

A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

On Protecting Child Victims of Neglect and Abuse in a Time of Diminishing Resources

POST-CONFERENCE REPORT
April 2003



Presented by:
Fresno County Foster Care Standards & Oversight Committee
Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Fresno County
Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention

Underwritten by:
The California Endowment
First 5 Fresno County
Kaiser Permanente
Fresno County Office of Education Student Advocacy Programs

This report is available at www.first5fresno.org.

And the Conversation Continues . . .

The Community Conversation was a tremendous success! Over 200 of Fresno's leaders were in attendance as the Annie E. Casey's Family to Family Initiative was presented. As stakeholders discussed many of the challenges that currently face the Child Welfare System in Fresno, the adoption of Family to Family as a model for system redesign seemed to provide the answers people are seeking.

Since the March 5 Community Conversation...

The Community Conversation provided a wonderful and productive forum for discussion of Family to Family. Since then, the following positive steps have been taken:

- On April 29, 2003, our Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution that designated Fresno County as a Family to Family County.
- The County contracted with Andrea Sobrado as the Family to Family Coordinator. She reports to DCFS Assistant Director Cathi Huerta and will work with a wide variety of County and community people.
- Just two weeks after Fresno's involvement with Family to Family became official, 26 delegates from Fresno embarked on an intensive three day training session (May 12 -14, 2003) in Huntington Beach, conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. It is worthwhile to note that the conference allowed for 10 paid and reserved spaces for each county, yet Fresno County arrived with 16 additional attendees whose agencies or organizations sponsored their trip. The Fresno constituency was certainly reflective of Fresno's community spirit and its

dedication to the families that the community serves.

- Check out the names of those who attended. These are not people who had nothing else to do! We were so proud of our delegation! They have been talking to others about Family to Family since their return to Fresno.

Fresno County Delegation to the May 2003 Family to Family <i>Convening</i>

Amy Alhadeff, School Psychologist, Fresno County Office of Education

Susan Anderson, Supervisor, Fresno County Board of Supervisors

Marilyn Bamford, Program Manager, FamiliesFirst

Polly Chandler-Franson, Executive Director, CASA, Fresno County

Kay Crockell, Foster Parent Trainer

Laurie Haberman, Division Manager, Fresno County Children's Mental Health Services

Cathi Huerta, Assistant Director, Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS)

Phil Kader, Prevention Services Manager, Fresno County Probation

Edwina Leinio, Service Director, FamiliesFirst

Wanda MacIntosh, Asst. Coordinator, Fresno State Foundation

Mercedes Medina, President SEIU Local

Irene Menendez, Senior System Analyst, Fresno County Information Technology

Brian Mimura, Special Project Coordinator,
First Five of Fresno County

Betty Moorman, Social Worker, DCFS

Kathe Nalette, Social Worker, DCFS

Nancy Osborn, School Psychologist, Fresno
Unified School District

Jesus Padron, Executive Director,
Cornerstone Church

Toni Paxton, Project Manager, DCFS
Placement Unit

Karen Rea, Quality Assurance Manager,
DCFS

Nancy Richardson, Chair, Fresno County
Foster Care Standards and Oversight
Committee

Theresa Sam, Asst. Director, Santa Rosa
Rancheria

Greg Sanchez, Social Work Practitioner,
DCFS

Andrea Sobrado, Family to Family
Coordinator

Martin Suits, Judge, Fresno County Superior
Court

Diane Warne, District Administrator, Aspira
Foster Family Agency

Gary Zomalt, Director, Fresno County
Department of Children and Family Services

Next Steps

- A smaller but mighty delegation will attend a national conference in Portland, Oregon sponsored by the Annie E. Casey Foundation featuring the Family to Family

Initiative. (We would send more people if they would let us!)

- Additionally, Fresno County has been offered the opportunity by the Stuart Foundation to secure a \$100,000 grant for the initial planning phase of Family to Family. Andrea Sobrado has taken the lead in pursuing these much-needed funds.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation is committed to helping Fresno County achieve the same positive outcomes as other counties and states have experienced. The Foundation will provide ongoing monitoring, training, and evaluation of Fresno's progress during implementation. There will be four annual conferences that Fresno representatives will attend, beginning with the national conference scheduled for June 3-5, 2003 in Portland, Oregon.

Meanwhile, planning for full implementation of the initiative is underway. We are grateful to the task force team co-chairs that will provide critical leadership during the implementation process.

- *Recruitment Training and Support Co-Chairs:* Diane Warne, Aspira Foster Family Agency and Toni Paxton, DCFS
- *Building Community Partnerships Co-Chairs:* H Spees, One-by-One Leadership and Greg Sanchez, DCFS.
- *Team Decision Making Co-Chairs:* Sue Allen, Allen-Spees Family Homes and Vicki Carrillo, DCFS.
- *Self-Evaluation Co-Chairs:* Karen Rea, DCFS and a community partner from CSUF (pending).

Though much hard work lies ahead, an incredible momentum of excitement seems to have drawn so many people to the table, and successful implementation will truly require the dedication and commitment of all. Family to Family, as a model for

reorganization of the county's resources to better support and strengthen families, is here to stay.

Dr. Gary Zomalt, Director of Children and Family Services welcomes Andrea Sobrado, Family to Family Coordinator



Andrea Sobrado served as a Long Term Foster Care Case Manager for Fresno County Department of Social Services before relocating to Southern California in 1997. She received her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Southern California and worked for the Orange County Department of Social Services to develop county/community partnerships.

This experience first introduced Andrea to the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Family to Family Initiative. Recruited back to Fresno County to provide consultation to the Domus Mitis Foundation in August of 2002, Andrea reconnected with the Annie E. Casey Foundation and her interest in Family to Family was rekindled. When Fresno County became designated as a Family to Family County, Andrea conveyed her desire to implement the strategy locally, and was selected to become the County's Family to Family Coordinator.

From my perspective... *Andrea Sobrado*

I am very excited about the opportunity to work with Fresno County to implement Family to Family. Fresno County gave me my first opportunity to work as a social worker, and now I have the chance to give something back to the county.

Implementing Family to Family will be a huge undertaking, and most of the work will be done by the agency social workers and by members of the community. I will merely coordinate this effort, but I am so fortunate that I will have the amazing perspective of seeing the different pieces all come together. I am looking forward to some very hard work, but at the same time, it is the most important work in which we can engage. We will be making a tremendous difference in lives of the children and families with whom we come into contact. Every child deserves a family and we will all work together to ensure that every child in our system be placed safely into the most family-like setting. I am very encouraged by the results that other counties have experienced after adopting the Family to Family Initiative. I am looking forward to seeing those same outcomes in Fresno County.



On March 5, 2003, over 200 people with the power to change the lives of neglected and abused children in Fresno County gathered together for a community conversation on protecting child victims of neglect and abuse in a time of diminishing government resources.

The conversation, convened by the Fresno County Foster Care Standards & Oversight Committee, Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Fresno County, and the Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention, elicited the perspectives, experience and involvement of local policy-makers and child and family experts toward an outcome of improved responses to the needs of neglected and abused children.

The gathering was designed to both educate the community on the scope, depth and consequences of doing a poor job of responding to the needs of neglected and abused children, and to provide a forum to discuss and commit to solutions *no matter what the fiscal climate is*. Following a review of the current financial status of the County, a panel of local experts offered their thoughts on the consequences of inadequate responses to the needs of vulnerable children and, more importantly, their suggestions as to what can be done to improve the responses. Representatives of the Annie E. Casey Foundation outlined *Family to Family*, a framework that rethinks our approach to foster care through

systemic change and community engagement. Responding to the presentations, community stakeholders engaged in table conversations around a series of sample goals, culled from the *Family to Family* Initiative with local issues folded in, allowing the participants to work together on goals which cross traditional agency and expertise boundaries. Following the conversation, the participants heard a call to action by the retired Regional Administrator of Northern California Parole Service, California Youth Authority. They also heard the Director of the Fresno County Department of Children & Family Services announce that the gathering represented the kick off to Fresno County's acceptance by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a county implementing the Family to Family Initiative with the assistance of the Foundation and the support of the State Department of Social Services.

When the Conference Planning Committee began putting together this conference, it was with an eye toward making it unthinkable for policy-makers to approach daunting budget decisions without keeping the needs of vulnerable children as a high priority. As the conference developed, interest grew in the Family to Family Initiative, and by the time the conference took place, an agreement had been forged between the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Fresno County Department of Children & Family Services to work together to implement the Family to Family Initiative in Fresno County.



It was our pleasure to bring this conference to fruition, and we look forward to working with a wide variety of community partners to implement excellent services for our most vulnerable children and families.

Conference Planning Committee

First Row, left to right: **Ryan Rickert**, CASA of Fresno County; **Dr. Jacqueline Ryle**, Special Consultant; **Kathleen McIntyre and Robin Leppo**, Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention.

Back Row, left to right: **Luisa Medina and Nancy Richardson**, Foster Care Oversight Committee; **Kerry Main Aller**, FamiliesFirst.

Not pictured: **Amy Buster Alhadef and Gladys Martin**, Fresno County Office of Education, **Vera Kennedy**, Foster Care Oversight Committee; **Polly Chandler-Franson**, CASA of Fresno County.

Photos by **Howard K. Watkins**

This post-conference report is in three parts:

Part I: Family to Family

Part II: Summary of the Conference Proceedings

Part III: Exhibits

- A. Summaries
- B. List of Attendees

PART I: FAMILY TO FAMILY

BACKGROUND: *The Current Challenges of our Public Child Welfare*

The nation's child welfare system faces a series of daunting challenges:

The number of children in the care of the child welfare system has continued to grow – from 260,000 children in out-of-home care in the 1980s to more than 550,000 in care by 2000.

As child welfare systems became overloaded, they were unable to safely return children to their families or to find permanent homes for them. Children have therefore experienced much longer stays in temporary settings.

At the same time, the number of foster families nationally has dropped, so that fewer than 50 percent of the children needing temporary care are now placed with foster families. As a result of this disparity, child welfare agencies in many urban communities have placed large numbers of children in group care or with relatives who have great difficulty caring for them. An infant coming into care in our largest cities has a good chance of being placed in group care, and may be without a permanent family for years.

Finally, children of color are vastly over-represented in this group of disadvantaged children.



Seated, left to right: Dr. Jacqueline Ryle, Amy Buster Alhadeff, Susan B. Anderson, Dr. Gary D. Zomalt, Bill Bettencourt, Olivia Weatherbee. Back row: Dr. Barbara Needell, LeeAnn Parry, Luisa Medina, Norma Caldwell, Judge Bruce Smith, Elinor Zorn, MD., Kathleen McIntyre, Nancy Richardson, Elizabeth O'Neil, Judge Martin Suits, Dr. Jane Middleton.

During the past several years, a number of state and local child welfare systems have seen a reduction in the numbers of children coming into care and have been able to increase the numbers of children placed for adoption. However, the severity of the challenges facing child welfare makes this an opportune time to rethink the fundamental role of family foster care and to consider very basic changes.

A RESPONSE TO THE CHALLENGE: *The Family to Family Initiative*

With the appropriate reforms in policy, resources, and programs, family foster care can respond to the challenges of out-of-home placement and be a less expensive and more humane choice for children and youth than are institutions or other group settings.

Family to Family was designed in 1992 and has been field tested in communities across the country, including Alabama, New Mexico, Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Maryland. Los Angeles County is in the early stages of implementation of the initiative. New York City has also adopted the neighborhood and family-center principles of *Family to Family* as an integral part of its reform effort, and new sites are in process.

The *Family to Family* Initiative provides an opportunity for states and communities to reconceptualize, redesign, and reconstruct their foster care system to achieve new system-wide goals; namely:

- To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood-based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities in which the children live.
- To assure that scarce family foster home resources are provided to all those children (but to only those children) who in fact must be removed from their homes.
- To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, and group homes) – by meeting the needs of many more of the children currently in those settings through relative or family foster care.
- To increase the number and quality of foster families to meet projected needs.
- To reunify children with their families as soon as that can safely be accomplished, based on the family and children's needs – not simply the system's time frames.
- To reduce the lengths of stay of children in out-of-home care.
- To better screen children being considered for removal from home, and to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family.
- To decrease the overall number of children coming into out-of-home care.
- To involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts.

- To become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes.

The new system envisioned by *Family to Family* is designed to:

- Better screen children being considered for removal from home, to determine what services might be provided to safely preserve the family and/or what the needs of the children are;
- Be targeted to bring children in congregate or institutional care back to their neighborhoods;
- Involve foster families as team members in family reunification efforts;
- Become a neighborhood resource for children and families and invest in the capacity of communities from which the foster care population comes; and
- Provide permanent families for children in a timely manner.

The Initiative is designed to reconstruct rather than merely supplement current operations. Such changes are certain to have major effects on the broader systems of services for children, including other services within the mental health, mental retardation/developmental disabilities, education, and juvenile justice systems, as well as the rest of the child welfare system. It is not unusual that the foster care system serves children who are also the responsibilities of other program domains. In order for the Initiative to be successful (to ensure, for example, that children are not inadvertently "bumped" from one system into another), representatives from each of these service systems are expected to be involved in planning and

implementation at both the state and local level. These systems are expected to commit to the goals of the initiative, as well as re-deploy resources (or priorities in the

use of resources) and if necessary alter policies and practices within their own systems.



THE FOUR KEY STRATEGIES of Family to Family

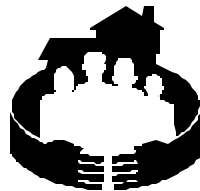
Recruitment, Training, and Support of Resource Families (Foster and Relative):

Finding and maintaining local resources who can support children and families in their own neighborhoods by recruiting, training, and supporting foster parents and relative caregivers.

Building Community Partnerships: Partnering with a wide range of community organizations – beyond public and private agencies – in neighborhoods which are the source of high referral rates, to work toward creating an environment that supports families involved in the child welfare system and thereby helps to build stronger neighborhoods and stronger families.

Family Team Decision-Making: Involving not just foster parents and caseworkers, but also birth families and community members in all placement decisions to ensure a network of support for the child and the adults who care for them.

Self-Evaluation: Using hard data linked to child and family outcomes to drive decision-making, and to show where change is needed and where progress has been made.



THE TOOLS of Family to Family

New principles, new policies, and new organizational structures are not enough to both make and sustain real change in public children's services. For such change to occur, new ways of actually doing the work need to be put in place on the frontlines of child protection. The tools developed by the Foundation and its grantees to help others build a neighborhood-based family foster care system are:

- Successful strategies to recruit, train, and retain foster families.
- A decision-making model for

placement in child protection.

- New approaches to tracing and analyzing outcome data.
- A self-evaluation model.
- Tools to build partnerships with neighborhoods and local communities.
- Tools to engage large organizations in change efforts.
- New approaches to engaging and serving drug-affected families.
- Tools to promote resilience among front line workers and to promote worker safety.
- Proven models, which move children home or to other permanent families

in a timely manner.

- Communications planning in a public child protection environment.
- A model for building partnerships between public and private child welfare agencies.

THE OUTCOMES of Family to Family

Those participating in the Family to Family Initiative are asked to commit themselves to achieving the following outcomes:

- A reduction in the number of children served in institutional and congregate care.
- A shift of resources from congregate and institutional care to family foster care and family-centered services across all child and family-serving systems.
- A decrease in the lengths of stay in out-of-home placement.
- An increase in the number of planned reunifications.
- A decrease in the number of re-entries into care.
- A reduction in the number of placement moves experienced by children in care.
- An increase in the number of siblings placed together.

Family to Family is a set of value-driven principles that guide a tested group of strategies that, in turn, are implemented by a practical set of tools for everyday use by administrators, managers, field workers, and families.

Several videos that describe the Family to Family Initiative are available for borrowing from the Fresno County Department of Children & Family Services by calling Bonnie Burns at 253-9084.

Other information is available about Family to Family at these web sites:

www.aecf.org Information/Resources;
<http://cssr.berkeley.edu> California Data;
www.f2f.ca.gov Information/Message Board;
bneedell@uclink4.berkeley.edu Barbara Needell;
marika.wolf@dss.ca.gov Marika Wolf
www.childrensdefense.org/statesdata.htm

Key People

Dr. Gary D. Zomalt, Dr. Barbara Needell,
Bill Bettencourt, Bart Bohn



PART II: SUMMARY OF CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

INITIATING THE CALL TO ACTION

Dr. Sharon Brown-Welty, President of the Board of Directors CASA of Fresno County, welcomed the participants and likened the gathering to speaking to the choir. She emphasized, however, that even the best of choirs need to learn new songs, and offered the community conversation as an opportunity to meet the challenge to adopt new ways to improve the response to the needs of neglected and abused children.

BRINGING FINANCIAL FACTS INTO FOCUS

Bart Bohn, Chief Administrative Officer of the County of Fresno, presented the current financial status of the County, reporting that this State is in serious financial crisis; that the deficit is between 35 and 46 billion dollars, depending upon whose figures are used; that extensive background knowledge is essential to understand the magnitude of the situation; and that this situation will last for several years, with a need to consider 2005-2006 in any deliberations on budget issues.

In the late 1990's, California saw a huge spike in income and capital gains, and developed programs in accordance with that spike. Now, funds have gone away, and expectations set previously cannot sustain solutions, which must include cost reductions and ways to increase revenue.

The Fresno County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to request that the Governor take steps to restore vehicle license fee increase as the right thing to do at this time in recognition that immediate action is essential. Delays result in lost dollars and a worsening problem.

Options for increasing revenue are limited, and measures for raising funds such as Measure B for the libraries and Measure C for transportation are difficult to pass. Most of the programs addressing the issues of this conversation are tied to the State economy; much of that funding is categorical, allowing little discretion for use in meeting local needs; and if revenues do not grow, the County is faced with making significant cuts.

With no caseload growth, County costs will increase by 6-10% due primarily to an increase in negotiated workforce costs. However, revenue growth is expected to be no more than 3%. For programs over which the County has some discretion, the shortfall represents \$15-20 million.

In response, the County has frozen the filling of vacant positions; is pursuing grant funding; is exploring streamlining operations and freezing positions; and dialoging with other counties to develop workable solutions.

In summary, Mr. Bohn stated the County appreciates the input from the community; emphasized that there are no bad or useless programs; and that only the best programs are left.

A VIEW FROM THE WORLD OUTSIDE FRESNO

Bill Bettencourt, Team Leader, *Family to Family* California, Annie E. Casey Foundation, showed a video and presented an overview, the tools, resources and related links for the *Family to Family Initiative*. Following his presentation, **Dr. Barbara Needell**, Senior Research Specialist, Center for Social Services Research, University of California at Berkeley, made a presentation entitled "Using Data to Guide Policy & Practice: Self-Evaluation in Fresno County. (Copies of the Power Point presentations made by Mr. Bettencourt and Dr. Needell can be obtained by calling Bonnie Burns at the Department of Children & Family Services, 253-9084. The video shown by Mr. Bettencourt can also be borrowed by calling Bonnie Burns.)

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES ON CHOICES, CONSEQUENCES AND SOLUTIONS



Pictured, left to right

Dr. Jacqueline Ryle, Moderator; **Dr. Sharon Brown Welty**, Presenter
Susan B. Anderson, Panelist; **Amy Buster Alhadeff**, Panelist
Honorable Martin Suits, Panelist; **Elinor Zorn, M.D.**, Panelist
LeeAnn Parry, Panelist; **Ms. Olivia Weatherbee**, Panelist

The panel of local stakeholders responded to the following questions as summarized:

QUESTION 1:

"What happens to children, families, and our communities when we do a bad job of responding to the needs of neglected and abused children?"

QUESTION 2:

"In spite of a fiscal crisis, what can we do to improve our responses to the needs of neglected and abused children?"

Elinor Zorn, M.D., Child Advocacy Program medical Director, Children's Hospital of Central California

QUESTION 1: It is essential to look at the history of domestic violence and the escalation of violence in families. Domestic violence escalates in many ways. The individual child is injured more severely over time if the violence is not stopped. Subsequently born children tend to be more seriously hurt. Domestic violence is intergenerational with multiple generations experiencing it. We are now seeing the third and fourth generations of families moving through the CPS system. The sooner we intervene effectively, the more money and lives that can be saved. Medical costs of domestic violence are extensive and increasing. There are now several studies being reported looking at the costs of our nation's trauma programs for children. Among children admitted to trauma programs, those whose injuries were caused by child abuse have the highest per day costs, the longest medical stays, and the highest number of consultations. In addition, there are the costs of providing the extensive and life-long care for those children whose brains were damaged by preventable child abuse.

QUESTION 2: The pressure of the poor economy and scarcity of health care dollars forces us to step back, look at existing programs, and evaluate their effectiveness. We must concentrate now on what is most effective to maintain needed service. It is important to look at the track records of programs and expand those that are most effective. The key to an ability to accomplish goals is coordination and communication between all agencies. Everyone must interact and communicate across lines in different ways than in the past. During this period, it is also important to keep an eye to the future and look for effective ways to use additional moneys when the economy turns up again. Now is the time to design the programs of the future.

Honorable Martin Suits, Fresno County Superior Court, Dependency Division

QUESTION 1: Diminishing resources result in poor decisions made in haste and a decreased ability to make good decisions in the future by the judiciary, which is the gatekeeper of the system.

QUESTION 2: This gathering is an opportunity; however, there is a floor beyond which we cannot go, and if the community goes below that floor, the effects will reach far into the future. There has been dramatic improvement in the past four years in the form of several programs and services, and it is essential not to go back, but to go forward from this point.

Ms. Olivia Weatherbee, University Student and Former Foster Youth

QUESTION 1: Relating personal experience, Ms. Weatherbee stated she has no idea how many homes she was in, or how many times she was taken from homes. She used the analogy of being given a bicycle, learning how to ride it well, then having it taken away, followed by the same cycle of receiving, learning, mastering and losing many times. She stated she was here because of people who love her, and spoke to the importance of relationship between all parts of the system, stating that without that, kids get left out. She stated the system is in a state of confusion, and everyone needs to get involved for there to be improvement.

QUESTION 2: Ms. Weatherbee feels there is opportunity to improve the system. She stated that from her perspective, the system is adult oriented. As a foster child she felt like she was outside looking in, and she noted that she didn't think that only foster children felt that way. A foster parent, a social worker, a biological parent, a teacher and even a District Attorney can be left out of the loop. The difference is that these people have the power to change that. Action is needed to look at the system and to provide support for kids. Kids need someone to listen to them – about how their day went – with consistency and reliability. She emphasized the need to keep families intact and not separate them.

Susan B. Anderson, Member, Fresno County Board of Supervisors

QUESTION 1: When there is poor response, there is added expense in terms of high levels of burnout and stress throughout all aspects of the system, everywhere. Burnout is not just from hard work, but also from the sense of futility and a sense of not making a difference. Those members of the system are also members of the community.

QUESTION 2: It is necessary to rethink how we think about the system. She expressed excitement about the Family to Family philosophy the County is preparing to undertake to work in improving the system. Information is a system problem, and it is important to evaluate and streamline the system.

LeeAnn Parry, Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits Program Manager; Child Advocate

QUESTION 1: There is high cost to children who are left in foster care. Children are re-victimized when there is a lack of sufficient control in finding permanent placements for the child. The child will experience delays in social, cognitive and emotional development when frequent moves characterize his or her placement history. The cost in public monies mounts as we pay for the related services for children who have been re-victimized through neglect in the foster care system – for special education services, mental health services (including residential treatment and hospitalization), the juvenile justice system, and adult corrections and probation and for SSI Disability payments that are directly related to anxiety and other disorders developed by a childhood spent in foster care.

QUESTION 2: Has seen more improvement to the system in the last 2-3 years than in the last 25 years that she has been involved in child advocacy. The question must be asked as to whether all possible is being done to provide for reasonable childhood experiences for a productive adult life and the answer is no. Each child needs to be looked at in the context of the child's family and of community. Services must focus on that context. We must re-think our commitment to permanence for each child, not just what is most convenient. We must commit to the most permanent placement possible for each child – a return to the family of origin or an adoptive placement are the most permanent options. It is important to recognize that the legal aspects of adoption are just that – legal. It is only the legal responsibility for the child that is terminated to transfer that responsibility into an adoptive placement; the emotional and biological connection to a family of

origin is not terminated. If we look at adoption as creating blended families, the child's health is improved through maintaining those important connections throughout the child's growth and development in an environment that is stable, nurturing and loving. It is also critical that we recognize that older children have the same need for stability in a nurturing, loving environment that will be available far into adulthood. Community support and services must be directed to the families who will provide that stability for children.

Amy Buster Alhadeff, Student Advocacy Programs, Fresno County Office of Education

QUESTION 1: Many children in foster care go from one school to another, with nobody knowing their full educational history. Some are denied enrollment due to lack of documents, and some are re-immunized when there are no records. Foster youth are simultaneously over- and under-identified for special education with seriously negative effects. All of this means children fall behind. An added problem is the issue of parents educational rights being observed, and confidentiality.

QUESTION 2: Non-public school funding continues to be a big issue. Progress is being made in Fresno Unified School District in meeting the needs of foster kids. All school districts in the County have agreed to use the same form, which helps keep kids in school in the County as well as those coming into the system. They will continue training to further the process. There is a collaborative project in the planning stages for a multidisciplinary assessment team, which will begin by focusing on younger children. There is need to expand to include more partners; there are resources; and all are working with the same child in different capacities.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS:

Twenty-two tables were designated with topics in the form of sample goals, culled from *the Family to Family Initiative*, with local issues folded in, allowing the participants to work together on goals which cross traditional agency and expertise boundaries. Participants had opportunity to move to three different tables with different stakeholders, discuss and record ideas on the specific topic of the table, and finally to summarize the notes at each table.

In summary, **the emergent pattern throughout all the goal topics emphasized the importance of community and systems involvement, support and action.**



The goals, table anchors, and summary of conversation highlights for each table, are attached as Exhibit B.

REFLECTION FROM LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Juan Arambula, Chairman of the Fresno County Board of Supervisors, observed that work being done to improve the system is a chance to keep hatred and violence from being passed on from one generation to the next, and to keep violence from spilling out of the home and into our schools and streets. He emphasized that the children the stakeholders are working to help are not someone else's children – they are ours. Their struggles are our struggles. And the system that serves them is our system and our responsibility.

He summarized that our society needs to make a commitment to better the lives of families, to make somebody else's children all our children, and stated that commitment has begun in our community with the efforts of the participants.

IT'S UP TO US

Norma Caldwell, Regional Administrator (Retired), Northern California Parole Services, California Youth Authority, asserted that we couldn't afford not to take care of our children. She outlined the demographics, jurisdiction and mission of the California Youth Authority, and pointed out that often youth incarcerated in CYA have had numerous foster placements with a history of abuse and abandonment, time spent in juvenile hall, and repeated violations. She emphasized it is up to us to cease the flow of our youth to the CYA. She stated there have been some small successes, but working together collectively could accomplish much, much more.

THE ACTION

Gary Zomalt, Ed.D., Director, Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services, commented on the importance of community partnerships in caring for children at risk or in need. He stated that *Family to Family* offers a roadmap for guiding services to assist us with both increasing and decreasing services – and announced that this event is a kick off to the initiation of the Family to Family Model in Fresno County. He expressed anticipation that the process will bring about transformative change in terms of how we deal with one another and how we deal with families who come into our care.

Dr. Zomalt reflected on this gathering, stating that as he moved from table to table, he observed and was pleased with the energy and chemistry. He stated this gathering defines leadership as a collaboration of change for mutual purpose, and he anticipates that this community will be in a better place next year in terms of its response to protecting child victims of neglect and abuse, and a better place yet in the year beyond that. He expressed appreciation to the panel for saying we cannot afford to blame one another, and concluded with the observation that hope realized is fundamental to our success.

FINAL COMMENTS

Kathleen McIntyre, President, Board of Directors, Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention, challenged everyone to fill out a Count Me In Card to put the words of the gathering into action.

Jan Warner, Advocate, CASA of Fresno County, expressed appreciation for the involvement of everyone and for the dedication and commitment to making a positive difference.

Dr. Jane Middleton, Member, Fresno County Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee, thanked everyone on behalf of the Committee, and stated the experience might be summarized by the following:

P hilosophy
I ntegrity
V alues
O bligation
T heories of human development and training

Exhibit B

- **Goal:** To better screen children at risk of removal from home, and to provide services to safely preserve the family without removing the children, wherever possible.

Table Anchors:

Table 1: **Robin Leppo**, Program Director, Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention

Table 2: **LeeAnn Parry**, Kaiser Permanente Community Benefits Manager, Community Advocate

Table 3: **Vicki Carrillo**, Supervising Social Worker, CDFS

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Better training of Law Enforcement and Child Protective Services
- *Coordinated response and decision-making between LE and CPS before hold placed
- *Family advocates to help advocate for family during staffings
- *At arraignment, get services court-ordered but leave kids in home, if appropriate
- *Better understanding of cultural issues with families
- *Reduce the adversarial relationship between LE and CPS
- *More community involvement (family and service providers) when staffings and multi-disciplinary roundtable meetings occur
- *Support services to families with unsubstantiated reports (referrals, outreach services, prevention)
- *Standardized decision-making tool
- *Interagency sharing for true collaborative relationships for services to families
- *Agency partnerships with families (non-adversarial) – communication and trust building
- *Developing mentoring relationships – kinship mentoring
- *Develop community standards for each community with distinct cultural/community identity
- *Develop support system services for families
- *Wrap around services
- *Emergency response – CPS. Need on-line workers to receive comprehensive training in determining if a child needs to be removed – “Structured decision making”
- *Educating law enforcement about assessments/investigations and determining safety/risk for children
- *Identification of at risk families by providers using screening tools
- *Staffings to incorporate “Family to Family” Model – linkages to community, family. Family needs to be stronger part of decision making process. Example: family group conference
- *DCFS – “About services to strengthen families – utilizing community and family”
- *Advocates trained to help families
- *Use of Neighborhood Resource Centers K-6
 - **Goal:** To develop a network of family foster care that is more neighborhood based, culturally sensitive, and located primarily in the communities, including the school attendance area in which the children live.

Table Anchors:

Table 4: **Bill Bettencourt**, California Leader, *Family to Family*, Annie E. Casey Foundation

Table 5: **Barbara Needell**, Child Welfare Research Center, UC Berkeley

Table 6: **Marion Karian**, Executive Director, Exceptional Parents Unlimited

Table 7: **Luisa Medina**, Fresno County Foster Care Standards & Oversight Committee

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Consider how placement decisions are made
- *Using neighborhood school-based resource centers for support (address inconsistency in how they operate now)
- *System currently fragmented
- *Community building as a part of it – also identifying strengths in communities
- *Using data to target communities
- *Community Care Licensing support needed – also, resources to help homes meet licensing standard
- *Redesigning child welfare systems practice regarding recruitment
- *Support of foster parents is critical – foster parents can be best recruiters when supported
- *Use data to show where kids are coming from, where there are available foster homes, and where we need to recruit
- *Mapping children before they enter foster care
- *Identify relationships that are important to the child and the continuity of contact
- *Transportation for schools for foster children

- *Training for foster parents on resistance to contact with biological family
- *Oregon Social Learning Model (OSLM.org)
 - Training for foster parents
 - Make them feel part of the system
 - Bring them into partnership with the system
 - Match child with intensive needs with family who understands how to care for that child
- *Collaboration with service providers – maintain continuity between child and known service providers
- *Deaf parents with hearing children or hearing parents with deaf children
- *Excellent families identified in neighborhoods and invite them to become foster parents
- *Think of culture in broad terms – include “deaf culture” – food preferences of child, etc.
- *Identify what types of support foster families need
- *Don't make assumptions about a particular ethnic group – we're not all the same
- *Engaging community – share data about children – identify languages in the community
- *Build relationships with schools, universities, faith-based, CBO's in the community
- *Examine our own values and ideals
- *Build trust in community and establish relations
- *What is good family care?
- *Advocacy method for foster care and making it more “user friendly”
- *Educational and training component for community and prospective foster community
- *More services during and post-reunification
 - **Goal:** To increase the number, quality and specialized capabilities of foster families.

Table Anchors:

Table 8: **Barbara Caldera**, President, Asociacion de Padres Unidos de Crianza, Chapter 74

Table 9: **Kay Crockell**, President, Foster Adoptive Kinship Parent Association

Table 10: **Barbara Foster**, Director, Specialized Foster Parent Training Project, CSUF

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Coordination between agencies and parties involved
- *Regular communication between parents involved (foster families)
- *Maintain support from County
- *Visit homes on regular basis
- *Foster parents are better at recruiting other foster parents
- *Clear guidelines for specialized care home
- *Pride needs to be more realistic
- *Foster parent resources needs to know more about each of our homes to know strengths
- *To increase number, keep mandatory pre-service training
- *Have Department establish a “support system” for foster families in crisis
- *Reaching out to specialized care working places for recruiting
- *To increase the number, quality and specialized capability of foster families
- *Quality should be first priority before increasing the number
- *Help with application process – for different ethnicities
- *Contacting all the churches and have a conference about the need of foster care and service organizations
- *Establish quality standards
- *Train foster parents in therapeutic strategies
- *Grass roots tactics for recruiting – door to door
- *Establish a system of community support/governance in place as needed
- *New foster parents need to make commitment – no eject philosophy
- *Do a business-like marketing strategy for recruiting
- *Careline needs to be responsive to issues with child in foster home
- *Recruit families within neighborhoods, organization, schools, churches

- *Recruit for large family groups (siblings)
- *Recruit/recognize foster family strengths and utilize them, i.e. single moms
- *Reduce regulation red tape – increase respite care
- *Pay them more money
- *Increase communication between partners
- *Plan strategically
- *Community Planning
- *Improve media perception of foster parents
- *Rate setting addressed
 - **Goal:** To reduce reliance on institutional or congregate care (in shelters, hospitals, psychiatric centers, correctional facilities, residential treatment programs, and group homes) by meeting the needs of many more of the children currently in those settings through appropriate care with the family or a relative or in a foster home.

Table Anchors:

Table 11: **The Honorable Bruce Smith**, Fresno County Superior Court, Presiding Judge, Delinquency Division

Table 12: **Edgar Castillo, M.D.**, Interim Chief Child Psychiatrist, DCFS

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Out of home placement as last resort
- *Craycroft is example of last resort
- *Services needed to be delivered prior to Craycroft referral
- *Streamline mentor/kinship placement with increased funding, expectation for services to be commensurate – needs to be “K” (contract) for commensurate services to make sure this is accomplished
- *Counseling – early prevention
- *\$49 million – education – schools
- *Early prevention begins here – bring entire community – church, school, CBO
- *Education in homes from parents and guardians
- *Community involvement and education
- *People who are in the business of foster care and other areas of care must be evaluated
- *People who have not resolved their victim mentality cause more problems
- *Early intervention
- *More clinicians, therapists, psychiatrists
- *Prevent births by drug/ETOH abusers
- *Social workers to work closely with foster parents – teamwork
- *Stiffer penalties on parents who are alcohol/drug abusers
- *More Neighborhood Resource Centers'
- *Voucher system for counseling services
- *More coordination of services
- *Improve quality of staff with more training
- *Expedite time it takes for child to step down from group home to FFA
- *More accurate diagnosis of drug/ETOH exposed infants and children
 - **Goal:** To develop practices to recruit, train, and retain excellent front line workers which promote resilience.

Table Anchors:

Table 13: **David Foster**, Director, Central California Child Welfare Training Academy, CSUF

Table 14: **Susan B. Anderson**, Member, Fresno County Board of Supervisors and Member, Fresno County Foster Care Standards and Oversight Committee

Table 15: **Erica Hasenbeck**, Social Worker, DCFS

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Too much reliance on short term for critical services. Short term nature discourages people from entering profession
- *Use a strengths based model to recruit, train and assign front line workers to job duties. Differentiated use staff skills, knowledge, education and abilities. Don't think everybody can do everything – don't expect it

- *Offer strong supervision and support, knowledge of employee strengths so they can be used most effectively on the job and feel a sense of success/reward
- *Educational system needs to train/prepare graduates for the stress/tasks associated with our jobs
- *Use mentors/field based trainees to prepare staff and support staff needing consultation on difficult cases. Use mentors with new staff – use mentoring process before front line staff is assigned cases independently
- *Agencies need to acknowledge the stress associated with our jobs and allow staff to recover with “mental health” days
- *Use community volunteers more. Neighborhood volunteerism can help shoulder the workload and reduce stress. Agencies need to systematically build volunteer components into their service delivery structures
- *Raise awareness within the community re: the role of front line workers and the needs in the community. Show successes and the front line staff who work hard and are committed. Use P.R. to portray the “heroes” that work hard daily to benefit our community
- *Make sure all front line staff have excellent communication skills
- *Strengthen relationships with local universities (CSUF, etc) to better prepare and support the workforce and foster parents
- *We need to look at organizational/structure change so that social workers follow a case through the whole process after intake. The current organizational structure is destructive and does not promote communication and understanding
- *Develop competent supervisors/management to give better services to social workers:
 - Training – need a 6-8 week academy of intensive raining – pre-service
 - Keep supervisors in their area of expertise
 - Develop teaching/training environment
 - Professional development plan for supervisors and upcoming supervisors
- *Cross training with education and courts
- *Cross cultural competency training
- *Recruit older people with life experience to go to social work school
- *Mentorship program for new social workers
- *High school/Explorer program for students entering into a social work career
- *Mentoring program in the CWS system
 - Reward veterans for expertise
 - Make them feel valuable, as assets
- *Recognition by community
 - Positive PR
 - Image – makeover
- *Strong supervision
 - Praise
 - Alternative compensation
 - Best practice taught and rewarded
 - Hold employees accountable
- *Cross awareness of different jobs
 - i.e.; administration and line staff
 - “job shadowing” creates understanding
- *Teamwork and communication with everyone involved with child (sharing load together)
- *Committees and workers – a voice – peer-to-peer
- *System of support for entry level staff
- *Supervisors and agency getting evaluated by workers
- *Morale + recognition!
- *Training
- *Passion for the field and the agency having a motivating vision
- *Workers having “good fit” and area and expertise
- *Communication and collaboration

- **Goal:** To develop and utilize productive approaches to engage and serve drug affected families.

Table Anchors:

Table 16: **The Honorable Martin Suits**, Fresno County Superior Court, Juvenile Dependency Division

Table 17: **Elinor Zorn, M.D.**, Medical Director, Child Advocacy Program, Children's Hospital Central California

Summary of conversation highlights:

*Needs:

- Inpatient substance abuse for kids
- Rural services
- Transition for 18 and older
- Stronger collaboration between treatment and home based intervention after
- 90% of removals of substance abuse
 - Sexual assaults and DV (program indicators)
 - Culturally competent
 - True family services
 - Family oriented
 - More internships

*What works

- Connecting substance abuse mom to supportive community (transmits new values)

*Work with entire family and their multifaceted problem

*Community, school, family involvement

*Prevention/parenting with adolescents

*Substance abuse as coping – not just self-destructive behavior/habit

*Identifying families

- schools
- hospitals
- assistance programs (WIC, AFDC)
- early intervention programs - will allow for earlier identification

*Get the fathers involved! (men in general)

*Collaborate resources/programs

- **Goal:** For each child in foster care to improve continuity in caring relationships with significant persons, with their family, with siblings, in out-of-home placements, in schools, with health and mental health providers, etc.

Table Anchors:

Table 18: **Amy Buster Alhadeff**, Student Advocacy Programs, Fresno County Office of Education

Table 19: **Mark Allen**, Acting SELPA Director, FUSD

Table 20: **Olivia Weatherbee**, University student, former foster youth

Summary of conversation highlights:

*FUSD Board policy allows foster youth to remain in home school

*School social workers can provide case management

*Improve DCFS system *ask for significant relationships on foster care placement form

*Communication between agencies on case by case basis

*DCFS notify schools when kids are placed or leave

*DCFS and schools to encourage immediate school enrollment at disposition hearing

*Ask the child!

*Family to Family would help

*"Mentor" placements when appropriate

*Encourage foster parents to foster relationships

*Need to keep siblings together

- *Schools – Maintain children at original school when emergency placement is made
 - Laws (McKinney-Vento) not followed
 - Provide training to front line staff
 - Records must be exchanged
 - Establish policy and MOU between school districts and DCFS
- *Out-of-Home – not staying in Neighborhood
 - Solution – To establish a policy to follow DCFS worker to not wait for court order
 - Establish GIS screen (i.e. Mapquest) for every DCFS worker
- *Visitation Centers (quality needed)
 - Must be roomy, have privacy, family oriented, comfortable
 - Supervised still allowing privacy
- *Siblings must stay together
 - Job of DCFS policy followed/established “Not just when court ordered”
 - Place out of neighborhood when siblings needed
 - Policy – arrange/plan for sibling weekly reunification when separated
- *Screening and assessment
 - Must be done for new entries, professional plan with all stakeholders to make good decisions
 - Must be collaborative
- *Use of media campaigns
- *Include all members involved, i.e. parents, siblings, staff, in staffings
- *Provide child with a community/family life long mentor/advocate
- *Provide in-home services to low risk families who will likely re-unify
- *Reduce fear/stigma/assumptions between parents/foster parents/social workers
- *Keep kids in their community

Open Line Tables

Table Anchors:

Table 21: **Susan Thompson**, HSS Administration

Table 22: **Sheila Kornzweig**, Central Valley Regional Center

Table 23: **Walt Buster**, former Superintendent Clovis USD, Director, BARTSCH Center for Character Education, Fresno Pacific University

Summary of conversation highlights:

- *Titanic Analogy – we are still focused on building better lifeboats but haven’t redesigned the ship
- *In times of economic downturn, turfism can increase
- *Investment in the development of hard data documenting outcomes and cost/benefit of prevention/root cause strategies need to be made (It is usually the first dollar to be cut). If we can’t document or wait for longitudinal results, we can’t compete successfully for funding to address root causes
- *Look at Pinedale Elementary for great example of community partnerships
- *Even though some believe the answer is not to “throw money at it,” we would like to test that theory. There is a lot of new money for foreign aid, but less and less for kids
- *Good thing: we do have energized people willing to continue to work toward improvement
- *Frustration: We are still not reconstructing systems to address root causes
- *We know there is a very strong correlation between poverty and family dysfunction but our investment in community development is shameful. 100’s of thousands to C.D./Millions to crisis services including CPS, law enforcement, repairing not rebuilding
- *Better preparation for the stress of the foster care process for child experiencing it
- *Foster parents are recruited now with expectations of long term care option
- *Foster parents currently believe they do not have to interact with natural family
- *Some use foster care as a short track to adopt the child – foments a conflictual relationship
- *Foster parents don’t feel they are treated as partners with Children and Family Services – don’t get information they need

at the prospect for reunification for this child to whom they feel attached

*Need to develop better, closer to home homes for deaf and disabled

*Now there is conflict between natural parent and foster parents

*Need much better recruitment training of foster parents

*Need to identify current and develop new resources for special needs children. Train foster parents who know sign language and staff in group homes to sign and work with deaf and special needs children

*Need a better way to improve communication of the process of foster care system to the child, parent and foster parent

*Prepare child for the disruption and changes which happen and are beyond his/her control to limit the personalizing it and to help them cope with it

List of attendees

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Reinventing foster care

Community conversation keeps vulnerable children in spotlight.

An attentive audience of people with the power to change the lives of foster children in Fresno County will probably be left with an indelible image of the face of Olivia Weatherbee, a bright, young college student.

Now a polished and articulate public speaker, Weatherbee stood before hundreds of people on Wednesday and described her heartbreaking years as a foster child, many times separated from her siblings. She spent part of her senior year in high school at Craycroft Center, a Fresno shelter for children, desperate to make sure she got to Roosevelt High every day so she could continue her advanced placement classes.

During this time of drastic budget cuts, three citizen groups initiated a "community conversation" this week in an unprecedented initiative to make sure the Olivias of our county — children without stable families to protect them — aren't forgotten.

The Fresno County Foster Care Oversight Committee, the Fresno County and Court-Appointed Special Advocates and the Fresno Council on Child Abuse Prevention collected hundreds of local policy-makers and child experts to contribute ideas for pushing the quality of foster care up, even as resources diminish. This budget is not just a county

The gloomy recitation of the county's financial situation and the system's frequent failings were quickly acknowledged and then set aside for a few hours, replaced by brainstorming sessions with people who know children best.

There is hope. Fresno County has adopted Family to Family, a new framework that promises great gains in the effectiveness of the foster care system. Bill Bettencourt, California team leader for the Family to Family Initiative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, made his case for rethinking our approach to foster care following a proven model being enthusiastically adopted around the state.

The Fresno County Department of Children and Family Services is one of the most troubled of the county's social service agencies, and skimpy finances could damage children for life if we let that happen. But as the presenters said often, we cannot afford to do a bad job with these children.

No matter what the budget crisis is, we have work to do and we'd best roll up our sleeves and do the best we can do.

The next step is a leadership challenge: Can the county's leaders seize the momentum of an energized, engaged community that refuses to go on as we have? Can they inspire and guide a collaboration of their staff and powerful community partners in a way that will change the lives of vulnerable children for the better?

Foster care failures

Fresno Bee
Article March 14

The victims of the system's faults are the most vulnerable among us.

“We cannot afford to do a bad job with these kids.”

The warning was repeated time and again by professionals during a recent community conference on the importance of effective foster care.

For all those hard-liners who believe social services for children are the easy place to take budget shortcuts, some very bad news arrived this week in the form of a lawsuit against Fresno County on behalf of five little boys. The suit seeks more than \$2.25 million in damages to compensate children failed by the system that was created to protect them.

That would be a significant financial hit, but it's nothing compared with the emotional impact on five innocent boys if the nightmare turns out to be true: One boy, allegedly starved and beaten by his foster parents, lost more than a third of his weight. Another allegedly was gagged with a sock and duct tape and hung by the back of his shirt on a bathroom hook.

The record of alleged abuse goes on and on in the claim, filed on behalf of five foster boys who all stayed with Simmarie and Marco Carrillo. The Fresno couple are in jail on criminal charges.

The claim alleges the county should have

known about the abuse and stopped placing children with the Carrillos. The justice system will ultimately decide the Carrillos' future and assess the county's responsibility, but it's apparent that red flags should have erupted all through the bureaucracy.

The sad part is that this is not an isolated situation for Fresno County. We can at least be grateful that this case was caught before a child's life was lost, as has happened so tragically before. The most recent case was little Dexter Taylor Jr., who was assaulted and murdered by Floyd Eugene Ray Jr., the husband of his foster mother, Ruby.

Foster care should be a haven for children, a safe and loving escape from a life of instability, abuse or neglect. Never should one bad situation be traded for another. The latest lawsuit points out once again the desperate need for more competent, strong families willing to reach out to children who need their calming influence.

Even as the state budget shivers and quakes in this historic financial temblor, it is vital — financially and morally — to do the very best job we possibly can to protect the thousands of fragile children entrusted to the county's care every year. The alternative is to spend millions more defending against charges, paying off huge damage judgments and, most painfully, watching innocent children suffer an unspeakable price for our mistakes. That is unacceptable.