

Improving Child Abuse Response

1. Summary

The Orange County Child Abuse Registry (CAR) received 33,872 reports of suspected child abuse in 2005, an average of 2,823 per month and a 22.3% increase since 2000.

Traditionally, officers take endangered children into protective custody and shelter them at the Orangewood Children's Home (OCH), operated by the Orange County Social Services Agency (SSA). Although alternative placements are quickly made, where appropriate, they nevertheless expose children to a potentially frightening and confusing process of being taken from their homes by strangers.

The SSA developed an enhanced Field Response Protocol (Protocol) to respond more rapidly to child abuse calls, streamline the process of identifying placement alternatives for children requiring protective custody, and reduce potential trauma to the children involved. It is intended to be offered to law enforcement agencies as the SSA builds social worker capacity.

The 2005-2006 Orange County Grand Jury conducted a study focused on a new protocol intended to streamline the process by which officers and SSA social workers address child abuse calls. The Grand Jury found that:

- 1.1** The enhanced protocol is designed to explore less formal placement alternatives in the children's extended family or community. When an officer responds to a call that may lead to removing a child from her/his home, the protocol calls for the officer to contact CAR to dispatch a social worker within 30 minutes to participate in a joint assessment, which occurs if the officer can stay on-site for sufficient time.
- 1.2** Due to the high volume of child abuse calls in their cities, the Santa Ana and Tustin police departments were asked by SSA and agreed to implement the enhanced protocol on September 1, 2005. Preliminary results through January 31, 2006, showed that 69% of the children remained in the custody of their parents when the protocol was used compared to none when it was not, an indication that use of the protocol results in less stress and trauma for children. This also

Some Acronyms in this Report

CAR	Child Abuse Registry
CAST	Child Abuse Services Team
JJC	Juvenile Justice Commission
OCH	Orangewood Children's Home
OCSD	Orange County Sheriff's Department
SSA	Social Services Agency

streamlines the investigative and reporting process for officers and social workers.

- 1.3** The Anaheim Police Department requested the enhanced protocol in December 2005. Besides these three police departments, other police departments and the OCSD have not yet been approached by the SSA about the protocol while it builds social worker capacity.
- 1.4** The SSA needs additional funds to support a broader implementation of the enhanced protocol and to provide for 24/7 on-site response to child abuse calls.

2. Introduction and Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of a new SSA Protocol and if the existing procedures between Orange County law enforcement agencies and child welfare agencies are adequate to effectively handle child abuse calls.

3. Method of Study

To determine if Orange County at-risk children are safe, effectively evaluated, and if reasonable placement alternatives are sufficiently explored, the 2005-2006 Orange County Grand Jury:

- Made visits to the Child Abuse Registry, Child Abuse Services Team, and Orangewood Children's Home
- Attended a monthly meeting of the Orange County Chief's of Police and Sheriff's Association
- Reviewed:
 - "2004 Annual Report of the Juvenile Justice Commission"
 - The SSA Field Response Protocol
 - "Orangewood Children's Home Re-Use Plan"
 - CAR reports on the results of the use of the enhanced protocol vs. not using the Protocol
 - "Social Services Agency 2005 Business Plan"
 - State Penal Code 11172(e), Child Abuse Reporting Act
 - Conducted interviews of SSA employees
 - Surveyed police departments and the Orange County Sheriff's Department (OCSD)

4. Background

As the lead Orange County agency responsible for child welfare, the SSA's stated mission is to strengthen and stabilize families and create an environment in a permanent, nurturing home where children are free from abuse. SSA serves all children from birth to 18 years of age who are in danger of death, injury, sexual abuse, physical abuse, neglect or exploitation. The Child Abuse Registry/Emergency Response Program, Child Abuse Services Team, and Orangewood Children's Home are the principal SSA programs responding to child abuse.

Law enforcement officers and social workers in the field are responsible for ensuring that children are not left in an environment that may pose a risk of actual or threatened harm, such as domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, abandonment, or exploitation.

4.1 Child Abuse Registry (CAR)

In 1974 the Orange County Board of Supervisors established the CAR to centralize the reporting of child abuse within Orange County. A 24/7 hotline to receive calls was initiated on February 1, 1975. CAR, the point of entry into the services of SSA for all children, is a 24/7 child abuse reporting center staffed with social workers who:

- Answered an average of 2,823 telephone reports per month in 2005
- Evaluate reports alleging child abuse to determine if the children involved are in danger
- Determine if and when the SSA emergency response staff need to respond to reports
- Process and distribute child abuse reports to local and state law enforcement agencies and maintain a countywide index of child abuse reports
- Provide information and consultation to law enforcement
- Foster communication with and provide training for law enforcement agencies, school districts, medical centers, and other groups as required by State Penal Code 11172(e), Child Abuse Reporting Act, to report suspected child abuse

Children and adolescents who feel they are victimized or abandoned may also telephone CAR for assistance and have their situations evaluated by a CAR social worker. The family may receive County services to prevent child abuse and neglect. This may result in the child or adolescent being given referrals for counseling and temporary shelter, or it may result in protective custody at OCH.

4.2 Child Abuse Services Team (CAST)

CAST is a specialized program designed to reduce the trauma for victims of child sexual abuse by providing a child-friendly site in which child sexual abuse investigations are coordinated and completed by a multidisciplinary team. The team consists of staff from

the District Attorney's office, Health Care Agency, SSA, law enforcement, the Victim Witness Assistance Program, and representatives from child advocacy and the therapeutic community. The goals of CAST are to: reduce the number of interviews a child must experience, limit the number of investigations, provide a child advocate to work with the victim and family if appropriate, provide crisis intervention, refer for long-term therapy, and protect the victim.

The Orange County Board of Supervisors appointed the CAST Task Force under the auspices of the SSA on December 1, 1987, to develop a multidisciplinary team program for conducting child sexual abuse investigations. At that time, children who were alleged to have been sexually abused were subjected to 15 to 25 interviews by numerous professionals during the investigation. The pilot project was funded on November 15, 1988, and began operating on March 6, 1989. It is jointly managed under the direction of the Orange County District Attorney, HCA, the Orange County Child Abuse Council, CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), and a private community provider.

The Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC), an investigatory arm of the Juvenile Court, annually inspects all Orange County law enforcement agencies to determine how they handle juveniles who come under their care. In 2004, the Commission also reviewed how law enforcement viewed their interaction with SSA. The 2004 JJC Annual Report stated that Orange County police departments were "...very pleased with the relationship they have with CAST ..." which is seen "... as an important community asset with very professional staff and responsive personnel." This report noted that "...several departments used the word 'phenomenal' to describe CAST and the work that they do. Several other departments stated that CAST makes their jobs so much easier and that the staff goes beyond the call of duty."

4.3 Orangewood Children's Home (OCH)

OCH is a county-operated emergency shelter care facility. It provides 24/7 professional care and supervision for a child who must be removed from his/her home due to neglect or abuse, or from foster care or group care due to a disruption in the placement. OCH is the transitional facility prior to the child's placement in foster care or his/her return to the family.

OCH was created out of the Albert Sitton Home, which opened in 1959. When the Sitton Home deteriorated and became overcrowded, the County developed a public-private partnership to raise money to develop a state-of-the-art emergency shelter care facility. Dedicated in October 1985, OCH was soon at capacity, and in 1991, more housing was added to accommodate 236 children. In 2001-2004, the average population of OCH ranged from 89 to 123, and has been under 100 since 2004; the peak populations for 2001-2004 ranged from 123 to 192 and have been less than 140 since 2004. The state license capacity is now set at 216 residents.

4.4 SSA Initiatives Related to Law Enforcement Response

The SSA works continually with Orange County law enforcement agencies toward improving techniques to ensure the welfare and protection of children. The following are steps taken recently:

4.4.1 Call Referral Procedure – Beginning June 2, 2003, all CAR calls from specially trained reporters, as mandated by the Child Abuse Reporting Act, generated logged referrals. Before that time, only information from calls that met the definition of abuse/neglect was made available to law enforcement.

4.4.2 Grand Jury Recommended a Dedicated Police Clearing Line – Based on a 2003-2004 Orange County Grand Jury Report, the SSA established a priority phone line for police on January 31, 2005. It provides background information on potential family guardians from CAR records to assist police decision-making in child abuse responses.

4.4.3 On-Site Hours Increased – SSA services are available by phone on a 24/7 basis. On April 1, 2005, however, the SSA Emergency Response Program increased its on-site hours of operation from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday through Friday, an improvement over the previous 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. hours. It required the addition of a second shift unit, including one supervisor, 12 social workers, and two administrative positions. The social workers provide immediate, in-person response to reports of child abuse, neglect, and exploitation Monday through Friday. Since implementation, the second shift unit has handled 68% of the removals of children from their homes. The advantage to the child is less likelihood of placement in OCH or another group home and a greater likelihood of placement in the child's home or a relative's home, when the home is determined to be safe.

4.4.4 SSA Field Response Protocol

To facilitate rapid social worker response to child abuse calls, the SSA developed the enhanced protocol in 2005 to streamline the process of identifying placement alternatives for children requiring protective custody and to reduce potential trauma to them.

When an officer responds to a call which may lead to the removal of a child from her/his home, the enhanced protocol calls for the officer to contact CAR to request a social worker to participate in a joint assessment. The protocol calls for a 30 minute response by the social worker. If the officer stays on-site through the arrival of the social workers, they participate in a joint assessment. If the call is after-hours or the officer cannot wait until the social worker arrives, the officer handles the incident based on

discretion and law enforcement agency policy for the protection of the child.

The first enhanced protocol pilot agreements were signed with the Santa Ana and Tustin police departments in August 2005 and the Anaheim Police Department in December 2005.

4.5 Protocol Advantages to Law Enforcement

Having a social worker respond to the location of the abused child provides several advantages to the law enforcement officer, starting with the first call for assistance, which also serves as the initial notification to CAR. This eliminates the need for an additional call to comply with the legal mandate requiring telephonic reporting of a suspected child abuse incident. Other advantages include:

- Central contact – A dedicated phone number providing a central point of contact to request a social worker for a field assessment
- Priority number – This central contact number is a priority number that advances the officer's call to the front of the CAR call queue
- Target response time – A response time by the social worker of 30 minutes or less
- Reduction of paperwork – The responding social worker completes the Application for Petition and other required paperwork as necessary, relieving the law enforcement officer of the responsibility
- Professional assistance – Assistance designed to determine the best course of action when assessing the need for protective custody or community placement using available information including alternative placement options, social service records, and on-site interviews
- Retention of final decision – The officer, in concurrence with the social worker, retains the final decision for the safety of the child consistent with law enforcement agency procedures

5. Observations and Discussion

The Orange County Grand Jury visited several SSA facilities, interviewed agency employees, and surveyed all Orange County police chiefs and the OCSD.

5.1 Orange County Chief's of Police and Sheriff's Association

The Orange County Grand Jury attended a meeting of the Orange County Chief's of Police and Sheriff's Association on November 2, 2005. On the agenda was a presentation by CAR and CAST personnel who spoke about their services and the enhanced protocol. As a result of the meeting, the Anaheim Police Department requested the protocol.

5.2 Documentation of Child Abuse

Documentation of child abuse is essential in pursuing the protection of children. Photographic evidence of abuse and living conditions is an especially effective tool for agencies to use in working with Juvenile Court to ensure that the right steps are taken for the welfare of the child. All responding Orange County law enforcement agencies have photographic resources readily available to fulfill this need.

5.3 Orange County Law Enforcement Agency Survey

By December 2005, the SSA had signed enhanced protocol agreements with police departments in Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Tustin. The Orange County Grand Jury surveyed all other city police departments and the OCSD, including officers-in-charge of each contract city, during the December 2005-January 2006 period.

5.3.1 Survey Questions

The survey asked the following yes-no questions:

- Are you aware of the SSA child abuse response Protocol?
- If “yes”, are you considering an agreement with SSA to use the Protocol?
- If “no”, may we send you a copy of the Protocol?
- Do you provide responding officers with a camera to document physical abuse and living conditions?

In addition to returning the completed survey, respondents were asked to include a copy of the department’s child abuse response procedure.

5.3.2 Survey Responses

Surveys were sent to 18 police chiefs and the OCSD. Anaheim, Santa Ana, and Tustin were not included because they have agreed to the enhanced protocol at the request of the SSA on a trial basis. Yorba Linda was not included in the survey because it contracts out its police function to the Brea Police Department. Twelve Orange County cities contract with the OCSD for law enforcement services (see Appendix 8.2). OCSD is also responsible for law enforcement services in all unincorporated Orange County areas. Responses were received from 18 cities and the OCSD. Table 1 indicates that many law enforcement agencies knew of the protocol and were considering it.

Table 1 FIELD RESPONSE PROTOCOL POLICE CHIEF'S/SHERIFF'S SURVEY RESULTS						
	City/OCSD	Know of Protocol	Considering Its Use	Want Copy of Protocol	Camera to Document	Sent Dept Procedure
1	Brea	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	No
2	Buena Park	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes
3	Costa Mesa	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes	Yes
4	Cypress	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
5	Fountain Valley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
6	Fullerton	No	NR	Yes	CSI	Yes
7	Garden Grove	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
8	Huntington Beach	Yes	Yes	Yes	CSI	Yes
9	Irvine	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	No
10	Laguna Beach	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	No
11	La Habra	No	NR	Yes	Yes	Yes
12	La Palma	No	Yes	NR	Yes	No
13	Los Alamitos	No	NR	Yes	Yes	Yes
14	Newport Beach	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
15	Orange	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
16	Placentia	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	No
17	Seal Beach	No	NR	Yes	Yes	No
18	Westminster	No	NR	Yes	Yes	No
19	OCSD	Yes	Yes	NR	Yes	Yes
TOTALS	Yes	13	11	12	19	11
	No	6	2	1	0	8
	NR	0	6	6	0	0
CSI - crime scene investigation NR - No Response						

5.4 Protocol Preliminary Results from Trial Cities

The Orange County Grand Jury interviewed SSA personnel to measure effectiveness of the enhanced protocol since its trial implementation in September 2005. Results through January 31, 2006, indicate that 69% of the children remained in the custody of their parents when the protocol is used compared to none when it is not. This presumes that leaving the child in the custody of the parents is considered to be safe. Use of the protocol causes a less stressful and traumatic event for the child and streamlines the investigative and reporting process for officers and social workers.

5.5 Law Enforcement Agency Procedures on Child Abuse Response

Law enforcement agencies have many procedures including child abuse reporting; however, those agencies which have not yet been approached by the SSA on the enhanced protocol do not refer to it in their procedures and do not train officers in its use.

5.6 Interviews with CAR Social Workers

Interviews were conducted with CAR social workers who take and respond to child abuse calls. Those social workers interviewed were aware of the enhanced protocol and concur that it is in the best interest of protecting children. They also feel that the protocol is useful for the officers and social workers alike. They believe it results in fewer child protection petitions being cancelled by the Juvenile Court because of the completeness of information developed by the rapid, collaborative response.

5.7 SSA Budget Increase to Open New Social Worker Units in Support of Protocol

The SSA has requested the 2006-2007 budget include funds to support three additional geographically dispersed units of social workers throughout the county to cover anticipated increased demand for social worker response to law enforcement calls as more law enforcement agencies are approached on the enhanced protocol by the SSA and agree to it. These budget funds will support the SSA's need to build social worker capacity

6. Findings

In accordance with California Penal Code § 933 and § 933.05, each finding will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. The 2005-2006 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at the following findings:

- 6.1** *Field Response Protocol developed:* To effectively explore placement alternatives, the SSA developed an enhanced protocol to improve cooperation between social workers and law enforcement officers responding to child abuse calls. As a result of the protocol trial in Santa Ana and Tustin, fewer children were taken away from their homes and taken to a public facility.
- 6.2** *Expansion of the enhanced protocol is planned:* Once social worker capacity is increased, SSA will propose to expand the use of protocol to OCSD as well as the following cities: Brea, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Beach, La Habra, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, Seal Beach, and Westminster.
- 6.3** *Law enforcement agency procedures and training on child abuse response:* OCSD and other law enforcement agencies that have not been approached by SSA on the enhanced protocol, have not included protocol in their procedures nor trained its officers of its use..
- 6.4** *SSA budget request for additional social worker units to support the enhanced protocol:* The SSA 2006-2007 budget request includes additional funds to open

and staff three new social worker units to be responsive to the anticipated increase in demand from law enforcement agencies.

Responses to Findings 6.1 through 6.3 are requested of the Orange County Social Services Agency.

Responses to Findings 6.2 and 6.3 are requested of the Police Chiefs of Brea, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Beach, La Habra, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, Seal Beach, and Westminster.

Responses to Findings 6.2 and 6.3 are required of the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner.

A response to Finding 6.4 is required of the Board of Supervisors.

7. Recommendations

In accordance with California Penal Code § 933 and § 933.05, each recommendation will be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. The responses are to be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings, the Orange County Grand Jury makes the following recommendations:

- 7.1** *Law enforcement agency acceptance of SSA Field Response Protocol:* All Orange County law enforcement agencies should consider agreeing to the SSA enhanced protocol as social worker capacity is increased to support law enforcement needs. (See Findings 6.1 and 6.2)
- 7.2** *Law enforcement training on the enhanced protocol:* After a law enforcement agency agrees to the protocol, it should become part of the agency's procedure and line officers should be trained on the revised procedure. (See Finding 6.3)
- 7.3** *Increase SSA budget:* The Board of Supervisors should consider the SSA request for funds to support three new social worker units. (See Finding 6.4)

Response to Recommendation 7.1 is requested of Social Services Agency

Responses to Recommendations 7.1 and 7.2 are requested of the Police Chiefs of Brea, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, Laguna Beach, La Habra, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, Seal Beach, and Westminster.

Responses to Recommendations 7.1 and 7.2 are required of the Orange County Sheriff-Coroner.

Response to Recommendation 7.3 is required of the Orange County Board of Supervisors.

8. Appendix

8.1 References

- "Annual Report, Juvenile Justice Commission," 2004
- "Business Plan," Social Services Agency, 2005
- "Orangewood Children's Home Re-Use Plan," William Steiner, September 2005
- California State Penal Code 11172(e), Child Abuse Reporting Act
- "Total Number of Reports per Year," CAR, January 18, 2006
- "OCH and Field Response Protocol Report," September through December 2005," CAR, January 20, 2006
- "OCH and Field Response Protocol Report," September 2005 through January 2006," CAR, February 14, 2006

8.2 Contract Cities

The following 12 Orange County cities contract with the OCSD for law enforcement services:

- Aliso Viejo
- Dana Point
- Laguna Hills
- Laguna Niguel
- Laguna Woods
- Lake Forest
- Mission Viejo
- Rancho Santa Margarita
- San Clemente
- San Juan Capistrano
- Stanton
- Villa Park