

FOSTER CARE SUPPORT SERVICES

SUMMARY

An ever increasing number of children are entering the foster care system. If foster children do not receive the parenting they should have, they may not become healthy and productive human beings. Support services that address the needs of children and their “parents” within the foster child’s life are limited. When foster parents lack sufficient training, the foster children do not receive the minimal necessities they need to overcome their disadvantages. The lack of adequate training, support services and compensation contributes to a shortage of qualified foster parents. A consequent reliance on more costly types of placement facilities (i.e. group homes) is the result. To overcome these deficiencies, the support services and training of parenting skills for foster parents need to be improved.

The foster parent is required to function as a professional. The Grand Jury study found that their training and compensation could be greatly improved. A more structured curriculum should be required for the initial foster care licensing requirement. More approved training facilities are needed throughout the County for initial foster care licensing and for renewal foster care licensing.

Providing foster care should not become a financial burden for the custodial parent. The parent should receive prompt reimbursement for all authorized foster care expenses. A payment delay of thirty to forty-five days is not acceptable. The foster care parents must be professionals and children in their care need and have the right to be properly parented.

INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE

The Little Hoover Commission in its report in 1992, determined that foster parents in California were poorly trained and poorly compensated. The Commission determined that a group home received five times the compensation per child that a foster care home received. The Commission stated that it was crucial the State upgrade the status of foster parents. This can be done by increasing compensation and insuring parenting skills through training and psychological evaluations. Assembly Bill 3062 in 1996, and Senate Bill 933 in 1998 set forth the requirements and funding to allow counties to meet the objectives of the Commission report.

The Grand Jury objective was to study the County foster care support programs, services and parenting training. Specifically the issues studied were:

- training the foster parents currently receive
- type of specialized classes required because of the foster child history
- the availability of training facilities throughout the county

- support services (respite care, child care, support groups, “in home” parenting classes or counseling available for the foster parents when needed)
- consistency of the financial support received by the foster parent for the type of care the child requires

METHOD OF STUDY

Information was obtained from the California State Legislature, Orange County Social Services Agency, Juvenile Justice Commission and Orangewood Children’s Home. Tours were taken at the Juvenile Correction Facilities, Orange County Probation Department, selected group homes, foster care agencies, and Orange County Department of Social Services.

Informative discussions were held with groups of representatives and support groups participating in forums about the County’s Foster Care Program. Recently passed and proposed County and State requirements have been reviewed for their impact on the foster care program. Articles appearing in local newspapers and magazines have been reviewed, as has information available on the Internet.

BACKGROUND

The number of Foster Care Children in California increased from 33,000 in 1984 to 90,000 in 1995, a 170% increase. The Orange County Social Services Agency has projected an increase in the number of neglected and abused children in 1999. California accounts for over 20% of the nation’s foster care children. The increased caseloads have created problems and stresses that the system was not designed to handle. Results of these deficiencies have prompted continuing system renovations. Children today suffer much more abuse than in the 1980s and have more serious behavioral problems.

Newly revised Orange County Social Services Agency programs for Foster Care starting in 1999 are based on fulfilling the requirements set forth in State of California Assembly Bill 3062.

The Orange County Social Services Agency administers mandated federal and state social service programs that provide care for abused or neglected children.

FOSTER CARE PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

Seventeen years ago, with the passage of Senate Bill 14, California entered a new era in child welfare. The system was reorganized around the principle that children entering the system would be returned to a permanent setting within two years, either with their custodial parents or an adoptive family. The average foster child experiences placement in at least two different homes. One in every ten foster children is likely to have been in five or more homes. Two of every five foster children are in the system for at least three years.

The Orange County Social Services Agency is addressing this problem by introducing the Placement Resources and Support Services Strategic Plan which will permit children to remain in the least restrictive, most family-like setting. Training needs to be available and used so that the objective of strengthening long term foster care would be achieved. This same program could be beneficial for all custodial parents.

ORANGEWOOD CHILDREN’S HOME

The Orange County Orangewood Children’s Home is the entry point into the system for the child who has been removed from home because of abuse or neglect (*Welfare and Institution Code §300*). If the child cannot be returned home, the possible placement of the child is:

- with relatives
- an emergency shelter home
- a foster home
- a group home

Over one-third of these Orangewood Children are returned to Orangewood as a result of placement failures.

FOSTER FAMILY HOMES

A foster family home provides twenty-four hour care and supervision in a family setting in the licensee's residence. A foster child is raised as a member of the family until age 18. During long term foster care the Juvenile Court, through the Social Services Agency, retains overall responsibility for the child and ties to the legal guardian continue.

SOCIAL SERVICES AGENCY

The Orange County Social Services Agency offers programs for foster care parenting skills. It contracts with the Child Abuse Prevention Center to provide an outreach and support program called "Suddenly Parents" for caretakers who are relatives. The Social Services Agency established a contract with Kinship Center Adoption Services to provide pre-placement and post-placement training and support to adoptive parents. The Social Services Agency has already planned to increase the number of foster care homes and adoptive homes through ongoing recruitment. The goal of the agency is to maintain and improve existing homes through increased support services.

The case worker for a child cannot be assured that the foster parents have received specialized training for the child's emotional needs. The lack of specialized training may result in placement failure, and long-term foster care is not achieved. The foster child in long term, stable foster care is less likely to become a juvenile delinquent.

FOSTER CARE PARENTS

Effective foster parenting requires capable, multi-skilled and multi-functional people. Foster parents must be able to work with agency staff, the courts, and various human service professionals, including doctors, school guidance counselors, probation officers and family therapists. The special skills needed to deal with troubled foster children are primarily acquired through training. Foster parents need support services to succeed. Among the services needed are:

- support and consultation from skilled social workers,
- respite care,
- day care,
- immediate responses in crisis situations.

The Social Services Agency must approve the child care provider when the foster parent must be absent from the home. The increasing number of abused children and burn out of the foster parents require continued foster parent recruitment.

The foster parent must be devoted, dedicated, patient, and well trained as the caregiver of another's child, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

A newly licensed foster care parent must be equipped to receive the foster child. For example, if the child is an infant, the foster parent should have a crib, play pen, and an infant car seat, before the child is placed in the home. In many instances, this will require purchasing new items by the foster parent. Should the child be of school age, basic clothing items may be purchased before the child's arrival. Although the Social Services Agency will reimburse the parent for authorized expenses, it may be 30 to 45 days or longer before the parent receives reimbursement. The basic monthly rates for foster care in Orange County are \$375 per child from ages 0 to 4 up to \$576 per child from ages 15 to 19. Basic rates are set forth in *WIC §11461* because of State and federal participation. Orange County monthly rates for the lower age groups is above the *WIC* basic rates. The increase in scheduled amount above the existing rate structure, as in Orange County, is done with county-only funds.

A foster parent must purchase food, clothing and medical supplies. Much of this is available at reduced pricing through the Women, Infants and Children program. It is a requirement that the recipients of Women, Infants and Children supplies attend the training films and lectures given for pregnant teens, before obtaining supplies. Foster parents needing the supplies should be identified and allowed to obtain their needs immediately without their required attendance for training films and lectures.

PRE LICENSING REQUIREMENTS

The foster parent must attend and complete *orientation* sessions and *training* courses provided by Social Services Agency to obtain a foster care license. The foster parent must be educated, trained or experienced in parenting skills, infant care and child development. The *training* courses required to receive a license to be a foster care parent are currently available at the Social Services Agency Eckhoff facility in the city of Orange. The prospective foster care parent must attend six 3-hour seminars conducted in the evening.

The topics covered are:

1. Overview of Foster Care Parenting
2. Licensing Process
3. Child Abuse/Child Development
4. Self Esteem
5. Placement Resources
6. Graduation

Completing these classes and passing the required screening then qualifies an applicant for a two-year license.

LICENSE RENEWAL REQUIREMENTS

License renewal for Foster Care requires eight hours of courses, seminars or conferences each year. Parent training courses are available at the local college level with classes scheduled in the evenings for ten weeks. Courses are directed to new foster parents and current foster parents. Any parent wishing to receive credit for any class given outside of the Social Services Agency must submit a request, in writing, for approval. The license renewal courses which do not require prior written approval are available at the Social Services Agency facility weekday evenings or at the Children's Hospital of Orange County, quarterly, on Saturdays.

RESPITE CARE

Respite care refers to intermittent or regularly scheduled temporary non-medical care and/or supervision. Foster children often may require extra attention at home and a respite care program gives foster families short-term relief from the continual care of their foster child. Respite care programs help to maintain family stability. Families may use this time to shop, run errands, schedule appointments, spend quality time with their other children, go out for the evening, or have private time alone. There are two basic types of respite care: in-home respite and out-of-home respite care.

The Social Services Agency allows five dollars per hour for child care when a parent attends a foster care function; such is not considered as respite care.

In 1987, the County of Orange established a formal respite care program. For in-home respite care, the caretaker may be a licensed foster parent, a licensed Foster Family Agency, foster parent or a relative. For out-of-home respite care, there are licensed foster facilities and approved preschools for respite day care only.

Should a foster family require respite care, the Orange County Social Services Agency has contracted with Orangewood Children's Foundation to provide the type of respite caretaker the foster family requires. The Foundation pays the caretaker directly and then bills the foster parent at a reduced rate. The Social Services Agency reimburses the foundation, subsidizing the difference between the reduced rate payment received from the foster parent and the actual rate of the caretaker.

Respite care taken by the foster parent is charged to the foster parent by Orange County. Most California counties allow the foster parent a respite care vacation and do not charge the foster parent. This contributes to the difficulty in Orange County for recruiting and maintaining foster parents.

FINDINGS

Under *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, responses are required to all findings. The 1998-99 Orange County Grand Jury has arrived at 7 major findings.

1. Parental training does include a generic curriculum for pre-licensing and licensing renewals. However, training does not include courses on the specific type of conditions for which the children under care may have been subjected causing their placement in Orangewood.

A response to Finding 1 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

2. Currently the *training* courses required to receive an initial Foster Care license are available only at the Social Services Agency Eckhoff facility in Orange.

A response to Finding 2 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

3. Community colleges and other recognized teaching institutions may offer parenting classes not currently pre-approved for credit by the Social Services Agency for pre-licensing or licensing renewal.

A response to Finding 3 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

4. The County places a financial burden on the foster parent by not fully funding needed respite care.

A response to Finding 4 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

5. Licensed foster parents do not receive support systems similar to those received by group homes (child care, support groups, in-home parenting classes and counseling). The \$5.00 per hour allowed for a licensed child-care provider is not adequate.

A response to Finding 5 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

6. Payments for foster care supplies are often 30 to 45 days after expense is submitted. Funds for advance purchases of needed supplies for a newly licensed foster parent are not made available and reimbursement may exceed 30 to 45 days after being submitted.

A response to Finding 6 is required from the **Social Services Agency**.

7. Foster parents are required to watch training films and attend lectures directed to pregnant teenagers prior to obtaining food and supplies at the Women, Infants and Children program facilities.

A response to Finding 7 is required from the **Orange County Health Care Agency**.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In accordance with *California Penal Code* Sections 933 and 933.05, each recommendation must be responded to by the government entity to which it is addressed. These responses are submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court. Based on the findings the 1998–99 Orange County Grand Jury recommends that:

1. The **Social Services Agency**, based on the circumstance of the individual foster child, specify, develop, and conduct specialized courses a foster care applicant and licensee must complete. (See Finding 1.)

A response to Recommendation 1 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

2. The **Social Services Agency** duplicate the required classes for the initial license in locations throughout the county that would afford a parent a convenient location. (See Finding 2.)

A response to Recommendation 2 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

3. The **Social Services Agency** evaluate for approval the courses offered by Community Colleges, such as Cypress College, and other recognized teaching institutions and establish the criteria that will allow foster care applicants and licensees, new and continuing, to attend and receive Social Services Agency credit for pre-licensing and license renewal. (See Finding 3.)

A response to Recommendation 3 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

4. The Social Services Agency should fund respite care commensurate with that offered by other counties throughout California. Foster parents should be allowed advance funds to cover start-up expenses for the child at time of placement such as clothing allowance, food, medical supplies, cribs, and diapers. (See Findings 4 and 6.)

A response to Recommendation 4 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

5. Licensed foster parents accepting children from Orangewood Children's Home should be allowed to receive, in the foster home, necessary support services (e.g. child care, support groups, in-home parenting classes and counseling.) The Social Services Agency increase the foster care payments or reimbursements for child care when attending support group meetings, foster parent seminars, counseling classes and parenting classes. (See Finding 5.)

A response to Recommendation 5 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

6. Payments to foster parents as reimbursement for expenses incurred for supplies should be made within two weeks after expense voucher is submitted. (See Finding 6.)

A response to Recommendation 6 is required from **Orange County Social Services Agency**.

7. Special identification cards be made available by the Health Care Agency so that foster parents who obtain their food and supplies from the Women, Infants and Children program facilities be allowed to do so without the requirement of first attending lectures and viewing films on teen pregnancy. (See Finding 7.)

A response to Recommendation 7 is required from the **Orange County Health Care Agency**.

COMMENDATIONS

The 1998–99 Orange County Grand Jury commends:

- The foster parents of Orange County for providing a much-needed service. They are dedicated to creating a better life for abused children. The foster parents contacted by the Grand Jury are professional, and their cooperation is to be commended.
- The Social Services Agency staff and field workers for their effort and patience.
- The entire staff at Orangewood Children's Home.

APPENDIX

Legal Authority: State Welfare and Institution Code, State Manual of Policies and Procedures, State Health and Safety Code, State of California Penal Code, State of California Probate Code, Immigration Act of 1990, United States Code, Title 25 and 42. State of California Assembly Bill 3062, dated February 23, 1996 (amending §1506 and §1529.2 of the Health and Safety Code,) relating to Community care facilities

REFERENCE ARTICLES:

- The Little Hoover Commission Report—*Foster Care*, 1992.
McKenzie, Richard B. *Rethinking Orphanages for the 21st Century*. Sage Publications, May 1998.
Orangewood Children’s Home Fact Sheet 1997–1998.
Orangewood Children’s Home Pamphlet.
Orange County Department of Social Services—All County Letter 98–70.
Orange County Probation Department, Youth and Family Resource Center, FLYER.
Statistics for Orange County, California, January 6, 1998.
Orange County Social Services Agency, Children and Family Services, Catalog of Services, April, 1997.
Orange County Social Services Agency 1999 Business Plan.
Orange County Social Services Agency Draft Proposal for Mileage and Child Care Reimbursement Criteria.
Orange County Social Services Agency Budget Summary, 1998–99.
State of California, Department of Social Services, Foster Family Agency Program Statement, January, 1996.
The Notebook: *News from Olive Crest Homes and Services for Abused Children*, Volume Number 1, Dated February, 1999 Flyers.

INTERNET REFERENCES

- Parent Education and Parenting Education, www.lcdgroup.com/parented.html.
Court Ordered Parenting Classes—Tipton (Revised).
Hermes.ecn.purdue.edu/links/ces96impact/0341.html.
For the Sake of Children: Restructuring Foster Care in California April 9, 1992
www.bsa.ca.gov/1hcd/115rp.html.
Orange County Works, www.ocworks.org/asp/index.asp.
Challenges to Child Welfare: Continuing the Call for a Return to Orphanages
www.azstarnet.com/~marier/sos/orphngs.html.
Critical Look at the Foster Care System, Foster Care Outcomes
www.geocities.com/Heartand/5401/foster.14/htm.
Kids Campaigns: Take this Heart, The Foster Care Project
www.kidscampaigns.org/Hot/fostercare/started/about/html.
Foster Care Net News, www.Azstarnet.com/~mauer/sos/chews/html.
Social Services Agency Fact Sheet, www.oc.ca.gov/ssafact.htm.

MEETINGS ATTENDED

- December 2, 1998. Juvenile Justice Commission.
December 2, 1998. Orangewood Children’s Home.
December 16, 1998. Department of Social Services.
December 18, 1998. Group Home Tour.
January 11, 1999. Orange Works Youth Employment Program.
January 20, 1999. Juvenile Justice Commission.
January 21, 1999. Cypress College, Foster Care Education Dept.
January 28, 1999. Orange County Social Services Agency.

February 2, 1999. Orange County Probation Dept., Youth and Family Resource Center.
February 9, 1999. Cypress College, Foster Care Education Dept.
February 16, 1999. Orange County Social Services Agency.
February 20, 1999. Orange County Social Services Agency.
February 23, 1999. Orange County Social Services Agency 1999 Business Plan Seminar.
March 3, 1999. Juvenile Justice Commission.
March 3, 1999. Orange County Social Services Agency.