they push me to the floor and put their foot on my back to hold me down.**

bedrooms, and inadequate furnishings. These programs focused on rules as opposed to an individualized therapeutic focus. Neither the staff nor the youth understood the purpose and values of the program and would often answer “What program?” These programs were not educationally focused and often discouraged any community involvement.

The leadership of these Unsatisfactory programs could not articulate a clear vision, values or purpose for their program. The youths’ perspectives on the program and staff were not appreciated and the youth often experienced repercussions for expressing complaints. The staff were not appropriately trained and were often rude, and not engaged with the youth. Many of the staff had limited education and were barely over 18 years old themselves. These Unsatisfactory group homes felt institutionalized and were not home-like. The furniture was ugly, old and uncomfortable. The FCO often found these group homes kept locks on their refrigerators and cupboards, no doors on

**In one Unsatisfactory facility the mattresses were on the floor, there were no curtains on the windows, and there were only four chairs at the dining table although six youth lived in the facility.**



## RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE GROUP HOME PROGRAMS

"California has been attempting to reform its group home services since 1998. It is time to move to action." (March 2006, "Framework for a New System of Residentially-Based Services in California.)

### **Compile Data on Youth Satisfaction, "Youth-Voice," and Youth Perspective As Part of the Oversight Process:**

The CDSS should require and track indicators such as youth and family satisfaction feedback. When visiting group homes the FCO always interviews all the youth who are present in the home at the time of the visit. It has been the experience of the FCO that the youth are incredibly perceptive and articulate regarding the quality of the group home program. They are able to acknowledge when a program is helping them deal with their various issues and also when a program is not.

The importance of the youth perspective on the quality of the group home program was also addressed in "Toward Better Accountability of Group Homes" a 2010 University of California Berkeley report, *"The State's data system should capture simple data about satisfaction with care as a step towards quality improvement. Stakeholders-including all the group home providers interviewed-emphasized the importance and value of youths' opinions of their own group homes. Youth, according to the providers and social workers interviewed for this report, can honestly and fairly evaluate whether or not the group home is a place that makes them feel safe and helps them to make progress in coping with their issues."* (Toward Better Accountability of Group Homes. 2010, p. 25)

In the 2010 draft report "A Framework for Integration of Congregate Care Reform Efforts in California" one of the outcomes and principles is that California should *"Drive a system wide commitment to youth and family voice and choice."* (2010 Draft report, "A Framework for Integration of Congregate Care Reform Efforts in California p. 2-4)

### **Create a Process to Improve Group Home Licensing and Program Quality Assessment**

The quality of the group home program and the quality of the daily interactions between the group home staff and the child/youth greatly impact the psychological health of the child/youth. The CDSS should create an integrated Quality Assurance oversight system that evaluates the group home programs on specific outcome measures and standards (educational, health, permanency rates, clinical outcomes, youth feedback etc.). A coordinated licensing and rates process should be created that evaluates and approves the quality of group home program statements, health and safety issues, and the appropriate rates.

Currently, the licensing and oversight of group homes is fragmented within CDSS between CCL and CDSS' Children and Family Services Division, the Foster Care Audits and Rates Branch (FCARB). CCL approves the license, the program, and the facility in terms of health and safety. The FCARB approves the rate based on a complex point system. These organizations do not coordinate their approval processes and do not have a process to evaluate the quality of the program. Thus a coordinated licensing and rates process should be created that includes an evaluation of the quality of group home programs based on outcomes, as well as feedback from residents and professionals.

### **Group Home Accreditation**

The CDSS should recommend that all group homes be accredited or to give placement preference to accredited programs. Accreditation provides an independent process that accesses the quality of group homes and provides knowledgeable feedback on methods of program improvement. There are several nationally recognized organizations that accredit group homes. The accreditation process evaluates each group home in terms of established criteria including, administration, quality of staff, therapeutic program and case reviews. These objective outside evaluators make an independent assessment of the quality of the group home program and services.

In the FCO Group Home Report Card, of the 42 group homes that were evaluated, all those that were evaluated as Good were accredited by California Alliance of Children and Family Services.



The importance of accreditation to improve the quality of group home programs was emphasized in the 2001 Senate Bill (SB 933) report which stated, *“Establish a statewide independent accreditation process to establish standards for practice for group care providers...Establish group home indicators of quality.... The state should determine the feasibility of linking accreditation to eligibility for funding and the licensing function.... Establish a joint accreditation board to conduct program reviews of group homes to determine if standard for practices are being met.”* (SB 933 Report, 2001 p.22 - 23)

#### **Mandate Employment Requirements for Group Home Staff**

The CDSS should require a minimum age of 21 years and educational requirements of 12 units of college credit for group home staff. When the FCO visited group homes we often met group home staff who were nearly the same age as the foster youth they were paid to supervise. These young group home employees did not have the maturity, skills, nor the education to provide the level of support the youthful residents required.

The UC Berkeley report, also discussed the employment standards for group home staff: *“...the minimum qualifications for being a staff member in a group home are fairly low. Childcare facilities, which employ a similar licensing system, require workers to have some training in childcare. The minimum requirements could be bolstered to require more than just 24-hours of training for all employees.”* (Toward Better Accountability of Group Homes, p. 32)

#### **Mandate Group Home Staff Training**

The CDSS should create and require a standardized group home training that all group home staff must complete. During visits to group homes, the FCO has often observed group home staff being inappropriate and disrespectful. In fact, when interviewed, group home staff were often unable to articulate the group home’s program elements and values. It is essential that group home staff have an understanding of psychological dynamics, child and youth development, and motivational and behavioral interventions. *“The skills and dedication of the childcare and social work staff are the most important factors in determining the quality of any group home program and its success in meeting the needs of the children.”* (SB 933, 2002, Status Report)

It was recommended that *“Community Colleges develop classes that address the specific needs of children in out-of-home placement and the special issues of which providers need to be aware ...”* (SB 933, 2001 Report,)

Agencies and researchers nationwide have addressed the need for more highly trained group home staff. One solution would be to provide group home staff the opportunity to become ‘certified’. Maryland is the first state to mandate practitioner certification in residential care. The North American Certification Project certification requires competencies in five domains: *“(1) Professionalism (2) Cultural and human diversity (3) Applied human development (4) Relationship and communication and (5) Developmental practice methods. The skills and dedication of the childcare and social work staff are the most important factors in determining the quality of any group home program and its success in meeting the needs of the children.”* (Annie E. Casey Foundation (2003) and Curry, D., & Cardina, H.J (2003) and Curry, D. & Eckles, F. (2009) )

#### **Develop an Alternative Funding Model**

In the visits to a wide range of group home from RCL 10 - 14, the FCO observed that the specific RCL rates did not determine the quality of the program. One group home that was receiving the RCL 10 rate of \$6,995.00 per month per child, provided a wide range of services and creative opportunities that far exceeded another group home that was receiving an RCL 14 rate of \$9,146.00 per month per child.

The RAND Corporation provided an in-depth analysis of the current funding model and recommendations for the group home rate system to be child centered and outcome driven. (SB933, 2002)

#### **Reduce Use of Restraints**

The CDSS should develop an initiative to reduce the use of restraints and seclusion in residential programs. Foster youth have reported the negative repercussions of restraints, both physically and psychologically. One administrator of a boys group home reported to the FCO that they had previously had a high number



of incidents of restraints being used to deal with aggressive behaviors and conflicts. However, they eventually realized the negative impact of restraints on both youth and staff, and have since provided their staff with an extensive “Trauma Informed” training that taught the staff how to de-escalate conflicts and to understand that the youth’s behavior is often impacted by previous trauma. This training stressed the importance of establishing meaningful relationship with the youth.

*“Children continue to receive serious physical injuries and even die, and experience trauma and re-traumatization, due to restraint/seclusion use. Reducing restraint/seclusion use does much more than decrease the number of episodes - it creates better, quantifiable outcomes for youth, families, staff and organizations.” (LeBel, 2009 & LeBel & Goldstein,, 2005)*

Several states and providers have initiatives to reduce the use of restraints and seclusion in residential programs, including New York, Ohio and Massachusetts. In Ohio, a statewide effort created a learning community focused on reducing restraint and seclusion.\*(Coate-Ortiz, 2005) In Massachusetts, the commissioners of child-serving agencies (i.e. mental health, child welfare, juvenile justice, public schools and early education) initiated a statewide effort to prevent restraint/seclusion use across agencies and levels of care. \* (Garinger, 2009) New York state has developed new regulations to promote restraint and seclusion reduction.

A curriculum to reduce the use of seclusion and restraints was developed by The Substance Abuse and Mental Services Administration (SAMSA, 2003). This curriculum focuses on identifying risk factors for conflict and violence BEFORE THEY OCCUR. It also provides early intervention strategies to immediately respond to conflict before it escalates, so using restraints and seclusion can be prevented (Garinger, G.,2009)

#### **CCL Should Maintain a Website That Provides Information About the Quality of the Group Home Program**

CCL should maintain a website that provides information about quality assessment of the group homes and any substantiated complaints or adverse actions. The placing agencies and public need to have access to information regarding the quality of the group home programs, in order to make appropriate placement decisions that meet the needs of the foster children and youth.

#### **Implement the Residentially Based Services (RBS) Reform Project Statewide**

Implement the Residentially Based Services (RBS) Reform Project statewide. The FCO has been very involved with the RBS Reform Project. This project was established by AB 1453 (Soto, Chapter 466, Statutes of 2007) in response to growing frustration with the shortcomings of the existing foster care group home system. The RBS pilots have created programs that reduce the length of time in group care and improve permanency outcomes for youth by combining short-term, intensive, residential treatment interventions with community-based services aimed at reconnecting foster children to their families and communities.

The FCO staff participated in the interviews of the youth and families in the various RBS Pilots. Youth and families reported that they felt that the RBS program was unique because professionals, family members and youth met together to develop goals for the youth and the family and all the perspectives were heard and respected. A grandmother reported that she experienced the RBS professionals as being extremely helpful, as opposed to previous experiences with child welfare professionals who seemed to focus only on the family’s problems and did not offer any real help.

#### **Require Child Focused Evidence Based Assessment of Foster Children and Youth**

The CDSS should require child-focused-evidence-based assessment of every child/youth before placement in a group home to ensure that our foster children and youth receive appropriate care and services. (Ex: the Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths tool).



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## EVALUATION: "THE FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN GROUP HOME REPORT CARD" DATA CRITERIA

Data for the "The Foster Care Ombudsman Group Home Report Card" was partially collected through the following interview questionnaires, and program observation criteria.

### PROGRAM CRITERIA EVALUATION

#### LEADERSHIP:

##### The Director:

CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM DESIGN	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM VALUES	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM PURPOSE	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED A PROCESS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT	A	B	C	D	F
HAD PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	A	B	C	D	F
HAD THERAPEUTIC AND/OR ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	A	B	C	D	F
VALUED YOUTH VOICE AND FEEDBACK	A	B	C	D	F

#### YOUTH RATING OF GROUP HOME

##### Youth:

CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM DESIGN	A	B	C	D	F
UNDERSTOOD WHY THEY WERE PLACED IN THIS GROUP HOME	A	B	C	D	F
FELT THAT THEIR YOUTH VOICE WAS VALUED	A	B	C	D	F
FELT PROGRAM WAS HELPFUL	A	B	C	D	F
ARE ABLE TO HAVE FAMILY AND FRIENDS VISIT	A	B	C	D	F
RECEIVES HOMEWORK ASSISTANCE AND ENCOURAGEMENT FROM STAFF?	A	B	C	D	F
LIKED THE FOOD?	A	B	C	D	F
LIKED THE ACTIVITIES THAT THE GROUP HOME FACILITATES?	A	B	C	D	F
PARTICIPATED IN SCHOOL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	A	B	C	D	F
WERE ABLE TO WORK PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEER IN THE COMMUNITY?	A	B	C	D	F
APPRECIATED THE QUALITY OF THERAPEUTIC SERVICES	A	B	C	D	F
WERE ABLE TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS	A	B	C	D	F
WERE ABLE TO GO TO THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE	A	B	C	D	F
OVERALL RATING OF THIS GROUP HOME	A	B	C	D	F

#### RATING OF STAFF

##### The Staff:

CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM DESIGN	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED THE PROGRAM VALUES	A	B	C	D	F
HAD PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE	A	B	C	D	F
HAD THERAPEUTIC AND/OR ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS	A	B	C	D	F
CLEARLY ARTICULATED PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN AND FAMILIES	A	B	C	D	F
WERE PROVIDED WITH STAFF TRAINING	A	B	C	D	F
VALUED YOUTH VOICE AND FEEDBACK	A	B	C	D	F

##### Facility Rating

GROUP HOME IS "HOME-LIKE"	A	B	C	D	F
DINNING & LIVING ROOM FURNITURE IS ATTRACTIVE AND IN GOOD REPAIR	A	B	C	D	F
THE YOUTH'S ROOM DECORATED AND FURNISHED NICELY	A	B	C	D	F



QUALITY, QUANTITY AND AGE APPROPRIATENESS OF BOOKS, PUZZLES, GAMES, AND SPORTS EQUIPMENT	A	B	C	D	F
COMPUTERS AVAILABLE WITH INTERNET ACCESS	A	B	C	D	F
ATTRACTIVENESS OF OUTDOOR AREA	A	B	C	D	F
OUTDOOR AREA ACCESSABLE AND UTILIZED BY YOUTH	A	B	C	D	F
BATHROOMS ARE CLEAN AND ADEQUATE	A	B	C	D	F
THE KITCHEN IS CLEAN AND THE FOOD SUPPLY ADEQUATE	A	B	C	D	F

**PROGRAM CRITERIA**

IS THE PROGRAM EDUCATIONALLY FOCUSED	A	B	C	D	F
IS THE MODEL OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT/DISCIPLINE UNDERSTOOD AND CONSISTENT	A	B	C	D	F
DO STAFF USE RESTRAINTS	A	B	C	D	F
DO STAFF CONDUCT UNWARRENTEED SEARCHES	A	B	C	D	F
IS ON-GOING STAFF TRAINING REQUIRED	A	B	C	D	F
DOES THE GROUP HOME FACILITATE ACTIVITIES & OUTINGS	A	B	C	D	F
DO YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN SCHOOL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES	A	B	C	D	F
ARE YOUTH ABLE TO WORK PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEER IN THE COMMUNITY	A	B	C	D	F
ARE QUALITY MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE PROVIDED TO YOUTH	A	B	C	D	F
ARE YOUTH ABLE TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS	A	B	C	D	F
ARE YOUTH ABLE TO HAVE FRIENDS AND FAMILY VISIT AT THE GROUP HOME	A	B	C	D	F
IS THE GROUP HOME PROGRAM ACCREDITATED	A	B	C	D	F

**GROUP HOME DIRECTOR INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. WHAT IS YOUR GROUP HOME PROGRAM DESIGN?
2. WHAT ARE THE GROUP HOME'S PROGRAM VALUES?
3. WHAT IS THE SPECIFIC PROGRAM PURPOSE? DOES YOUR GROUP HOME FOCUS ON A SPECIFIC POPULATION OF YOUTH?
4. WHAT IS YOUR PROCESS FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT?
5. WHAT IS YOUR PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE?
6. WHAT ARE YOUR THERAPEUTIC AND/OR ACADEMIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS?
7. HOW DOES YOUR PROGRAM WORK WITH THE FAMILIES OF THE CHILDREN? OR WORK TO FIND FAMILIES?
8. HOW DO YOU OBTAIN FEEDBACK FROM THE YOUTH REGARDING YOUR GROUP HOME PROGRAM AND STAFF PERFORMANCE?
9. IS YOUR GROUP HOME ACCREDITATED? IF SO, HOW IS THAT PROCESS HELPFUL?
10. WHAT CRITERIA DO YOU USE IN HIRING STAFF?
11. HOW DO YOU HANDLE COMPLAINTS?



## YOUTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN LIVING IN THE GROUP HOME?
2. WHAT COUNTY ARE YOU FROM? WHY WERE YOU PLACED IN THIS PARTICULAR GROUP HOME?
3. HAVE YOU EVER LIVED IN OTHER GROUP HOMES
4. IF SO, HOW DOES THIS COMPARE WITH THE OTHER GROUP HOMES?
5. WHERE DO YOU GO TO SCHOOL? HOW ARE YOU DOING IN SCHOOL?
6. DOES THE STAFF HELP YOU WITH HOMEWORK AND ENCOURAGE YOUR ACADEMIC PROGRESS? WHERE DO YOU STUDY?
7. WHAT IS YOUR DAILY SCHEDULE LIKE HERE?
8. HOW IS THE FOOD?
9. WHO COOKS?
10. WHAT IS THE FACILITY'S PROGRAM?
11. DO YOU HAVE GROUP MEETINGS?
12. WHAT MODEL OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT/DISCIPLINE DOES THE FACILITY USE? IF LEVEL SYSTEM, HOW IS IT STRUCTURED?
13. DO STAFF USE RESTRAINTS?
14. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SINCE BEING HERE?
15. HAS THE PROGRAM BEEN HELPFUL?
16. WHAT ACTIVITIES DOES THE GROUP HOME FACILITATE?
17. WHAT SCHOOL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVIES HAVE YOU PARTICIPATED IN?
18. ARE YOU ABLE TO WORK PART-TIME OR DO VOLUNTEER WORK IN THE COMMUNITY?
19. DO YOU TALK WITH A THERAPIST?
20. DOES THIS GROUP HOME PROVIDE DRUG/ALCOHOL TREATMENT SERVCICES?
21. ARE YOU ABLE TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS?
22. ARE YOU ABLE TO VISIT WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY?
23. ARE YOU ABLE TO GO TO THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE? WHO TAKES YOU?
24. WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT THIS GROUP HOME?
25. WHAT DO YOU NOT LIKE ABOUT THIS GROUP HOME?



26. DO YOU HAVE ANY ISSUES WITH GROUP HOME STAFF? WHAT DO YOUTH DO IF THEY HAVE AN ISSUE WITH STAFF OR THE GROUP HOME?
27. DOES THIS GROUP HOME ASK FOR YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE QUALITY OF THE PROGRAM? AND FOR YOUR FEEDBACK ON STAFF PERFORMANCE?

### STAFF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU WORKED AT THIS GROUP HOME?
2. HAVE YOU EVER WORKED IN ANOTHER GROUP HOME?  
  
IF SO HOW DOES THIS COMPARE HOME WITH THE OTHER GROUP HOMES?
3. HOW HAS YOUR ACADEMIC AND PREVIOUS PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE QUALIFIED YOU FOR YOUR JOB AT THIS GROUP HOME?
4. HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE STAFF MEETINGS?
5. HOW OFTEN DO YOU HAVE THERAPEUTIC REVIEW MEETINGS?
6. WHERE DO THE YOUTH GO TO SCHOOL?
7. DOES THE STAFF HELP WITH HOMEWORK?
8. WHAT IS THE DAILY SCHEDULE LIKE HERE?
9. HOW IS THE FOOD?
10. WHO COOKS?
11. WHAT IS THE GROUP HOME'S PROGRAM AND VALUES?
12. WHAT MODEL OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT/DISCIPLINE DOES THE GROUP HOME USE?
13. IF LEVEL SYSTEM HOW IS IT STRUCTURED?
14. DO STAFF USE RESTRAINTS?
15. WHAT STAFF TRAINING HAVE YOU RECEIVED HERE?
16. WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED SINCE BEING HERE?
17. WHAT ACTIVITIES DOES THE GROUP HOME FACILITATE?
18. WHAT SCHOOL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVIES DO YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN?
19. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO WORK PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEER IN THE COMMUNITY?
20. WHAT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE DO YOUTH RECEIVE?
21. WHAT DRUG/ALCOHOL TREATMENT SERVCICES DO YOUTH RECEIVE?
22. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS?



23. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO HAVE FRIENDS AND FAMILY VISIT YOU HERE?
24. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO GO TO THE CHURCH OF YOUR CHOICE? WHO TAKES THEM?
25. WHAT DO YOU ENJOY THE MOST ABOUT WORKING AT THIS GROUP HOME?
26. HOW COULD IT BE IMPROVED?

### FACILITY

1. IS THE GROUP HOME "HOME-LIKE"?
2. IS THE FACILITY WARM AND WELCOMING OR COLD, DEPRESSING OR INSTITUTIONAL?
3. DOES THIS FEEL LIKE A HOME YOU WOULD WANT A FAMILY MEMBER LIVING IN?
4. IS THE DINING & LIVING ROOM FURNITURE ATTRACTIVE AND IN GOOD REPAIR?
5. ARE THE YOUTH'S ROOM DECORATED AND FURNISHED NICELY?
6. OBSERVE WHAT THE YOUTH ARE DOING DURING THE VISIT (ACTIVITIES, WATCHING TV, ETC.) ARE THERE SUFFICIENT, AGE APPROPRIATE, AND IN GOOD CONDITION, BOOKS, PUZZLES, GAMES, AND SPORTS EQUIPMENT?
7. ARE THERE COMPUTERS WITH INTERNET ACCESS?
8. IS THE OUTDOOR AREA THAT IS ATTRACTIVE, ACCESSABLE AND UTILIZED BY YOUTH WITH AGE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES AVAILABLE?
9. ARE THE BATHROOMS CLEAN AND ADEQUATE?
10. IS THE KITCHEN CLEAN? FOOD SUPPLY ADEQUATE?
11. ARE THERE PHONES AVAILABLE FOR CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS?

### PROGRAM REVIEW

- REVIEW THE RESIDENT ORIENTATION BOOK/HANDBOOK
- REVIEW THE PROGRAM STATEMENT

1. WHAT IS THE FACILITY'S PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY?
2. WHAT ARE THE AGES OF THE YOUTH?
3. ARE THE YOUTH DEPENDENTS (WI&C 300) OR DELINQUENTS (WI&C 600)?
4. IS THE PROGRAM EDUCATIONALLY FOCUSED?
5. DOES THE STAFF HELP WITH HOMEWORK?
6. WHAT MODEL OF BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT/DISCIPLINE DOES THE FACILITY USE?
7. IF LEVEL SYSTEM, HOW IS IT STRUCTURED?
8. DO STAFF USE RESTRAINTS?



9. DO THE STAFF USE SEARCHES?
10. WHAT STAFF TRAINING IS REQUIRED?
11. WHAT ACTIVITIES AND OUTINGS DOES THE GROUP HOME FACILITATE?
12. WHAT SCHOOL EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVIES DO YOUTH PARTICIPATE IN?
13. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO WORK PART-TIME OR VOLUNTEER IN THE COMMUNITY?
14. WHAT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE DO YOUTH RECEIVE?
15. DOES THE PROGRAM PROVIDE FAMILY-FINDING AND FAMILY THERAPY?
16. WHAT DRUG/ALCOHOL TREATMENT SERVCICES DO YOUTH RECEIVE?
17. ARE YOUTH ABLE TO MAKE CONFIDENTIAL PHONE CALLS?
18. ARE FRIENDS AND FAMILY ABLE TO VISIT YOUTH AT THE GROUP HOME?
19. IS THE GROUP HOME PROGRAM ACCREDIATED?



# APPENDIX A

## PURPOSE OF THE OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

The FCO shall be established as an autonomous entity within the CDSS “for the purpose of providing children who are placed in foster care, either voluntarily or pursuant to Section 300 and Sections 600 and following, with a means to resolve issues related to their care, placement, or services.” [Welfare and Institutions Code (W&I) section 16161]

The FCO shall do the following:

- ▶ Disseminate information on the rights of children and youth in foster care and the services provided by the Ombudsman Office.
- ▶ Maintain a statewide toll-free Foster Care Help-Line (1-877-846-1602).
- ▶ Investigate and attempt to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care, related to their care, placement, or services.
- ▶ Document the number, source, origin, location, and nature of complaints.
- ▶ Compile and make available to the Legislature all data collected over the course of the year including, but not limited to, the number of contacts to the toll-free telephone number, the number of complaints made, including the type and source of those complaints, the number of investigations performed by the Ombudsman Office, the trends and issues that arose in the course of investigating complaints, the number of referrals made, and the number of pending complaints.
- ▶ Present compiled data, on an annual basis, at appropriate child welfare conferences, forums, and other events, as determined by CDSS, that may include presentations to, but are not limited to, representatives of the Legislature, the County Welfare Directors Association (CWDA), child welfare organizations, children’s advocacy groups, consumer and service provider organizations, and other interested parties. It is the intent of the Legislature that representatives of the organizations consider this data in the development of any recommendations offered toward improving the child welfare system.
- ▶ Post the compiled data so that it is available to the public on the existing FCO website.
- ▶ Have access to any record of a state or local agency that is necessary to carry out his or her responsibilities, and may meet or communicate with any foster child in the child’s placement or elsewhere.
- ▶ Act as a fact finder to provide families, citizens, and other stakeholders with an avenue for independent review of concerns related to the care, placement and services provided to children and youth in California foster care.



# APPENDIX B

## AUTHORITY AND LIMITATIONS OF THE OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

The authority of the FCO includes:

- ▶ The authority to meet or communicate with any foster child in his or her placement or elsewhere.
- ▶ The authority to access any record of a state or local agency necessary to carry out its responsibilities.
- ▶ The authority to investigate any and all complaints received by the Ombudsman Office.
- ▶ The authority to recommend case reassessments.
- ▶ The authority to investigate the acts of state and local administrative agencies and to recommend appropriate changes to safe-guard children's rights.
- ▶ The authority to report all findings to CDSS and the California Legislature.

The FCO is not authorized to:

- ▶ Challenge court decisions.
- ▶ Change case plans.
- ▶ Pursue local administrative personnel actions.
- ▶ Pursue discrimination complaints.



# APPENDIX C

## INQUIRY AND COMPLAINT PROCESS

The FCO statute (W&IC sections 16160-16167) states that the FCO has the discretion to decide whether to investigate a complaint or refer complaints to another agency for investigation. It also states that the FCO may do the following:

- ▶ Conduct whatever investigation it deems necessary.
- ▶ Attempt to resolve the complaint informally.
- ▶ Submit a written plan to the relevant state or county agency recommending a course of action to resolve the complaint. When the FCO makes a written recommendation, the state or county agency shall submit a written response to the FCO within 30 business days.

The FCO has established the following protocols for handling complaints:

- ▶ Document all contacts in the FCO Call-Tracking database.
- ▶ Prioritize complaints and decide whether to dismiss, resolve informally, refer to another agency for resolution, or initiate a formal investigation.
- ▶ If the complaint involves an allegation of abuse, a Suspected Child Abuse Report (SS 8572) is submitted to the county Child Protective Services (CPS) and if applicable a referral is submitted to CDSS Community Care Licensing (CCL).
- ▶ If the FCO refers a complaint to a county ombudsman for investigation, the FCO submits a written referral to the county ombudsman with the recommendation to investigate the matter and respond back to the FCO within 30 days. The FCO will follow-up with the complainant to verify resolution and determine whether additional investigative action will be taken.

If a formal investigation is initiated, the FCO will usually notify the county point-of-contact or county ombudsman regarding its investigation; however, on a case-by-case basis, the FCO may not send a notice. Examples where a notice may not be sent include, but are not limited to, cases where timely resolution is required, and/or the complainant requests anonymity or fears retaliation.

Each contact to the FCO provides an opportunity to take action, educate, provide resources and identify recurring problems in California's child welfare system. In these instances, the FCO conducts fact-finding, data collection, consultation and interviews to resolve complaints. Cases are not closed until after the complainant's concerns have been addressed and/or resolved.



# APPENDIX D

## OFFICE OF THE FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN STATUTE (CALIFORNIA WELFARE AND INSTITUTIONS CODE SECTION 16160-16167)

16160. The Legislature finds and declares that the people of California have benefited from the establishment of a long-term care ombudsperson pursuant to Section 9710 of the Welfare and Institutions Code and a child care ombudsperson program pursuant to Section 1596.872a of the Health and Safety Code. It is the intent of the Legislature to provide similar protections for foster children by establishing a foster care ombudsperson program within the State Department of Social Services.

16161. The Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson shall be established as an autonomous entity within the department for the purpose of providing children who are placed in foster care, either voluntarily or pursuant to Section 300 and Sections 600 and following, with a means to resolve issues related to their care, placement, or services.

16162. The director, in consultation with a committee of interested individuals, shall appoint an ombudsperson qualified by training and experience to perform the duties of the office for a term of four years. The director may reappoint the ombudsperson for consecutive terms. The director shall select the committee members, the majority of whom shall be representatives of children's advocacy organizations and current or former foster youth.

16163. The department shall hire the necessary personnel to perform the functions of the office. Priority shall be given to former foster youth in hiring decisions.

16164. (a) The Office of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson shall do all of the following:

(1) Disseminate information on the rights of children and youth in foster care and the services provided by the office. The rights of children and youths in foster care are listed in Section 16001.9. The information shall include notification that conversations with the office may not be confidential.

(2) Investigate and attempt to resolve complaints made by or on behalf of children placed in foster care, related to their care, placement, or services.

(3) Decide, in its discretion, whether to investigate a complaint, or refer complaints to another agency for investigation.

(4) Upon rendering a decision to investigate a complaint from a complainant, notify the complainant of the intention to investigate. If the office declines to investigate a complaint or continue an investigation, the office shall notify the complainant of the reason for the action of the office.

(5) Update the complainant on the progress of the investigation and notify the complainant of the final outcome.

(6) Document the number, source, origin, location, and nature of complaints.

(7) (A) Compile and make available to the Legislature all data collected over the course of the year including, but not limited to, the number of contacts to the toll-free telephone number, the number of complaints made, including the type and source of those complaints, the number of investigations performed by the office, the trends and issues that arose in the course of investigating complaints, the number of referrals made, and the number of pending complaints.



(B) Present this compiled data, on an annual basis, at appropriate child welfare conferences, forums, and other events, as determined by the department, that may include presentations to, but are not limited to, representatives of the Legislature, the County Welfare Directors Association, child welfare organizations, children's advocacy groups, consumer and service provider organizations, and other interested parties.

(C) It is the intent of the Legislature that representatives of the organizations described in subparagraph (B) consider this data in the development of any recommendations offered toward improving the child welfare system.

(D) The compiled data shall be posted so that it is available to the public on the existing Website of the State Foster Care Ombudsperson.

(8) Have access to any record of a state or local agency that is necessary to carry out his or her responsibilities, and may meet or communicate with any foster child in his or her placement or elsewhere.

(b) The office may establish, in consultation with a committee of interested individuals, regional or local foster care ombudsperson offices for the purposes of expediting investigations and resolving complaints, subject to appropriations in the annual Budget Act.

(c) (1) The office, in consultation with the California Welfare Directors Association, Chief Probation Officers of California, foster youth advocate and support groups, groups representing children, families, foster parents, children's facilities, and other interested parties, shall develop, no later than July 1, 2002, standardized information explaining the rights specified in Section 16001.9. The information shall be developed in an age-appropriate manner, and shall reflect any relevant licensing requirements with respect to foster care providers' responsibilities to adequately supervise children in care.

(2) The office, counties, foster care providers, and others may use the information developed in paragraph (1) in carrying out their responsibilities to inform foster children and youth of their rights pursuant to Section 1530.91 of the Health and Safety Code, Sections 27 and 16501.1, and this section.

16165. In his or her efforts to resolve complaints related to foster care, the ombudsperson may do all of the following:

Conduct whatever investigation he or she deems necessary.

Attempt to resolve the complaint informally.

(c) Submit a written plan to the relevant state or county agency recommending a course of action to resolve the complaint. If the ombudsperson makes a written recommendation, the state or county agency shall submit a written response to the ombudsperson within 30 business days.

16167. (a) A toll-free number shall be established for the office. (b) Social workers shall provide foster children with the toll-free number for the office and verbal or written information regarding the existence and purpose of the office.



# APPENDIX E

## CALIFORNIA RIGHTS OF CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN FOSTER CARE

Welfare and Institutions Code section 16001.9:

(a) It is the policy of the state that all children in foster care shall have the following rights:

(1) To live in a safe, healthy, and comfortable home where he or she is treated with respect.

(2) To be free from physical, sexual, emotional, or other abuse, or corporal punishment.

(3) To receive adequate and healthy food, adequate clothing, and, for youth in group homes, an allowance.

(4) To receive medical, dental, vision, and mental health services.

(5) To be free of the administration of medication or chemical substances, unless authorized by a physician.

(6) To contact family members, unless prohibited by court order, and social workers, attorneys, foster youth advocates and supporters, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA), and probation officers.

(7) To visit and contact brothers and sisters, unless prohibited by court order.

(8) To contact the Community Care Licensing Division of the State Department of Social Services or the State Foster Care Ombudsperson regarding violations of rights, to speak to representatives of these offices confidentially, and to be free from threats or punishment for making complaints.

(9) To make and receive confidential telephone calls and send and receive unopened mail, unless prohibited by court order.

(10) To attend religious services and activities of his or her choice.

(11) To maintain an emancipation bank account and manage personal income, consistent with the child's age and developmental level, unless prohibited by the case plan.

(12) To not be locked in any room, building, or facility premises, unless placed in a community treatment facility.

(13) To attend school and participate in extracurricular, cultural, and personal enrichment activities, consistent with the child's age and developmental level.

(14) To work and develop job skills at an age-appropriate level, consistent with state law.

(15) To have social contacts with people outside of the foster care system, such as teachers, church members, mentors, and friends.

(16) To attend Independent Living Program classes and activities if he or she meets age requirements.

(17) To attend court hearings and speak to the judge.

(18) To have storage space for private use.

(19) To be involved in the development of his or her own case plan and plan for permanent placement.



(20) To review his or her own case plan and plan for permanent placement if he or she is 12 years of age or older and in a permanent placement, and to receive information about his or her out-of-home placement and case plan, including being told of changes to the plan.

(21) To be free from unreasonable searches of personal belongings.

(22) To confidentiality of all juvenile court records consistent with existing law.

(23) To have fair and equal access to all available services, placement, care, treatment, and benefits, and to not be subjected to discrimination or harassment on the basis of actual or perceived race, ethnic group identification, ancestry, national origin, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, mental or physical disability, or HIV status.

(24) At 16 years of age or older, to have access to existing information regarding the educational options available, including, but not limited to, the coursework necessary for vocational and postsecondary educational programs, and information regarding financial aid for postsecondary education.

(b) Nothing in this section shall be interpreted to require a foster care provider to take any action that would impair the health and safety of children in out-of-home placement.

(c) The State Department of Social Services and each county welfare department are encouraged to work with the Student Aid Commission, the University of California, the California State University, and the California Community Colleges to receive information pursuant to paragraph (23) of subdivision (a).



# APPENDIX F

## COMPLAINT AND INFORMATIONAL ISSUE DEFINITIONS

**Adoption:** Any call relating to a potential, completed or failed adoption.

**Attorney:** Any call regarding the procedures, practices or actions of individual attorneys including access to the attorney by the birth parents and concerns from individuals who believe an attorney is not acting in the best interests of a child or youth.

**Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA):** Any call regarding a youth's desire to have a CASA or another person's desire to find a CASA for a child or youth.

**Child Welfare Practices:** Any call regarding the policies, procedures, practices or individual actions or behavior of county social service department employees including social workers.

**Court:** Any call regarding procedures, practices or actions of the court, including the judge.

**CPS Reports (Child Protective Services):** Any call relating to a report of known or suspected child abuse or neglect of a child or youth who is not in foster care.

**Criminal Background Exemption:** Any call that is child specific relating to a criminal background exemption of a current or prospective (including relative) caregiver.

**CWS Background Checks:** Any call requesting the criminal or child abuse history of a person.

**Discrimination:** Any call that is not from a youth or on behalf of a child or youth relating to discrimination on the basis of actual or perceived race, ethnic group, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identification, mental or physical disability, HIV status.

**Emancipation:** Any call regarding emancipation including county Transitional Independent Living Plans (TILP), future housing, referral for employment or assistance for emancipating or already emancipated youth.

**Family finding:** Any call from a foster child or youth, former foster youth, or relatives of a youth or former foster child or youth, requesting information that will assist in the re-establishment of contact with family members.

**Foster/Kin Care Services:** Any call from foster parents or relative caregivers regarding services for foster children in their care.

**Higher education:** Any call from a foster youth or former foster youth or other stakeholder requesting information or assistance regarding college or other post-high school educational and career opportunities.

**Homelessness:** Any call regarding an emancipated youth's need for housing, potential homelessness, etc.

**ICPC: (Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children):** Any call regarding placements outside California or from another state into California.

**ICWA: (Indian Child Welfare Act)** Any call relating to the placement of a foster child or youth that is affiliated with an Indian tribe.



**ILP (Independent Living Program):** Any call relating to the policies, procedures or practices of a county ILP including requests for referrals to county ILP coordinators or contractors.

**Immigration:** Any call regarding lack of citizenship papers, green cards, Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), non-resident alien status, deportation, etc.

**Licensing:** Any call relating to a Community Care Licensing (CCL) or county licensing situation or concern.

**Medical/Dental:** Any call regarding the physical or dental health of a foster child or youth, Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT).

**Medi-Cal Enrollment/Disenrollment:** Any call regarding Medi-Cal enrollment, disenrollment, and/or eligibility of a foster child or youth.

**Mental Health:** Any call regarding the mental health of foster children and youth, inter-county coordination issues, the need for counseling services, and Therapeutic Behavioral Services (TBS), and eligibility for Medi-Cal.

**Non-foster Care:** Any call not relating to foster care or child welfare services, and/or is not within the scope of the Ombudsman Office. Many of these are calls about child support and family disputes.

**Out-of-County Medi-Cal:** Any call regarding the transfer of a foster child or youth's Medi-Cal from one county to another due to the child's jurisdiction is in one county but the child resides in another county.

**Payments:** Any call regarding a payment or rates issue for any foster child or youth such as: state/federal eligibility for Aid to Families with Dependent Children-Foster Care (AFDC-FC), clothing allowances, non-receipt of payment for a Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (KinGAP) placement, Specialized Care Increment, etc. Also includes calls about the rate paid for foster family homes, group homes or foster family agencies.

**Personal Rights Violations:** Any call regarding any of the rights listed on pages 23 or 24 of this report.

**Placement:** Any call regarding a change in placement by child welfare or probation of a child or youth into or from or between a temporary, permanent, foster/adopt, group home or foster family agency. This includes any call from a relative who wants a child's or youth's placement to be changed but who is not requesting that the child be placed with him/her.

**Presentation:** Any request for an Ombudsman consultant to present information on the rights of foster children and youth and on the duties of the Ombudsman Office.

**Probation Practices:** Any call regarding the policies, procedures, practices or individual actions or behavior of county probation department employees including probation officers.

**Publication:** Any request for publications including foster care rights posters, brochures, and Resource Directories.

**Relative Placements:** Any call from a relative regarding placement of a related child or youth with the relative, including adoption, guardianship and KinGAP, and calls regarding county approval of the relative's home for placement.

**Removal:** Any call relating to the removal of a child or youth from the home of the birth family.

**Research:** Any call requesting statistical and other information necessary for a research project or paper.

**Reunification:** Any call concerning reunification of a foster child or youth with the birth family.



**Runaway:** Any call regarding a foster youth under 18 who has run away or is otherwise missing from his/her placement.

**Visitation:** Any call regarding visitation by an individual to a child or youth in a foster care placement.

**Volunteering:** Any call requesting information regarding volunteer opportunities in Child Welfare Services.



# APPENDIX G

## CALIFORNIA CHILD WELFARE/FOSTER CARE LEGISLATION 2010/2011

### **AB 12 CALIFORNIA FOSTERING CONNECTIONS TO SUCCESS ACT (CHAPTER 559, STATUTES OF 2010)**

1. Requires the Department of Social Services to exercise its option under federal law to enter into kinship guardianship assistance agreements with relative guardians of children who exit foster care, replacing California's existing state and county-funded Kinship Guardianship Assistance Program (Kin-GAP) with a new federally subsidized Kin-GAP program.

2. Extends foster care, Kin-GAP, and the Adoptions Assistance Program (AAP) services to age 20 for youth completing secondary education or an equivalent credential, enrolled in a postsecondary or vocational institution, participating in a program designed to promote or remove barriers to employment, employed at least 80 hours per month, or incapable of doing one of the above due to a documented medical condition.

### **AB 743 FOSTER CARE: SIBLING PLACEMENT (CHAPTER 560, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Requires California to place siblings together when they have been removed from their parents or guardians unless that placement is contrary to their safety or well-being pursuant to the federal Fostering Connections Act, and for notification to be provided to a child's attorney when there is a change in placement resulting in the separation of siblings.

### **AB 1758 COUNTY WRAPAROUND SERVICES PROGRAM (CHAPTER 561, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Removes "pilot project" references for county wraparound services programs administered by DSS and designed to keep children in their homes with family-based support services as an alternative to group home placement. This bill adds non-relative extended family members to the list of family members and guardians eligible for wraparound services.

### **AB 1905 FOSTER CARE: FUNDING: PLACEMENT APPROVALS (CHAPTER 562, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Ensures continued approval and payments for foster youth relative caregiver homes pending the annual reassessment visit.

### **AB 1933 FOSTER CHILDREN: EDUCATION (CHAPTER 563, STATUTES OF 2010)**

This bill extends requirements for local educational agencies to allow foster children to stay in their school of origin from the remainder of the school year to the duration of the court's jurisdiction.

### **AB 2474 COMMUNITY CARE FACILITIES: FOSTER FAMILY AGENCIES (CHAPTER 43, STATUTES OF 2010)**

This bill extends by one year, to January 1, 2012, the sunset provision on the requirement for certain foster family agencies to employ one full-time social work supervisor for every eight social workers.

### **SB 654 INDEPENDENT LIVING PROGRAM (CHAPTER 555, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Extends eligibility for Independent Living Program services to former foster youth placed with a non-relative legal guardian, whose guardianship was ordered on or after the child's eighth birthday.



**SB 945 JUVENILE COURT JURISDICTION: SERVICES AND BENEFITS (CHAPTER 631, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Requires probation and parole officers to provide wards of the court formerly in foster care with notification regarding their eligibility for services and benefits available for former foster youth when the court terminates jurisdiction, or upon release of a ward from a non-foster care facility.

**SB 962 PRISONERS: ADJUDICATION OF PARENTAL RIGHTS: PARTICIPATION (CHAPTER 482, STATUTES OF 2010)**

SB 962 will help prison inmates participate in hearings that determine whether they can retain parental rights for their children. The bill also establishes a pilot video-conferencing system in Los Angeles County that will save the state money.

**SB 1353 EDUCATION: FOSTER YOUTH (CHAPTER 557, STATUTES OF 2010)**

Requires consideration to be given to specified factors in making educational and school placement decisions for children and youth in foster care and requires that information about the number of school transfers a foster child has experienced and information about the child's educational progress as demonstrated by academic test scores and graduation credits, be included in the child's health and education summary.







STATE OF CALIFORNIA  
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DIVISION

OFFICE OF THE CALIFORNIA FOSTER CARE OMBUDSMAN

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